SLOW-BURN JOURNAL: IN THE TENDERLOIN

BOOK III

Sept. 4 – Oct. 31, 1993

Saturday, Sept. 4, 1993

10 a.m. I was woken by a garbage truck under the window with grinding gears and an avalanche of broken glass.

A slow afternoon. It took a long time getting something going on the typewriter. I was approximately brain-dead for some reason, though there was not much wine last night. On the other hand, you think you're moving slow and then you find you covered a couple of pages with notes and quotes by the end of the afternoon, and read a fair amount. When I'm slow a wooden instrument picks up the slack. When the mental is on hold your feelings are more pronounced. They're not so sublimated or eclipsed.

6:30 p.m. I left a message on Sophie's phone machine. I said I'm here and here's some music, a slow flurry of guitar notes. The woman is so tangible, but what we had is slowly going away. Our lifelines brushed against each other for a week or two. There was an overlap of our magnetic fields, and then they drifted apart.[1]

The woman was emerging from the wreckage of a year-long affair, testing the waters of the otherwise, and I was part of those waters. She put her toe in, sending ripples which told her things and which I felt and which are slowly diminishing. I went through

[1] There is a provisional flux of love, a dimension one inhabits. It comes with roadside attractions and digressions, and is convoluted as your nervous system.

this with the Czech woman who was in an even worse affair. She was the same age, twenty-nine, when we got acquainted and ended up in bed one night. She later resumed her affair with the Latino poet with disastrous results. It fell apart and he killed himself in his mother's home.

There were a couple of phone calls concerning Clear Lake and a coffee table in someone's garage.

I read about officials of the last administration trying to profit in the private sphere from what they set in motion while in "public service." In this case, they were soliciting contracts in Kuwait, having made contacts there while working for the government. There is a conflict of interest when they look ahead with ulterior motives.[2]

9:30 p.m. An opera by Mozart. I lay down for a few minutes, got too comfortable and passed out for several hours. I came to after midnight, a little disoriented, and shook it off. I stumbled on a clear-headed clearing in the middle of the night, having shaken off the cobwebs from that afternoon. I went out for cigarette papers and it turned into a walk, the cool night air in a neighborhood which is like a cold shot of vodka. I walked past the Federal building, an eroded moon, and Miss Pearl's Jam House, the territorial limits of where I live and how.

On the typewriter for a few hours.

4 a.m. I picked up the guitar and turned on a black and white tube which I hardly ever do these days. It was on once or twice last month. I found an old movie, *Decameron Nights*, based on the tales of Boccaccio. It looked like they filmed it a few hundred years

[2] I also read about an English play called *Kafka's Dick*.

ago in the Alhambra, a Moorish palace in Granada.[3] I miss the south of Spain, and it was painful being torn away from it by a commercial.

5:30 a.m. Reading *Valis,* by Philip K. Dick:

> In Plato's cosmology, noos or Mind is persuading ananke or blind necessity – or blind chance, according to some experts – into submission… He stayed up to 4 a.m. every night scratching away in his journal.[4] I suppose all the secrets of the universe lay in it somewhere amid the rubble.
>
> … later developed a theory that the universe is made out of information. He started keeping a journal – had been, in fact, secretly doing so for some time: the furtive act of a deranged person's encounter with God was all there on the pages…
>
> Journal entry 36. The origin of the word "idiot" is the word "private." Each of us has become private, and no longer shares the common thought of the brain, except at a subliminal level. Thus our real life and purpose are conducted below our threshold of consciousness.[5]

The things around you are reflected on an inner screen and that is what you're looking at. You get reality secondhand, an echo of it filtered through your senses. It is edited, cut down to size, so you can process it. Your awareness fluctuates from hour to hour, and your cognizance is customized by your psychology. It's known for shying away from information which it finds disturbing.

Sunday, Sept. 5, 1993

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[3] I was there with Simone, the French-Belgian woman, in 1975. The fountains have been working on their own since the 1200's (gravity doesn't quit). I spent several days making sketches as I read the writing on the wall: *Wala ghalib 'iilaa Allah*. It was repeated over and over in a fluid stylized script. It means "No conqueror but God," a reminder of our limits.

[4] I think there, 4 a.m. (my version of "*Cogito ergo sum*").

[5] An idiot in ancient Greece was someone who didn't participate in society (presumably having nothing to contribute). Eventually it came to mean someone who was mentally deficient, an allusion to the diminishing returns of subjectivity and isolation.

10:30 a.m. I woke up and called my friends in Marin. Maya answered, very polite. There were voices in the background and she said, “Excuse me I’m going to change phones.” She proceeded to have the call taken in her room, like it was for her. She is nearly ten going on eighteen. We had a nice conversation for a while, then her mother got on and wanted to know if I’m going to Clear Lake with them. We knocked it around for a few minutes. I have no camping equipment and it’s a long drive (2 ½ hours). She said she could borrow an extra sleeping bag, and that seemed to settle it.

I had half an hour to catch the transit bus out of town. I threw a few things into a bag, took a shower, and left.

With the weather overcast and dreary it wasn’t a bad idea to leave. I went into a coffee shop and stood there with a strap over my shoulder, the handle of a tennis racket sticking out. A stranger went by, pushing the handle of the racket away and causing the bag to slip off my shoulder. I was half asleep, but had the temerity – I mean the imperialistic white male impulse - to turn and look at who knocked the bag off my shoulder. A young black man who was not in a good mood, and my staring at him made it worse. He almost reacted, saying something I didn’t catch and walking out while looking back and hesitating, like I had violated a code which required me to get out of his way and not look at him. I should have averted my eyes in a deferential manner and not assumed that we were equal.

I went outside and ran into an old man who I knew from where I used to live. He would do odd jobs and maintenance for the building and he lives around here, probably in a single room. He was in an animated mood and we talked about the fire last March and the effort of rebuilding when there was so much damage. An apartment down the hall

from me had vanished in thin air. There were only two or three workmen and he was not impressed. If he was twenty years younger he could help. He said he's eighty-four, and wore a wrinkled old suit and vest with a crumpled hat. He has an accent or a speech impediment which sometimes makes it hard to know what he is saying, a Norwegian with a life force. He was talking for a minute and gesticulating before I realized he was talking about people who jump off the bridge.

I took a bus to Marin, a half hour ride to another micro-climate. There was sunlight on the horizon where the dreary lid of clouds ended. I got out in Larkspur and walked a couple of blocks to my friends' place, and we left soon after. The atmosphere was a little subdued, like there had been a sharp exchange of words. I think my presence was facilitating a romantic mood. They had more time for themselves with me as an escort and diversion for the daughter. I was also a buffer zone, whereby a couple prone to arguing is more restrained when someone else is there.

We drove in a small sedan to San Rafael where Maya's father lives, picking up an extra sleeping bag. He shares a one-story house with a couple of others. She has her own room, a replica of her room in her mother's apartment, a similar version of herself. She showed me her kitten and the troll dolls with freaked-out hair.

On the road to China Beach. I realized the two of them are not wound too tight when it comes to planning these excursions. Their background preoccupations are poetry and acting, and they're caught up in a moody intense affair. They are capable of going on a cookout and forgetting knives, forks, and plates. In this case they managed to leave behind two sleeping bags, so there were two bags for the four of us. Caught up in the

momentum of driving and the conversation we missed a couple of turn-offs. There was an impulse to get away, but the planning was a little ragged.

They were in the front seat getting reacquainted, while the two of us were in the backseat being ignored. That was fine with Maya. We're old friends and she was testing out her conversation skills, which are considerable. We were caught up in the repartee for most of the trip. As we drove I heard how Maya wants a horse and knows a lot about their maintenance and saddles. I told her a few horse stories. A friend of mine had a couple of horses in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains when we were twelve and we rode them (also rode a cow, which wasn't hard because it wasn't moving). After galloping on a trail the horses were sweating. We removed the saddles and rode them bareback at a walking pace to cool them off. My jeans were so caked with salt that when I took them off later they almost stood up on their own.[6]

I heard about who is her friend and who isn't. There is one girl who I've met who is beginning to develop. She weighs twenty pounds more than Maya, who said with some scorn, "She's fat." Maya is under the impression that girls get fat around twelve or so when they begin to have breasts and hips. I wonder if some women have internalized a dread of being "fat" because when they were young it was equated with going through puberty. They acquire some additional curves and pounds, and those can be an encumbrance. There is also the annoyance of having a period every month.

She talked about gymnastics and the older girls (twelve to fourteen) who're good at it, but which is phased out when they start to have a figure. It is not so much a loss of

[6] While walking along a barbed wire fence my horse moved closer to it, trying to brush me off. I kept leaning to the side so my leg didn't catch on the barbed wire. The horse was sweaty. I was sitting on him bareback and slid off, landing on the ground. He carefully stepped over me.

innocence as a loss of other things, like thinness and androgyny. The confidence they had as tomboys is diminished.

Maya admitted she is a little thin, and showed me how she could put her two hands together, fingertips touching, and pass them nearly all the way up her leg (wearing shorts and a T-shirt). She is not too thrilled with the small dark hairs on her leg and arms, assuming it isn't proper for a girl. I tried to tell her otherwise, but she didn't believe me.

She is well acquainted with lipstick, and her ears are pierced. She asked if I thought she should have another piercing. Her nails were done, though chipped a little.

That "overweight" friend of hers is Jewish. Maya described her in terms which sounded like a stereotype – pushy and problematic, if not neurotic. She said her friends are used to discussing their parents' divorces with each other, and wasn't impressed that this one is in therapy because of her parents' separation.

Maya wants to be an artist and is very aware of girlfriend/boyfriend stuff. She watches videos of Madonna. At one point she recited in a singsong voice the lyrics of a song, "All My Love" by Soul Asylum. She has tapes that she listens to in her room, memorizing the words. "Insane in the Membrane / insane in the brain."[7]

I thought she was a little young for some of this, but she doesn't think so. Knowing may not lead to doing. It could be a preventative in fact. It is magnified in girls as a form of protection, an early warning system. Some forms of knowledge are developed out of one's own vulnerability or paranoia. Girls often have a more developed social sense than boys do, including manners and psychology. They mature two years ahead of boys. Some women think they never catch up. You could also say the boys take

[7] Cypress Hill

longer to mature because there is more to work with. At any rate, you want to avoid the premature maturity of those who think they have arrived because they finished high school.

Maya is precocious. She is usually in the company of adults as an only child of divorced parents, and has had to cope with a temperamental mother. Meanwhile, we were driving through open country in the hills with a few horses here and there. I was relaxed, even when they missed the turn-off and wondered what road to take. We ended up going through Calistoga on a long and winding road through the woods and it was warm out.

The conversation in back was bouncing around, from vampires and violas to books and butterflies (one flew in) (a book flew out) (just kidding). At one point, doubting something she said, I responded with a phrase that became a refrain.

"You know what happens to little girls who…"
"What?"
"They get fat."

She laughed. "You know what happens to older boys who don't believe little girls?" She described what happens in horrifying detail. A flying worm enters the man's head and goes into his brain and ends up in his eyeball. Her imagination is well-developed.

She also mentioned that she wants to have a horse "before I die." I wondered if kids have a magnified sense of their own mortality. I said she wasn't supposed to die for a long time. She is fatalistic, assuming she could die tomorrow from a fatal disease or a car crash. Her main concern at the moment, on a winding road, was not getting car sick. She didn't, but was quiet for a while.

5 p.m. We arrived at a campground which was not on the lake. We drove through it slowly and left. The Actress was surprised she got a reservation. Now we knew why.

There were comments about rundown trailers for the lifers. We drove until the lake was in view and arrived at Clear Lake State Park. The sign said NO VACANCY, but we tried it. There was a dead oak tree on the side.

Turned out there was a vacancy. We didn't like it and returned to the ranger station. I got out, talked to the woman, and got another site. Returning to the car I said I had negotiated something. The Actress said, "You just have to sleep with her."

We unloaded the stuff at a campsite on the edge of the woods. The trees were a canopy with a clearing for a small dome tent. There was a fireplace with a grill and a wooden table. I set up the tent with Maya and went back for an armload of firewood. The other two were preparing things. By the time it was dark (they forgot the lantern), Michael was cooking steaks and chicken breasts with whole cloves of garlic and green peppers, checking it by flashlight. I had a beer. Maya got me involved in a game of gin, dealing the cards like an expert. It turned out she has her own rules. We had to negotiate those. At any rate, I lost. She was impressed that I could cut the deck with one hand in the air.

I was impressed when I looked at the void through the trees. More stars than I've seen in a long time. The city obscures the fact that we're in outer space. There were voices and faint music from the other campsites. The situation was primordial, with a prehistoric fire and meat roasting on it. It is something I don't experience very often, the country at night, the scent of the land, the sound of crickets. There are no right angles and hardly any man-made structures, just the torque and tangle of trees. The only illumination is the firelight. It softens the look and presence of people who are half obscured, blending into the darkness from which they came and to which they will return. The light flickers

with a diffused effect on nearby trees and branches, a light with a trembling flux. We could be in the Middle Ages with a fire in the woods.

Earlier I went for a walk in the twilight, looking for the lake. I found a wooden pedestrian bridge over an inlet, beyond which I could see the lake and the lights on the far shore. After dinner I showed them where it was with a flashlight which I kept turning off and Maya wanted on. I pulled out the binoculars and gazed into the void.

10 p.m. Back at the campsite. The sleeping arrangements were up in the air. Maya was a little moody from an earlier suggestion of sleeping with her mother. They now changed the plan, where I would be in the tent with Maya, and the other two would be on the ground not far away. When it was time for her to go to sleep, she expected me to join her, saying, "Are you ready to go to sleep now?" I made a tactful excuse that it was early. Her mother took her into the tent where they read for a while.

Michael and I sat around the fire and talked. They brought a bottle of whiskey which I gave them months ago. Sometime after eleven I was sleepy, though I found it hard to leave the magnetic field of a dimming fire. I finally crawled into the tent next to a sleeping girl. We were supposed to share the sleeping bag unzipped and opened wide. There was an air mattress which made it comfortable. I lay there in my clothes listening to the rhythm of the crickets and thinking I wouldn't be able to fall asleep, but my body had other ideas.

Monday, Sept. 6, 1993

Early morning, maybe eight, we woke up. The two of us seemed to sit up together with the sleeping bag around her legs and her alert and talkative, beginning where we left

off last night. I woke up in the middle of the night and wondered how I would go back to sleep. I heard someone walking around nearby. Then I passed out, vaguely conscious of her foot or leg against me. When Maya mentioned having been a little cold at some point because I took the covers, her mother said, “Why didn’t you snuggle up to him?” That left both of us wide-eyed.

We were still in the tent, however. She unzipped the flap and peered out, pointing to where the other two were huddled together on the ground, covered in the other sleeping bag. She was trying to determine who was on top and if they were “doing it.”

When we got up and went over to them they looked as if they wanted more sleep, having been on the hard ground. They wanted to use the tent, and eventually disappeared into it while Maya and I were at the wooden table having apple juice, a peach, and water (and a cigarette for me). She was preoccupied with what she thought was going on in the tent. It appeared to be breathing in and out, moving a little, which she pointed out, whispering, “Look they’re doing it!” I said, “Excuse me?” I tried to be diplomatic while discouraging her from tiptoeing to the tent and listening. She went on about how she hates her mother, and suggested that her mother had a sex change. I thought we should change the subject, but she got in a remark about how her “boobs” could have been added on and her “ding-a-long” removed. I diverted her attention with the story of how I was adopted as a government experiment.

Eventually we were caught up in another one of her diversions, a scrabble game. It’s a rudimentary version of what I usually do in the morning, playing with words. My moves were slow and methodical compared to her quick ones. Anyhow she lost.

There were more comments about her mother. It is probably not the first time a girl said, “I hate my mother.” It doesn’t necessarily reflect badly on the mother. I don’t know if she has over-corrected in trying to bring up a well-mannered daughter, having shared custody with the father. There are influences on the girl which are hard to control – TV, movies, music, and the other kids at school. She listens when the adults are talking, aware of euphemisms, innuendos, and when the conversation is diverted because of her.

I wondered if it was a typical mother-daughter standoff. The Actress is at odds with her own mother. The daughter may not approve of the men in her mother’s life, and she’s seen a few. I’ve seen her trying, rather coyly, to reveal some secrets to the current boyfriend, with the mother telling her to be quiet. She thinks that people kissing or “doing it” are gross, that being a common term with her. I suppose when one is delicate and virginal a lot of things seem gross. The mother is an emotional woman with a sharp tongue, and constantly corrects Maya or demands she not interrupt. It builds up resentment in the daughter. She mimicked her mother’s responses to this or that infraction, rolling her eyes. I know the feeling. My own mother had a short fuse and a sharp voice when I was in high school, and not without cause. I had the feeling her voice was burned into my mental circuits at a young age. It’s how a mother forces her will on a child, instilling a sense of caution for when the mother isn’t around. When the kid is an adult and crossing a street he can hear his mother’s voice saying, “Look both ways.”

The Actress is a little vain and not the most logical person around. Her daughter has weathered her mother’s storms and is turning into the opposite. She seems calmer, but I’m speculating here. Maya is in the fifth grade and a credit to her mother. The latter

said when kids turn out bad the parents feel like they're to blame, though much of the time they're not.

I wondered about their differences and distance, being somewhat out of sync. The mother is a Taurus and the daughter is a Libra. Forty vs. ten. The only child of a broken home. If the mother is a little wild and strict, the daughter is intelligent and aware. It's hard to hide anything from her. She told me she walked into her mother's bedroom and saw Michael lying "buck naked" on the bed. On another occasion she caught a glimpse of them "doing it" with the door slightly open. Her room is next to theirs and she sometimes lies awake at night, hearing things.

I'm in an odd position as her confidante, and distracted her from these matters with a Frisbee. On a small road under the trees she could throw it, but it didn't always go in my direction. To compensate she showed me her gymnastic moves, including a kind of back flip.

Eventually the mother emerged from the tent, having put her boyfriend to sleep. She heated up water for coffee and oatmeal with sliced peaches. Then Michael emerged, sleepy and reading the paper for a while. I bought a local newspaper yesterday and never got to read it. I wanted to scope out a world of cheaper rents and hunting rifles, the front page with some mention of brush fires and child molesting.

We broke camp around noon, and drove half a mile to the shoreline of the lake and found a swimming area. The place was almost deserted. We spent the afternoon with a classic view of California foothills across the lake, and an alpine-looking mountain on the side. Mother and daughter wiggled discreetly into their swimsuits while sitting in the sand. Maya wanted my presence down by the water where we skipped rocks, or tried to,

and then went in. She thought my swimsuit was too small. The water wasn't cold, but there was some moss or seaweed floating here and there. Even worse, it was a little murky. I showed her how to cup her hands with a handful of water in which there were specks of algae. I forgot to mention that old song, "What's It All About, Algae?"

Then we were swimming, but she refused to put her head under. She didn't want algae in her hair. She trailed behind me with her hands on my shoulders, steering past the clumps of lake-weed. We went over to the right and found a semi-secluded beach with rock formations, so we walked back to the others and got them to relocate.

We were there for a couple of hours. I swam out to the rope boundary and back. Had a rendezvous with Maya who was hugging the shoreline, but now she was more used to it. Her and I were doing all sorts of stuff, with her riding on my back or trying to stand, jumping or diving off my back and shoulders, splashing around. Always with an arm out making sure I was there and didn't drift away. We figured out another maneuver where I would submerge and then come up with her sitting on my shoulders, legs around my neck, and holding on. I was supposed to stand up and then lower myself into the water, but sometimes would fall over.

I swam with her mother and Michael, who was something of a landlubber in the water. An occasional motorboat went by, like a motor walking on the water.

We lay on the towels. It was warm out. A couple of ducks walked out of the lake and came close with their phosphorescent feathers. We threw them a few tortilla chips. The last time out of the water we noticed the algae was accumulating in our swimsuits. There were comments about having "slimy private parts." The mother was more than ready to get out of her suit, being low cut with her pendulous breasts. There was some

comment about it functioning as a scoop for anything in the water. The daughter stretched the front of her swimsuit out, looking for something. It looked like all of us had gotten out of the lake and were checking if we were still intact.

Around four or five it was time to leave. The other two went on ahead. I made a discreet change in the rocks. Maya was preoccupied with something in the reeds. She wanted to catch a lizard and nearly did. I was supposed to help, but it took a while. Then her mother, way down the beach, was waving her arms and yelling.

There was some question in the mother's mind if she had two kids on her hands or two adults, and which are harder to manage. In the backseat we were off on another tangent with the mother saying, "Here they go again," and wondering why we're so in sync. Is it the daughter's maturity, reaching beyond her years, or my arrested development? All the ages you have been remain in your circuits and you can call them up, especially when you're under the sway of someone else that age. I'm not too good with age stratification. When you're in the presence of another life form with whom you get along, the person could be ten or seventy as far as carrying on a conversation. There are guidelines of discretion which I'm not completely out of touch with.

We drove through the country on a meandering route (an orchard heavily laden with pears), until we stumbled on the highway we were looking for. It took us on a beautiful winding route into a small mountain range with many of the trees a burnt orange (buckeye). There was a touch of autumn in the air when we arrived in the small town of Hopland. It was warm and quiet, and Michael wants to move there.

In the Hopland brewery with some tables in back and grape vines on a trellis overhead, this being luscious vineyard country. The waitress looked pretty fresh, a tall

and buxom woman with a ring through her nose. I had a local stout, the other two with Blue Heron Pale Ale, and some food. Maya was sulking next to her mother, who now and then will order her to change her attitude. There are affectionate moments between them, but I'm not sure what they amount to, given their capacity for pretending. Maya can be tactful and diplomatic. I don't mean that she is counting the days before she has her own car, but she has a strategy of going head-to-head with an authority figure who she happens to live with.

There was a curious interlude when leaving the lakeshore. We stopped at the showers. Mother and daughter went in, took a shower, then walked out clutching towels to themselves. The daughter in the backseat dropped the towel to her waist and said, "Don't look." I had already turned around, talking with Michael, who then headed for the showers. The mother was in the front seat and I leaned on the open door. She dropped the towel and her heavy breasts were swaying as she strapped on a bra.

We left the brewery gardens, picked up some ice cream, and Maya was in a good mood again. During the drive she announced that her "bladder is ready to burst," so we made a stop. Then Michael took another exit for the hell of it (having had two pints). We meandered through the countryside with its verdant vineyards. There was some mention of extending our lost weekend and things became a little wacko, if not chaotic. Everyone had their own idea of songs to sing and partially remembered lyrics. Sometimes there were two or three songs going at once. Maya sang one, and I started in with "Hound Dog."

Our decorum in the backseat was disintegrating by the time it was dark and we got involved in a towel fight. I was trying to be careful but she wasn't, laughing and

mugging, sticking her face in my face and making faces. At one point she whipped me accidentally with her ponytail, then took her hair down, lush and dark and smelling nice and hung it in my face. Did I think it smelled good? We had become familiar at this point, having compared the scars on our legs. She showed me a splinter in her hand. “It doesn’t hurt.” I momentarily felt the softest skin. She stared at me with those big dark eyelashes. Then she tried to gross me out, pulling the skin around her eyes down and rolling her eyeballs up like a horror film. She showed me how to do it.

On the drive up yesterday when we finally reached a stop, having been sitting for hours, I was a little stiff and almost groaning when I got out, saying “Whoa” when I stood up. She thought that was amusing and did it herself a couple of times, getting out of the car, feigning an effort, and saying “Whoa” in a low voice.

Meanwhile, Michael took another exit in the dark, pulling up to a garish amusement park. He wanted to extend the weekend with some video games. Maya showed her dexterity with a pinball machine. She has quick reflexes and played better than I did. I think we ended up tied in our relative aptitudes. Frisbee and scrabble versus pinball and cards. We won’t mention the swimming.

We finally left and drove for half an hour to their house, where I sat around for a while. Maya got ready for bed, walking out in a long T-shirt with her hair down. I was leaving and gave her mother a hug. I was about to shake hands with Maya in the kitchen. She reached out with her hand, “forgetting” it held a knife, and laughed.

Michael drove me to the bus stop. We had a cigarette and talked about how hard his work at the men’s club is, and when I should drop by.

10:20 p.m. The bus pulled up and I was gone, sitting in a quiet form of transport. It was very subdued compared to the relentless presence of a ten-year-old girl. There was a half-moon in the night. It was low in the sky and its reflection floated in the bay, the metallic horizon of a city glowing in the dark. I thought I would get whiplash going from the country to the Tenderloin, but it wasn't bad. I was tired and it was more like going from a lake to the oblivion of one's bed. I sat up for a couple of hours, having coffee, a glass of wine, and cigarettes, thinking about the trip and how close I came to not going. It took on a semi-mythical aura with a disembodied recollection. How often am I throwing a girl into a lake?

Flashbacks and follow-ups:

The two of them took turns with the driving, both with suspended licenses. There was not one valid license amongst the four of us (I had a DUI last year), though Maya has an excuse. Michael has some moving violations he ignored, and they grew into a thousand dollars in fines.

On the drive to the lake Maya showed me how to drool. We then discussed if little girls have rabies.

Returning to Larkspur and stopping for something they left us in the backseat. Maya had a flashlight and kept shining it in my eyes, more or less daring me to take it away. I did, which required roughing her up a little and she liked it. She took back the flashlight and did it again. I roughed her up again and got it back.

On the way to the lake I brought up Boccaccio. They weren't sure who he was, saying, "Painter?" "Sculptor?" "Writer," I said, and she replied, "We're so sophisticated" (laughing).

Tuesday, Sept. 7, 1993

12:30 p.m. I went to the office and walked with V. to Old St. Mary's for a piano recital by Elaine Lust. "Preludes, Opus 28" by Chopin (1810-1849). There were twelve of them in half an hour, from *agitato* and *lento* to *allegro appassionato*. V. was in a yellow silk blouse with a black skirt, nylons, and black pumps. Legs up, knees together, and holding a holy object in her hands. Infinite mercy and Chopin.

When it was over she turned and said, "Are you going to pray?" I thought she meant with the candles where you pay a coin and light one on an altar. I said I didn't have any change. She said you don't need money to pray, then hurried out in order to make a phone transfer of funds from her savings to her checking account.

We had a taco and burrito on a granite slab. I told her about Clear Lake and the intelligence of young girls, which was no surprise to her - even from the standpoint of their knowing about the facts of life. It functions as an early warning system.

Returning to the office she said she would never spend the night in the woods. It's dirty and undignified and there is nowhere to plug in her hair drier. She also let me know she isn't going to read the book I loaned her, *Half of Man is Woman*. Too busy.

"What did you do this weekend?"
"Window shopping…. killing time."

There was not much going on at work and I walked home after five.

I was tired for some reason and lay down around nine. Woke up at eleven with the phone ringing. It was the Phantom. He was going on in his slow and halting manner about whammy bars and broken strings and eight-track tape recorders. The conversation managed to evolve into a more political vein. He talked about a newsman during the

Persian Gulf war who was "giving himself a blow job" with respect to his dynamic presence in the vicinity of rockets. The latter were described in aesthetic terms as if they weren't blowing up entire families in Iraq. Talk about broken homes.

There was some mention of how a longhaired stoner from Nebraska likes to hang out in garages, shooting the breeze with older black men. They got into a conversation recently where he was the butt of some derision. I think he said that "economics fuels racism." I don't think that is completely false, but they would have none of it, like the slave trade wasn't economically driven, or there wasn't a financial incentive to look down on another race.[8] On the other hand, there is the old routine about the English looking askance at anyone south of the English Channel, and that has little to do with economics.

1 p.m. I went back to sleep. No coffee, beer, or typing. I was giving the metabolism a break.

Wednesday, Sept. 8, 1993

8 a.m. I woke up early and realized the benefits of clean living from last night. The typing was going over the falls and wouldn't quit. Seven pages, single-spaced. It went on for hours. Then I leveled out with a wooden instrument.

2:30 p.m. Went to work. The Attorney is behind on some of his cases and the clients are complaining on the phone. He is so much in debt he will never catch up, I mean in this lifetime (he is sixty-five). He appears to have given up in that respect.

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[8] Some black people want to maintain the specter of a racist power structure which is on their backs all the time, otherwise they might have to take more responsibility for their lives and admit that the same civilization is providing some amenities and useful inventions. The posture of a monolithic victimization is undermined every day by black professionals, including those who hit the big time via music, sports, and politics.

I went out with V. on an errand, picking up some shoes at a repair place for her boss. She complained about it on the way back, saying his wife should do it.[9] V. describes herself as "quiet," but she has a temper. I wonder how much of it is sublimated in the homicidal books and movies that she likes so much. She touched on one of her discrepancies, her love of money. I mentioned a quote in the Bible which says the rich don't go to heaven (unless they give it to the church). She acknowledged the sentiment, but said she hadn't read it.

5 p.m. I left with her and found myself on the elevator with four women, including two of the more innuendo-prone women in the office, the receptionist (Aisha) and the New Age woman from Texas. They are usually a hair's breadth away from thoughts about sex. The older one asked in a false-polite voice about the recital yesterday. I said, "Chopin… the Preludes, Opus 28," and rather than running through the terminology of *lento, andantino* and *molto agitato*, which I didn't remember anyhow, I said, "Slow and fast." The two of them took a second for that to sink in with its suggestive side-effects. They were heartily agreeing with the concept. Even V. was laughing.

I walked her to the underground monorail and continued to a bookstore where I flipped through the periodicals, going from Lucien Freud to Nirvana. I found a heavy book in a locked glass case on H.R. Giger, the man behind the disturbing creature in the movie *Alien*. Sometimes I'll be in a bookstore and sink so deeply into a book I get disoriented, forgetting where I am. It's like when you pass out in the middle of the afternoon, coming to a little later, and you don't know what day it is.

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[9] Not likely. She is known for being bossy and controlling. Her father is a lawyer who set up her husband in his practice.

The sinister and convoluted compositions of someone born in 1940. A “bio-mechanoid” with a primordial slime. Freudian plumbing in the dark. Hermaphroditic robot shock. A nightmare of prehensile greasy tubing. The reptilian sublime. A robotic species reproducing itself in a moral void, echoing with the sound of machines. Corroded iron intestines and fallopian tubes and throats, if not aorta-like conglomerations of old metal, the guts of a machine. An android strapped into an abortion machine and sucking on a hard extension full of vapors in an atmosphere of sweating iron, eerie milk-white bodies, motor oil, and semen. Shades of J.G. Ballard (who wrote *Crash*). The woman is inhaling through a tube until she is transparent and the vapors have blown the back of her skull into a long reptilian spinal cord.

I sank through the floor into an engine room of the collective unconscious. The logic of his work perpetuates itself with a metaphoric reverb. It is anal-symmetrical and well-defined. He said a pathological obsession with symmetry is thought to be a sign of insanity, an over-compensation for an inner imbalance. A machine-controlled psychosis.

There was a poem in the back of the book by another European. The poem is a vacant-philosophic comment on his work. I wonder if Giger was lobotomized by his art. It requires hours of concentration with an air-brush and the mechanical follow-through of a perfectionist. Maybe it dilutes his comprehension of other mediums. Which is to say I don’t know why he would collaborate with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer.

I hit the sidewalk with the long shadows of people going home and thought about the artist, Lucien Freud. He has a flat in London where he struggles with the realistic and it shows. He seems to be obsessed with the contortions of an arbitrary mortal.

In the Tenderloin, a block from home, I noticed two men on the corner in handcuffs, one of them a transvestite. There were a couple of other guys who look like they live around here, but they're scruffy undercover cops. That's a little disturbing, like being arrested by your neighbors or someone in disguise. They called for a patrol car which pulled up and I went into the store.

The other night I was walking home a block away. There were several young women in short skirts: skinny, overweight, and in between. All of them for rent, the three non-graces. They were not exactly in translucent gowns and trailing wildflowers, but this neighborhood is a far cry from Botticelli.

8:30 p.m. I called Sophie. She sounded upbeat and conversational, so maybe this connection isn't dead in the water. It's hard to tell sometimes. It's possible we operate at different velocities and she is slow and receptive, open to suggestion, while being anchored in some cold realities. But the rest of her is floating. I mentioned having spent some time at Clear Lake. She is another single mother with a ten-year-old daughter. She went to a wedding in Stern Grove on Sunday morning and ended up drinking too much. There was no one to talk to. She admits that she's a "lush." She had to be driven home by someone and didn't return for her car until that evening, by which time the parking lot was closed and locked. Sophie said she has a problem with cars.

We talked for less than half an hour. I mentioned *Poetomachia*, the play by Amy Freed. It turns out she saw her plays on Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allen Poe at the Climate Theater, and would love to see the current play with two suicidal women poets. Then she had a call and put me on hold. It was her adoptive mother, some problem with her eye. She said she would call me back.

Maybe she meant it, but it wasn't that night. Another sign of how we have a different sense of timing, and that can make for hips that pass in the night. There was a random encounter, colluding by coincidence, but we are drifting apart. She is like a planet growing smaller in the distance. The woman has a lovely gravity. It pulled my attention and concern in her direction for a while.

The level of writing in *The New Yorker* is an antidote for the *Chronicle*. I read about pushing cigarettes in China, murder in Texas, and Diana Trilling. Harold Brodkey on John O'Hara, who isn't very good at portraying Protestants. "He laughs at them, and they do not come alive; he makes them fearful and petty and dull, inane." "O'Hara can't do the childishness or the effectuality or the cleverness of Wasps." That sounds familiar, and it took a time-lapsed Jew from Illinois to point it out.

> Success as a writer often seems to rectify an anomaly in social class. Or the reverse: an anomaly in social class often leads to the concentrated effort that brings early success as a writer.

I wrote a letter to the woman in Alaska who is returning in ten days. Dear Energizer Bunny….

Thursday, Sept. 9, 1993

Typing in the morning.

A microphone was being tested across the street. There was a gathering of suits and legs, a groundbreaking ceremony. The shovels had purple ribbons. There was a model of the anticipated building. An idolatry of structures. They even said a prayer. I would prefer the empty lot with old brick buildings on the side, the numbers running along one wall and an arrow pointing down. No longer can you RENT A WRECK.

Through a window on the right of the desk I can see an old Mission-style church a few blocks away and a flag pole, a reminder of church and state with tenements in between. A new building will block the view.

The vacant lot under my kitchen window, where the addicts and the homeless come and go, will be a children's playground in a few months.

2 p.m. I walked downtown and went into a building. On the elevator was a sign, ART GALLERIES, which I read as ART ALLERGIES. There were photos of the interiors of homes, whatever the female photographer thought was an identifying moment, looking for domestic pretensions. People who're a legend in their own home full of kitsch and memories, as if their lives had calcified in that direction.

She knows about the territorial egos of some people. There were a couple of women with large portraits of themselves. One in New Orleans covered an entire wall, a genteel mother with her children on the side of a quiet riverbank where she stood in a burst of light. It reminded me of the pretentious wife of a king who commissioned a series of self-glorifying portraits from Rubens. They give the impression that God is sitting at her right hand and everyone else at her pretty feet. The woman in New Orleans was the main event. There was a husband standing off to the side, practically in the shadows, leaning against a tree like a wooden object or a side-effect.

I walked to work. The little trees on California Street are in bondage, surrounded with iron bars.

In the office for 1½ hours, then left.

7 p.m. I took a bus to the sound-room flat, and was sitting around the kitchen with the Phantom and one of the roommates with his black book open, the pages covered with a tiny black scrawl.

We went down to the sound room and hooked up the Les Paul. The Phantom got a nice sound from the equipment, adjusting dials and switches -some distortion with a cutting edge. We cut loose for a long improvisation with a vague adherence to a chord progression. I threw in a lot of notes with a certain echo. The high notes were evaporating in mid-air with him on drums or improvising on a mic. He can cut loose, vocalizing like a maniac or a spaced-out drone, refuting the notion that in outer space no one can hear you scream.

He took a couple of breaks. I was not about to stop, being onto something with a sinister current. It was dripping with reptilian possibilities. He asked for a cigarette. I had to stop and roll him one. He's a pot-head, but he's not very good at rolling his own. Earlier in the kitchen I realized he can do impressions of others. He will speak of himself in self-deprecating terms, like someone whose picture you see on a wanted poster in the post office. "Or a milk carton," I said. He feels like a misfit or a fuck-up with a drinking problem, but picking up a hollow-body guitar he did a nice send-up of a cocktail lounge crooner.

He finally insisted I take a break, though the session never recovered from it. I took off the guitar and went into the garage, having a beer and a cigarette. There were half-dissected motorcycles lying around. We talked for a while. I think he wants to turn his life around and is making an effort. He has a sense of having bottomed out. The lethargy, futility, and what not, but he's twenty-nine and was trained as a sound

technician. The Phantom used to be in a working band, and wants to rebuild the sound-room, put in more equipment, make tapes, and stop blowing his money in bars.

We returned to the audio dungeon for another hour. It had an off-and-on intensity. I played along with a tape he made with a drum machine (wrote dream machine). He kept adjusting the sound on the guitar, even to the point of a delay in sound. I asked him, with his tendency for making random adjustments, if he knew how to return to a sound that worked. Not necessarily. He likes to keep it open-ended, leaving something to chance. He never steps in the same river twice, and yet his life is in a rut.

11 p.m. We stopped and turned off the equipment, having been down there for several hours. Went upstairs, exhausted. I don't know a better antidote to women, short of falling asleep. I handed him a ten-page poem, "Emily and Camille,"[10] to give to someone who is on close theatrical terms with the woman who wrote *Poetomachia*. I said he could read it if he wanted to, though he's about as literary as the label on a beer bottle. There was a line that made him brighten up, "God loves the weird."

I left that session in the reverberating dungeon with my head in the clouds. There was a heavy fog, the mist blowing across the street like a low-flying cloud crashing into the neighborhood.

Friday, Sept. 10, 1993

12:30 p.m. I walked into the office and the receptionist said she had something for me. It was a glossy ad for a porno film with a leggy redhead lying on the floor in a transparent mini-dress with nothing underneath. She leaned back on her elbow and

[10] It is written in the manner of Emily Dickinson responding to Camille Paglia's description of her as a morbid loner (and much more) in *Sexual Personae.*

looked up at the camera with an expectant challenging look. Breathless, lips parted, surrounded with burning candles. Aisha said the candles are part of the act, having met her through a girlfriend who may or may not be in the business. She was impressed with the legs and "talent" of this woman who, she said, would drip melting wax on herself. Aisha made a motion to imply her bosom and below the waist with a knowing and approving look.

The ad was signed, "Lots of Love, Lust & Peace."[11] I wanted to analyze the handwriting. It might reveal her as a simple-minded materialist whose body is her medium of expression. A solid-state being with integrated circuits and a head made out of wood, so any transcendence has to come from elsewhere: lights, camera, action.

Last night in the garage the Phantom mentioned an interview he chanced upon. Charlie Rose on Channel 9 was talking to Catharine MacKinnon, the fiancee of the Freudian fuckup, Jeffery Masson (who sued *The New Yorker* for libel and lost). She was at the trial and sometimes in the office, though I never spoke with her. They talked about her efforts to establish a legal definition of pornography (something to do with "degrading"), but it was more open than the legs of the women involved. However vaguely defined, she wants it banned entirely.[12] The Phantom was puzzled and scornful, since most women who take their clothes off for a camera are more than willing.

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[11] The porn star had misspelled her own name, but it's a stage name. Her real name is written in semen, sweat, and celluloid.

[12] Pete Hamill, the New York journalist, has an essay about MacKinnon called "The New Victorians" (*Playboy*, January, 1993). He notes that her negative generalities about men are not only degrading but misinformed. "… [O]ver and over again, MacKinnon speaks about men as if they all behaved in the same way and were sexually excited by the same imagery." Not content with being wrong about the male gender, she manages to be wrong about females when claiming (along with Andrea Dworkin) that sexual intercourse is a form of rape. I'll go out on a limb and say that is not how most women think of it. As for the Feminists Against Censorship Taskforce (with women like Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich, and Rita Mae Brown), she said, "The labor movement had its scabs, the slavery movement had its Uncle Toms, and we have FACT."

MacKinnon made a point about those who aren't, citing the somewhat dated example of Linda Lovelace.

V. and I walked to the Hunan place with her in a fuzzy pink sweater and black satin pants. I had the usual smoked ham, bamboo, and rice. We're in tune like a man and woman who in other circumstances, if not another lifetime, might have had a life together. It is out of the question, what with her being engaged to someone else, not to mention my being "over the hill" and the wrong race. That leaves us with a fine rapport with no strings attached or expectations. She talked about her wedding next year, costing over $5000, and the fact that they have never lived together. It will be different than seeing each other twice a week. She is not about to let him get the upper hand, but admits there are patriarchal customs in the Philippines. I said something to the effect, hesitating, putting a spin on it which would not sound too forward, that he would do well to hold on to her and make it work since he wouldn't find a better woman. She agreed, hitting the table with her little fist and exclaiming, "Ditto!" with a laugh. Then her expression changed, becoming philosophical and saying on the other hand, if she wanted to, she could probably find someone better.

She also mentioned their bank accounts. "What's mine is mine. What's his is shared," she said, smiling sweetly. She thinks she is getting old and worries too much. She found two silver hairs in her black and glossy hair. Later we were walking on the sidewalk and she exclaimed, "My bee-ological clock is ticking."

Meanwhile, there were comments on how spicy the meal was. It burned her lips as she related more gossip from the office. She's been training her replacement who talks a lot and wants to have the baby of one of the legal assistants. The receptionist has slept

with thirty men. This information was related from one woman to another as an accomplishment I think, but it included five abortions. The latter didn't sit well with V., who for that matter couldn't fathom thirty men. I said it's kind of a lot. She said, "Kind of?!" From her perspective, five or six would have been more than enough for a woman of twenty-seven. Ten or twelve would imply the woman is loose or careless. Thirty was a slut. Any more than that implied a sociopath who is beyond redemption.

We returned to the office with her walking fast so as not to be late.

An hour later I left with her (the Attorney was working on a long complaint). She had to file something at City Hall, an ordinary errand, but I was walking on air. Her presence is like a dry and light champagne, a refinement with a certain effervescence. She could talk about anything, including what she had for breakfast, "bread and coffee," and I would find it interesting, as if anything to do with her existence is significant. I'm a little in love with her.

I can hear her soft voice speaking slowly, "Shut… up," but there is something reciprocal here or we wouldn't have these rendezvous every few days.

At the counter for filing she stamped the documents with her thin wrists. She noted how short she is, five feet, and shrugged. I wonder if those references to herself are how she gets her bearings in the world, leaning on them like I lean on a newspaper (which she has little interest in). I've heard about her thick dark eyebrows, her lips, her legs which she doesn't shave, her pantyhose which don't last very long, her clothes, her wrists (carpal tunnel syndrome), her hair, her twenty-minute showers, her problematic waistline, her weight, her occasional efforts to exercise, her stress, her very moderate

drinking habits, her plans for having two or three kids. She makes it sound like those are the main coordinates of her existence, beyond which things become irrelevant.

Back in the office I had a long complaint to put together (seven pages) with the Attorney gone.

5 p.m. I left with her and the two sisters on the elevator. I told V. that one of our clients will come here to pick up the complaint, “The fat guy with a gun.” The older sister said, “You guys have the worst clients. Ours are more sophisticated.” I was searching for a response. “You mean like the bottom of the barrel?” She suggested, “Scum of the earth.” “Thank you.” The others were laughing.

I walked V. to the underground, then headed for the pool. There were only a few people there. A watery mile.

One of the lanes was taken by a large black woman with a rope-hair conglomeration on her head. For half an hour she didn’t leave the shallow end or stray more than a foot or two from the wall. She stood there facing the wall and talking to herself in a low voice. She seemed to be talking to someone who wasn’t there, with occasional startled reactions where she would jump back a little. For the most part she stood in the water as if that was sufficient and constituted a work out. I suppose it was a change of pace. Lifting a leg or an arm, swaying her hips, the water waist deep, the woman wallowed in transparency.

Given the points of view that don’t translate very well from one race to another, I wonder what she thought about these white folks in a hurry. They “exploit” the water to get somewhere. That was a line I heard from the Kenyan professor, Dr. Ali Mazrui, in a

documentary on Africa.[13] He was explaining why black Africans never sailed to other continents. He said they didn't want to exploit the elements of the earth in order to move from one location to another (I don't think it hurts the water). Also, they didn't have much in the way of boats and navigation skills.

Hot shower. I walked to the hamburger joint, passing a line of people a block and a half long waiting to join *The Joy Luck Club*.

Walked home with a nice fatigue, and passed out somewhere after ten.

Midnight: I woke up with the phone ringing, the Czech woman. We talked for over an hour. The honesty of the woman is one of her specialties. She admitted that she often views other women as trouble, especially at work. They have a tendency for being "insecure…," not to say "irrational" when it comes to men. That leaves the men with a few questions. She had run-ins with a "lesbian bitch" where she used to work who didn't like her. She is horrified at the prospect of a world run by women. She said if men want women for their bodies, there are women with a similar approach. They think with their cunts and wonder why their relations with men are shallow and slippery, going from one crisis to another.

With respect to her semi-derelict Mexican lover, there have been diminishing returns for anything beyond the physical. She is ready to call it quits. It is hard to get her head and sex organ in alignment.

Saturday, Sept. 11, 1993

[13] He had a cunning reference to Europeans who come to Africa on vacation, showing a few topless white women on the beach. The image of black women walking around half naked is overdone in his opinion. Most of them are more discreet these days.

9 a.m. My alarm clock is a motorcycle, someone yelling on the street, a garbage truck.

Coffee and cigarettes, and typing for hours.

4:30 p.m. I was supposed to meet the Czech woman in the woods with a few others, but was not in the mood. I walked to Polk Street and picked up a few supplies: typewriter ribbon, coffee, and a light bulb. The coffee shop has an old style with its wood and brass, and smells of dark roast. I stood near the counter with a couple of others, waiting my turn. I had a fatalistic calm.

The man behind the counter asked who's next, looking at an old woman behind me who came in after I did. I looked at her and she said something about my being next, so I turned back about to say, "Half a pound of French roast," when I heard her saying in a huff, "I'm so tired of people not saying thank you I could SPIT!" I turned around and saw her glaring at me. Thin and stylish, over sixty with a certain poise. I came this close to saying, "Please don't spit on the floor." Not sure why I didn't, except I didn't trust myself - it would have led to more words. I guess she was doing me a favor by not cutting in front of me. I stared at her in disbelief, then turned back and said "Half a pound of French…" with some effort, "… ground for espresso." I walked out in a fine mood and wandered into an old vintage store, looking at cut-glass ashtrays. If I ever end up collecting something (besides paper), it will be rocks and vintage ashtrays.

Walked to the library. Not sure what I was doing there, except for returning a book. I read some poems by Carolyn Forche,[14] and found a couple more books by Philip

[14] An excerpt from "The Colonel" (1978):
The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries
home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like
dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this. He took one

K. Dick, though I don't like him that much. Even less the blurb by Ursula K. Le Guin. "Nobody notices that we have our own homegrown Borges, and have had him for 30 years." That's like comparing a fine old cognac with bathtub gin as far as the quality of writing goes. So much for homegrown.

On the way home I passed some Spanish-speaking men who had a sex change. They're brazen, but it's getting old. Earlier I walked past a Laundromat with a young Vietnamese woman inside. She stared shyly at a black transsexual hooker who had walked in wearing a tight skirt that barely cleared her assets. The hooker had the confidence of someone whose reason for being is as tangible as a tube of lipstick.

The brass mailbox in the lobby is a metal void. I've been expecting letters from Vienna, Paris, and Anchorage.

8 p.m. I sank into an easy chair with the opera on, *The Elixer of Love* by Donizetti. I was making headway with a science fiction book (*Eye in the Sky*). It took some effort, swimming against the current of a prose style which rubbed me the wrong way, but the concept had a hold on my attention.

I put it down after 150 pages, a quick read. The entire evening, including a workout on a stringed instrument, felt like a spiritual struggle. Your contradictions wrestle with themselves like an angel of the isometric. There are slow waves moving through the hours and things are looking up or down. Some of the undulations have to do

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of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck themselves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm and held the last of his wine in the air. Something for your poetry, no? he said. Some of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.

with women. With the last one I was feeling positive or negative from one moment to the next. It would help to see her again to put it in perspective. It's not because I find her irresistible, I just want to stop idealizing someone in their absence (like the way I magnified this studio in my mind before I decided to live here).[15]

I turned on the tube, channel 9, with old Mexican films, and caught the last part of *Maria Candelaria* (1944) with Dolores del Rio. It fluctuated between being a good film and not so good. One minute it was floating into a situation with poetic camerawork, and the next it was a caricature of Mexican culture. Roughly speaking, a painter wants a beautiful and respectable woman in the village to pose nude for him. Her name is Maria Candelaria and she won't do it, wanting to protect her honor. She leaves. One of the Mexican-Indian women in the room volunteers, saying she looks like Maria. There is a brief shot of her from the side. She is standing by the window wearing nothing while the man is bending towards the canvas.

The next thing you know, a woman from the village walks into the house, sees the completed painting (we don't see it), assumes it is Maria in the nude, and things decline into mass hysteria. She informs the villagers who come running to the house. They have a look, and then they're running around with flaming torches and Maria is on the run with her home on fire. She stumbles through swampy waters in her long skirt, somehow staying ahead of the mob who plunge into the water up to their shoulders while holding torches. I want to say they're carrying a torch for her. This is serious, men and women are coming after her. She finally makes it to the town, running down the street, where – big-time pathos – the man in her life is in prison. He was alerted by mental telepathy to her

[15] Does a writer blow things out of proportion by thinking too much? It's like he has the Paris Opera on his shoulders in a world that listens to Top 40. Maybe a writer is small-minded from reading the fine print and it makes everything around him seem larger.

plight and pleads with the jailer to let him out. The jailer crushes his hands on the bars until they're bloody. He hardly winces (there is bad acting and oddly-timed cuts, along with a cause-and-effect dimension which lacks credibility, something like a dream).

Her intention is to run to the window of his prison cell where she calls to him, saying as the mob is approaching with stones in their hands (they're going to stone this woman to death for posing naked), that she did no wrong. Her honor and her love for him is intact. He kicks down the jail door, knocks over a guard with a rifle, and runs out of the prison just in time to pick her up at the foot of the prison wall where she was felled by a stone thrown by a woman. She has a dying moment in his arms. He is stoic, glaring at the mob who're standing there like moronic extras with their torches burning. Then he carries her lifeless body in his arms. In the next scene she is placed in a gondola surrounded with flowers, looking lovely and peaceful and honorable, but unfortunately dead as a doornail. He rows her slowly into the canal of the dead (*muertos*) with a stubborn look on his face. It's a death-before-dishonor situation (*fin de la pelicula*).

I sat there stunned, like one of the rocks hit me, glancing off my hard-headed solitude, my own *cabeza*. I wondered what happened to the painter. Why wasn't he around to defend her and share the blame?[16]

10 p.m. The next film was on the Mexican revolution, *Enamorada* (Woman in Love, 1946). I provided some background music with my guitar.

Phone call from the Czech woman. She sounded a little different and hard to understand at first. Gradually the situation was coming into focus. She was drunk. It turns out the party was at her place, an illegal basement in the Haight. Her friend had a flat tire

[16] I had a life-drawing class at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles when I was in high school. It was taught by a very good black artist, Charles White. I wasn't sure if I could focus on my brush with a naked co-ed lounging a few feet away, but I managed.

so they didn't make it to the park. She thought I might have gone looking for them and was relieved I didn't. She noted my absence though.

Our communication was a little blurred, but her mood was such that I treated the situation with some respect. When a woman is in such a state, a cold fury of disillusionment and blunt confessions, you listen. Her Mexican lover had passed out on the sofa (tequila, beer, and marijuana). She was drifting away and losing respect for him. Now just a "piece of shit" in her opinion, who among other things had the nerve to be getting friendly with one of her women friends who is "ugly and stupid" and gave him her phone number. There was a pattern being revealed to her and she criticized herself for falling into it, going off on a long tangent of how she is so giving, even to strangers. The men are like stray wounded dogs with her in the role of a nurse who can only get hurt. There are diminishing returns, so it makes her mean. You can't go on giving and not get much in return. I was going to say she recently described him as a satisfying sex object. I touched on that, but she wouldn't have any of it. She was going to kick him out when he woke up. No more, he was so dumb, he would jump on anyone. She should have known. And no, she wasn't surprised. There were moments of an icy clarity with an Eastern European accent coming through.

She went on talking, the equivalent of a dark night of the soul, although it was only ten or so. Another reason she was depressed and confused is that everyone had gone home. She couldn't believe it. The party began in the afternoon, but she wasn't about to quit. Unfortunately, there was no one left, except that good-for-nothing worthless… who was not only beneath her but unconscious (talk about disloyal). She wanted me to come over. I started to say that he was there, but she said, "I don't want to fuck. I want to

talk… and drink." She proceeded to count the bottles left. "10 beers, 2 bottles of wine. Come on." I thought fast, looking around the place. I had an opera on, the Mexican revolution on the tube, and a good book, not to mention a typewriter and guitar. I was relaxed and not in the mood for drinking (I rarely am these days). I weighed that against the prospects of going out in the fog and schlepping halfway across town to a cold basement where an angry woman who is so drunk she can barely stand up is "frustrated" with her lover who is sound asleep.[17]

It wasn't hard to decide, though I did say she could come over here. "Too far." After a while we said good night. I went over to the disheveled bed by the window and lay down with the Mexican revolution being beamed into the room through a black and white portable with the sound off. There were subtitles and some dated subtleties.

A Zapata type has stormed into a town and taken over, but the local priest is an old friend. The revolutionary falls in love with the temperamental daughter of a pillar of the community. Their first encounter has all the dignity of a couple of twelve-year-olds, with her insults going on and on. At one point she slaps him twice for talking to her on the street, then is surprised when he knocks her down. "You hit a woman!" Up to then she was a tomboy in heavy skirts who held men and their weaknesses in contempt. She didn't hesitate to slug him in the face and then was surprised when he responded in kind. Equality hits back.

She went to the priest and unleashed a tirade about how people like him (the revolutionary) are useless and beneath her and should all be dead. The priest had to point out a few Christian concepts to her. He said the revolutionary has some genuine beliefs in

[17] I was going to say it's Hispanic Heritage month so she should be nice to him, but decided not to.

the equality of people, which was news to her. It was all getting rather tiresome. I pulled the blanket over my head for a while, a blessed relief, with the radio coming through. I caught the ending where she ran off to join him and the peoples' forces, walking through the fields with bombs going off. There was a scene of peasant women walking beside the horses of their men who're riding. She walked beside his horse, holding onto a strap and looking up with docile pride. I thought, the men ride and the women walk?

11:30 p.m. On the typewriter. Coffee and a Guinness. I paused for the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*[18] to pass through my life with a rising wave of undefined emotion. As it moved slowly through the room it stirred up memories of women.

Sunday, Sept. 12, 1993

NOTES

> A letter from an attorney in the office with the phrase that something was "legally blinding."
>
> "MULTIETHNIC VIEWS CLASH OVER CHANNEL PROGRAMS." I want to watch my program.
>
> A failed suicide talking in *Valis*:
>
> "… [W]hat amazed me the most was the wisdom of my body, which knew not only to defend itself from my mind but specifically how to defend itself. I realize now that Yeats' statement, "I am an immortal soul tied to the body of a dying animal" is diametrically opposite to the actual state of affairs vis-à-vis the human condition."
>
> A border town in Texas, a private high school. A white boy goes out with a Latina girl, both with middle class backgrounds. It doesn't work out and they break up. Her mother starts calling him. There was a multicultural breakdown involving the

[18] Wagner composed the opera in 1865, when this country was an ex-colonial outpost just emerging from a ruinous civil war (over the primitive custom of slavery).

girl's honor, or the mother's honor as reflected in her daughter, which requires that the boy marry the girl. The boy had stumbled into a misunderstanding. He didn't understand that his customs meant nothing to someone from another culture.[19] Eventually the mother had a Latino fortune-teller contact a couple of Mexican hit men who gunned the kid down in his parents' driveway. There was an assumption that in killing him her daughter's virginity would be restored. I'm not making this up (*The New Yorker*, Sept. 13, 1993).[20]

The implication is that the defining principle of a girl is between her legs and it's worth a boy's life. He was already a nonentity in the Hispanic world of the mother. Her own values were the only ones that counted, though living in this country and availing herself of the amenities and benefits of living here. She refused to honor some of the local customs, such as: a girl's virginity is not worth a boy's life, and you don't shoot your daughter's ex-boyfriend (I wonder what the daughter thought of that). And practicing black magic is uncivilized.

Corollary: The hit men went back across the border, which it turns out is a one-way situation. "Asserting the rights of its citizens to travel as they please, Mexico issued a stinging rejection yesterday of Governor Wilson's proposal for a U.S.-Mexico crackdown on smugglers who help illegal immigrants enter the United States." (*SF Chronicle*, Sept. 11, 1993). In other words, there is no such thing as another country's sovereignty according to Mexico. Its citizens can go wherever they want to. Nowhere else in the world are there borders, visas, or passports. "You should not lose sight of the enormous contributions Mexicans have made to the State of California…." How does the border suddenly become a fixed thing, protecting Mexicans when they commit crimes in the U.S. and retreat across the border and there's no extradition? Oddly enough, Mexico's southern border is known for being tough on anyone trying to enter Mexico illegally.

The Marquis de Sade: a descendant of ancient nobility. In 1768 he was twenty-seven. He picked up a young female beggar on the streets of Paris. Promising domestic employment he brought her home and abused her. "That same evening," she "escaped the Marquis's custody and told the world her story. Within a week young Sade began one of many jail terms he would serve for his sexual excesses." (Seven months, first offense.)

Men have been abusing women with impunity for centuries, but even at this extreme, with him part of the nobility and her a street person, he went to jail "within a week."

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[19] Much is made of the Ugly American syndrome, where Americans in another country have a rude indifference to the local customs and language. Similar versions have been found here in the form of the Ugly Chinese or the Ugly Mexican.

[20] If she loses her virginity again, the boy's life will be restored (not).

> It is curious how a sadistic French aristocrat who lived two hundred years ago became a figure of respect for many progressive left-wing people. He tortured women, but was against the church and didn't repress his feelings. He was in alignment with the French revolution and lived in an asylum where he put on strange theatrical productions for the public. It would be like going on a date to a mental ward to watch them stumble around onstage while being directed by a sadomasochist. Not exactly *The Sound of Music*, but considering the movies these days there isn't much difference, except for one important qualifier: it is a prophylactic film projection, rather than being live among the lifers.
>
> The biographical background of an author is thought by some to be irrelevant when talking about his or her writing. I don't mind hearing about the "perennial absence of his cold, distant mother," or that his father was "a bisexual, eccentric, debauched diplomat who doted on his only son." He had an "equally close bond with his notoriously dissipated uncle Abbe de Sade, a whore-mongering cleric whose household the young Sade described as 'a seraglio… better still… a bordello'." I don't want to say he was a product of society, but he wasn't that original in how he looked at things. And "… the extraordinarily loose mores of eighteenth century France permitted numerous noblemen who had committed transgressions far more outrageous and violent than Sade's to go scot-free."

A friend of mine from Nebraska (the Phantom of the sound-room) has a mild approach to life (or is it mildly terminal). He said something the other night about avoiding arguments because "a negative force creates a negative force." I have to admit he has a point. The scenes that I have troubled with an angry response, sending the situation into a further dimension of anger. The hostility takes on a life of its own, which sounds like many a pointless war.

There were negative responses that I stirred up with a letter to someone. I would still be in touch with the spider woman from a year ago if only I had been a doormat. What will happen if I publish an opinionated journal? Will that engender some hostility, assuming it gets any attention at all? Anonymity is a form of camouflage. Keep your head down and it won't get shot off. Sticking your head up is an education. You see what kind

of crossfire you attract, and find out who your friends are. You find out who your girlfriend is. You learn about rotten tomatoes.

Speaking of the rotten tomato approach, which doesn't take a lot of cognizance, someone objected to an article in the *New York Times*. The paper has some reasonable doubts about the current mayor. His administration is "troubled," which is putting it lightly. But the black "publisher and editor-in-chief" of the *Amsterdam News* called the *Times* article "gibberish… and denounced 'White-think'," which holds that "no Black is competent to run this city."

How does Dinkins = all blacks? They all look the same? *The New York Times* endorsed Dinkins for mayor in 1989, and again this year, so what is he talking about? They couldn't possibly have any reason to question the mayor, so it must be racial. I thought you're not supposed to generalize on the basis of race. Didn't Martin Luther King, Jr. say something about the content of one's character? The evidence is overwhelming that Dinkins is a stuffed shirt or a stuffed tuxedo. The implication of "no Black is competent" is that a black man can't be criticized, even in a high position which affects the lives of millions of people. The editor's attack is ringing hollow, and "White-think" is a racial slur, the sort of negative generality which is a crime against humanity when used on black people.

Typing for a few hours. On a wooden instrument for a couple of hours while watching the U.S. Open. When I'm distracted by some mindless action on the tube the music gravitates to places it wouldn't normally have gone.

It was a nice afternoon, but there's a studious current and I'm staying in. Later I called the Czech woman, asking if she could give the Phantom a job in the coffee shop

where she works. It sounded possible. She was lighthearted and casual, completely different from last night. She apologized for getting angry about the man who passed out, saying it was over and done with and she was kicking him out. “He’s dead.” It turns out they made up.

7 p.m. On *60 Minutes*: the worst prison, and custodians making more than teachers. Afterwards I spent a couple of hours going through piles of old newspapers, throwing 90 percent of it away, but kept the clippings.

The phone seems to have gone dead. I’m stretching out in a subdued vein which can be useful. A pot of coffee in the morning and no alcohol. I had the late show on the tube while lying on the bed with the guitar. *Final Notice*. I must be at a low ebb if the TV is on so much. Zoning out.

Monday, Sept. 13, 1993

Woke up early, not enough sleep. There was the sound of someone slamming on the brakes and skidding, metal slamming into metal. A Monday morning collision. The neighborhood colliding with itself, or the weekend with the work week.

I read old manuscripts, the typographic déjà vu of a journal. Writers are more limited in their approach than painters, where respect is given to everyone from Rembrandt to de Kooning. That is quite a range. I’m not sure if a journal could accommodate it. My writing is full of twists and turns and has a lot of torque, but now and then a portrait emerges from the gloom.

I glanced out the window at the vacant lot. A couple of beat-up women were disappearing behind their cardboard. I wondered if someone could rig a remote-control

smoke bomb which would go off, knocking the cardboard over and blowing their cover as they light a crack pipe. It wouldn't be neighborly, but neither is smoking crack.

I went out around noon, thinking of going out to the cliffs. There was fog on the horizon, an atmospheric deflection of my plans. I returned and found a postcard from Jacques, my old friend in Paris. He was in New York City visiting his mother who is "seriously ill." The postcard showed a dreary scene of commuters on a crowded subway. I read the paper, a habit I would like to break and probably won't as long as it hits a chord of corrosive conditions and caricatures.

HALF IN U.S. BELIEVE CREATIONISM. "Poll finds only 11 percent strictly adhere to evolution theory… that things evolved without a god." "Human beings were created just 10,000 years ago – without evolving from lower forms of life." Godless evolution is right up my molecular alley, but some people want an explanation with all the verisimilitude of a Broadway musical. It isn't "living well," but artificial legends about yourself which are the best revenge. As if to say: life is hard and then I die, the earth reclaims my body which will turn to dust, but it's not going to get my self-image. I believe in the most full-blown dreamy kitsch and do it with hypnotic closed-circuit concentration. Its artificiality is my revenge on the real. The facts of life can fuck off. There are clouds of cotton candy with a choir of angels and I am pulled into the sky in a burst of light, breaking through into the heavens where there is a silk pillow with my name embroidered on it.

It is realistic to assume that human beings have an artificial streak big enough to drive a truck through. Unfortunately, it lends itself to a false consciousness that authoritarian governments rely on. It's a "doublethink" which offers people an escape

from reality, but it is harder to focus on the facts of oppression – all the more so when the past is not seen as relevant, and truth has been demoted to a subjective realm.[21]

I read the two-page article on the religious right. It is "emerging" as a "born-again political movement." I don't know how true that is. It's hard to gauge the significance of an article based on column inches. In that respect, what is nearly as significant as the religious right is "a stretch lace camisole" with "body-hugging fit" for $12.95 at the Emporium.

A couple in Whittier look like they're giving a Nazi salute to the light. "We're not trying to force our views on anyone…." And yet, "…although the economy and taxes are important to religious conservatives, their significance pales in comparison with such issues as abortion and, to a growing extent, homosexuality and immigration." They have a right to not have abortions and not be homosexuals if they can help it, but beyond that, what's all the fuss about if they're not trying to force their views on anyone?

"We are the keepers of what is right and what is wrong. Our mandate is to impact the nation on moral issues" (from the Traditional Values Coalition). So they're trying to force their views on everyone and we can feel the impact. Who put them in charge of right and wrong? Just writing these phrases hurts my typewriter.

How can you trust someone who says, "We realized Reagan and Bush were going to be able to hold the tide on social evils, and people became complacent…Twelve years later, we're having to reactivate all those people." Because social evils were held back during the Republican administration (I can hardly write this), but now they're starting to seep back into the national fabric? There was a high tide of crime and drugs and unethical

[21] George Orwell published *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949. The psychological warfare of the state against the people has expanded in the technological age. We are led to believe that WAR IS PEACE and IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH, and a President was killed by a magic bullet.

business practices (with broken homes) throughout the 1980's, so what is he talking about? It is as contrived as his perspective on the origin of the species, so at least he's consistent. Would you buy a used religion from this man? A political agenda with its head in a cloud of self-serving subjective metaphysics. He should go to church and stay there.

Corollary: one of the largest women's organizations in the country is in the pocket of the religious right. "Concerned Women for America," (claiming 600,000 members). There was an assumption that once women had the vote this country would be more progressive. More and more people have been incorporated into the system with the right to vote, but that doesn't mean we're on the verge of a Greek millennium. They fan out across the political spectrum, echoing what went on before, from conservative and reactionary to you name it.

Meanwhile, keeping things in perspective: PRINCESS ANNE IS PREGNANT.

Where was I? Diverted by the news.

2 p.m. Phone call from B. at work. We have been missing each other and were catching up on the latest. She went to Black Sand Beach with the German woman yesterday and took off her clothes. Now her bottom is burned. She has a way of saying what she did on this or that night while leaving other nights unspoken for, like Saturday, which makes me wonder how familiar her and Ilsa have become.

To show how she operates: her sister in Connecticut met a man on a train who offered her a job "crewing" on a yacht (which is computerized). Screwing on a yacht is something else, but I don't think that's what he had in mind. They would cruise down the coast to Florida. The sister called B. on the West Coast asking if she wanted to go. B.

thought about it – based on a random encounter on a train with a stranger. Her life hinges on that sort of thing. She is easily distracted, ready at a moment's notice to fly off the handle, airplane-wise.

2:30 p.m. I went to work, where I was dealing with a seven-page will. We had to redo it because the man got married and changed the terms - being of sound mind and body and leaving something to the San Francisco Symphony for piano competitions. I thought of two pianos in a wrestling match.[22]

I was typing when V. walked in. She wore a long skirt and a loose sweater. When sitting down and crossing her leg there was a long slit in the skirt. She was showing a lot of leg in smoky nylons. She glanced back and smiled. Barely visible on the back of her neck were some fine black hairs and I forgot where I was.

Earlier I went into the Attorney's office with a note from a phone call to inform him that a long delay in one of our cases (verifying adoption papers) had occurred because we sent the original document to the wrong department. He said, "Why the fuck don't you send it to the right department then?" while fumbling through the papers in the file. I stood there for a few seconds, long enough to bore a hole through him with my eyes which is saying something since he has the hide if not the habits of a hippopotamus. I said, "We need the original document and it is sitting in the wrong department." "Oh."

This is someone who exudes an automatic negative static. It's like hitting an old sofa with a duster and the dust (the static) flies off with no apologies. I want to tell him that one reason the Germans lost the war was their tendency for being auto-sodomized by

[22] I also thought of a painting by Salvador Dali, "Atmospheric Skull Sodomizing a Grand Piano" (1934), but I try to stay rational when I'm at work.

their own pomposity, and eventually it impaired their strategic judgment. Maybe I'll put it in a footnote to a memo. Our backgrounds are (mostly) Danish and German, which could be another reason we don't get along.[23]

6 p.m. On the way home I stopped at a shop with international newspapers. There were literary magazines from *Zyzzyva* to *Dog Spit Comix.* I pulled one out, thinking it was about tattoos. On the cover was a woman who resembled someone I knew a few years ago. It turned out she is from Germany, lives here, and turned her body into a medium of expression and a living statement. There was some suggestion that she is an androgynous being who identifies closely with a "self-fertilizing lizard." Reptilian and asexual, in other words (sounds like a bad date). Males are not required for reproduction. That sounds like the female supremacy of some women – the ones who act like they contain both egg and sperm. The man is only there to stir them up inside the woman.

I was impressed by the tattoos and how serious one would have to be to follow through on this. Not to mention posing for a publication with no clothes on and her pubis shaved, showing an abstract "tribal" tattoo above her mons veneris. There was a ring through the "hood of the clitoris" and a nipple ring. A crescent bone through her nose. A needle through the bridge of her nose. Head shaved. The skeleton of a lizard tattooed on the side of her head. Another significant pattern on her shoulder, and this is not to mention the earrings.

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[23] I haven't quit because I like the part-time hours and don't come in until mid-afternoon. I have to do something to pay the rent since I neglected in my misspent youth to write a best-selling novel, and was too eclectic and experimental to wear the straitjacket of a profession. He won't fire me because we operate on a Gentleman's Agreement that he can be as temperamental and insulting as he wants and I won't fall apart, though now and then responding in kind. A woman worked here before me and it cramped his style, having to watch his language. Also, he doesn't like change, and my work is holding up.

The slender boyish look of a small-breasted woman. Maybe she is psychologically self-fertilizing and this is the result. She has a drop-dead realistic perspective on the body and her being in the world. It requires this extreme to hold her in focus and to project who she is (as she said in the interview), having no other means.[24]

She is not listed in the phone book. I would imagine her *raison d'etre* is unlisted. I was struck that someone like her exists. I suspended judgment as it gets in the way of bringing remote beings into focus – remote I mean from my own experience. Actually, she isn't that remote. I've had a few friends who were well along the route she took, but some of my women friends would be recoiling and derisive if I showed them a picture of her. I could say she is a liberated woman who is nailing down her reputation with bits of metal, wearing the insignia of her own enigma on her skin.

I imagined a conversation with Ming, where I said:

"Maybe she's without sin."
"Right, and I'm the Virgin Mary."
"If you kill a man it will restore your virginity."
"Where do you get your information?"
"All over the place."

To lighten up, still in the magazine shop, I picked up an issue of FUTURE SEX. It is somewhat cybernetic. There was a naked guy on a broken-down bus, standing there with a hard-on. Possibly a reference to *A Streetcar Named Desire*. I walked home, picking up fish and chips.

[24] I just did an odd thing. I thought I would look her up in the phone book (Idexa). A little distracted I picked up a heavy dictionary instead (it's about the same size). I turned to "insane root" in the I section. That set off a chain of associations according to the surrounding words and definitions: Insatiable. Inscape. Inscrutable. Insecurity. Insensible. Inseparable. Inserted. Inshore current. Inside loop. Insidious. Insightful. Insignificant. Insinuating. Innocent. Innovative. Inordinate. Inquisitive. Insane.

7:30 p.m. Turned on the game and picked up the guitar. The home team blew it.

I've had one beer in three days, and was typing for hours. The resounding silence from that woman is a wonder to behold. I'm getting cold.

Tuesday, Sept. 14, 1993

Walked to work. It was invigorating and took about twenty minutes. The neighborhoods alter from one block to the next. When I walk three or four blocks I'm in a decent area. Things become indecent when descending from Nob Hill.

I rendezvoused with V. in the office and sensed that something was a little off with her. When we left for the church she admitted it and gave me a heated account, being cranky and tired. Last night her boyfriend managed to lock the keys in the car with the engine running. They had to call a tow-truck which cost a lot and they broke the lock on the trunk when looking for a tool. They were up late and some arguing was involved. "You didn't raise your voice did you?" "Yes I did." Along the lines of: how could you do that? She can't imagine anyone being so distracted from the actual chain of events, including a car with the motor on, as to lock the keys in the car.

We walked to Old St. Mary's. There was a string quartet in progress. Two violins, viola, and a cello. "The Quartet in D Major" by Mozart (1789). High ceilings and prismatic light. A silence with 18th century strings attached. We were on the left side in a row of pews with a statue in front. The Virgin, head bowed, hands levitating a little. The lights in the ceiling emanated from her head, going in a straight line past mine. Towards the end there was a minuet. I leaned over and asked, "Do you like it?" "It's okay." She was hungry.

We walked out on The Sonus Imaginorem Quartet. I asked if she knew Latin. No. We missed the "Phantasy for Oboe and Strings" by Britten (1935), picked up some tacos, and sat on a granite slab in the wind. She said the younger Filipina women in the office are stuck up. It's good to have a second opinion since I don't trust my own all the time. The girl she is training is a little dumb. All she wants to do is "flirt, flirt, flirt," and have babies.

While walking back to work V. mentioned that she can't write to save her life. It just doesn't come to her, trying to organize her thoughts on a page or describe something in an essay. She had a hard time in school, not just English composition in the Philippines, but in her own language. "Just give me numbers!" She likes those.

Speaking of numbers, she said one of the attorneys makes over $80,000 a year. The thought of it leaves her wide-eyed, but then her conscience kicks in, saying she would never marry someone for his money. It's not uncommon from what I've heard, and she mentioned one of the Filipina women in the office whose parents want her to "marry a rich man." So much for love and romance, unless they're tied to money. Some women love possessions, and they're incompatible with a low income. They want the good life and objectify a man to get it.

We returned to the office. The Attorney had a court appearance out of town and there was not much to do. An hour later I was reading the paper when the phone rang. It was V. in the back. "Let's go." Click. I went on an errand with her and she pointed out a place we could have lunch. We returned and I did a little work.

5 p.m. We left together. Earlier she asked, "Are you going to walk me?" We have an off-the-wall connection, lighter than air. It's like two spirits gravitating towards each

other to walk and talk and listen to the finest music. The circumstances have a built-in restraint, but the rapport is there. It's on a level I associate with the 19th century, where the presence of a woman is enough, or the only possibility in a strict society.

She is lovely, has a fear of heights, and sticks to a fixed routine. She doesn't know much about politics and doesn't care. There is a concentrated will in her. V. gives a lot of attention to her appearance, but there is more to her. A man might see her as an exquisite flower, but it's a flower with the capacity to drive a car, work in an office, plan her life, and speak two languages.[25]

When leaving work, a woman got on the elevator and bumped into me, saying, "Excuse me, sir." She may have been responding to my clothes - a gray tweed sport coat, brown slacks, dark sweater, red tie. On the street V. was amused. "See how old you are, she called you sir."[26] What surprised me was her saying "Excuse me" at all.

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 1993

NOTES

> Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), said to have invented modern literate pornography. *The School of Whoredom*.
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> A woman from China broke the record for long-distance running on a diet of turtles and worms.
>
> False memories are common among the self-invented in a culture with a shallow-vicarious atmosphere of constant diversion.

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[25] There is an androgynous aspect to modern life, but androgyny reminds me of a quote from Bette Davis about acting: "A man is somewhat less of a man, a woman is somewhat more than a woman."

[26] V. and I are fifteen years apart. I was going to point out some examples of older men with younger women, I mean besides Woody Allen. The head of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) is sixty-four and married to a Christian woman who is thirty-two, but I'm not sure V. knows what the PLO is. If I said he was a millionaire it would make more sense to her.

A national news magazine noted where the President chose to vacation and the reason he didn't go somewhere else. "Too hot." The reason for avoiding California: "Too shallow." If that is true then what am I doing here? There is an osmosis with your surroundings which is hard to avoid. Why is a shallow person like myself trying to write things? It would seem to be futile, like beating a lame horse. If the comment isn't true, and it is just a shallow off-the-cuff observation, what's it doing in a national news magazine and in reference to the President?

If California is shallow, it would explain a few things, like the connections one is forming or not forming as one goes through life on the West Coast. There is a certain turbulence when things aren't sinking in and relationships are transitory, easily torn, if not pretended. Lacking depth the people lean on their reflection, leading to a sophomoric socializing of homogenous factions.

Iron John: One cold toilet or a hard man for the whores.

I have friends who're technically women.
They're so technical about it
I would rather go swimmin'.
I can do without it.

In the woods at Clear Lake, talking about the Tenderloin with Michael. Sometimes I look like I belong here, unshaven and disheveled. He knows the feeling, and avoids the area since he might start to think he belonged here. There are neighborhoods of resistance and osmosis, and you want to have your wits about you when disintegration is around the corner.

Bruce Connor: I went to a show of his work the other night (missed the opening). He is an eclectic artist who goes in any direction he wants to, maybe on a pivot of psilocybin. Some of his sketches look like psychotic fragile diagrams of the effect of mushrooms – an edgy and reverberating aimless force field.

More to the point: refined and intricate rows of inkblots on thin paper. They were no bigger than an inch and arranged in columns. The pelvic configurations of tiny mice in the manner of snowflakes. No two were alike. How did he do it? It begs the question of whether his mind is blown, arriving at these outer realms of delicate design where he apprehends an idiosyncratic composition. In this case, the fallout of tiny inkblots with a chain-link density. Is he a gentle man? Compare it to his life-size silhouettes of white light angels.

The homeless and the derelicts in this town get $345 a month on general assistance, plus whatever they can panhandle. Free meals, no rent. A lot of it goes for drugs and alcohol.

One or two million women in this country have had silicone breast implants (and thousands are suing for various malfunctions). It is becoming more realistic to refer to artificial women.

The Hounds of Peace. Forty-one and I'm still thinking of band names.

The best laid plans of icy women.

Any report in a storm.

The FBI had a file on Georgia O'Keefe. Her compositions of a cow skull or a flowering, an empty house in New Mexico, were a threat to national security. She crossed state lines when she moved to New Mexico from New York City with intent. An individual intensity with a subversive potential, given her propensity for seeing things clearly. What if we all dropped everything and started seeing skulls and vulva petals? The system would grind to a halt. An old woman investigated the effects of light and bone and the agents investigated her – with the discernment of a connoisseur, of course. Mug shots worthy of a Stieglitz. A woman who was too close to the earth for those who live in vacuum-sealed security installations. Their right angles are subverted by a curve, and she threw them a few. They swung and missed by a country mile. Considering who was head of the FBI, it was one old lady investigating another, jealous of her authenticity.

I loaned a book of modern short stories to V. a while back. One of the stories was brutal and obtuse. It was about a girl in a Latino gang and was far removed from V.'s world. Another story was more civilized, but she didn't get it. A Jewish woman in her thirties was being "waxed" in a salon while carrying on a bitter and sarcastic conversation with her mother. That someone would be on such terms with their own mother was beyond V.'s comprehension or sympathy.

A couple of weeks ago an attorney working for V.'s boss was in the office. He is forty, unmarried, and it was his last day before a month-long trip to Europe. I dropped into his office on the way out to say goodbye. There were comments about the time I spent in Europe and how friendly the women were in Spain - a lightweight generality which I could back up with some real occurrences. The Jewish paralegal stuck her head into the room and interrupted the conversation while hissing, "You pig!"

Maybe there was something lost in the translation, given her ethnic background, but I wondered why it was okay for her to say that. It was more rude than anything I said in a conversation, which was not about her and didn't include her.

(Imagine two women talking in an office about men. I appear in the doorway and call one of them a cow. It wouldn't go over very well.) On the other hand, you have to look where it's coming from. She tends to speak in blunt terms. She is the only person in the office who wears a T-shirt and jeans, looking kind of shlumpy. She gave up on her looks long ago. Referring to the young woman being trained by V., she said, "Where's that little shithead?" Referring to the older New Age woman: "Is Loo-loo back yet?" She is either sardonic or complaining, often in a whining manner that drives V. nuts.

I later got wind of the possibility that she likes the attorney who was leaving, so my talking about Spanish women may have rubbed her the wrong way.

There is a young and stylish Filipina woman in the office. V. never talks to her, finding her too aloof. Her name signifies something like "holy water miracle."

Reminds me of a line from Robert Hughes: "The self-righteousness of the 'I' is anesthetic."

10:30 a.m. I finally got enough sleep.

Working on a multi-level journal, pulling in notes and quotes and other signals from several intersecting dimensions: books, the newspaper, conversations with people, things I see out the window, the radio, legal work, whatever floats up in my head. It makes for a multi-faceted view of things, with the potential of a wider and more complicated chord. Or maybe an exploded view, like the efforts of a man whose mind is blown to link up the component parts, however remote.

12:30 p.m. Phone call from B. She went to a seminar last night with the German woman. "Sex, love and intimacy." It sounded boring. She said it was like a 12-step program where you stand up and say something about yourself. There was some allusion to the fact that things are warming up between her and this woman, and they've gone to a nude beach a couple of times.

She is thinking of flying to the East Coast next week. Do I want to go? A Russian Orthodox wedding in Washington, D.C., then New York City for a week or two. Air fares are reasonable, but my financial situation isn't. I don't have an extra $500 lying around.

I have managed to run my finances into the ground again. Not surprising when you have a low-profile occupation and can't be bothered to work more than part-time. I'm trying to figure out what happened to the $5000 I inherited from my step-grandmother less than two years ago (I had three grandmothers when I was growing up). When I break it down it makes sense as to why there's nothing left. $2000 went back to my parents for accumulated debts, borrowing here and there. I have no debt, but I'm broke. Another $600 went for the deposit on this place, and I've been supplementing a bare-bones income with $100 a month for a year and a half, which is about $2000. That's $4600. A beat-up Stratocaster, a rug from Afghanistan,[27] and a loan of $240 to an ex-girlfriend which I'll never see again. It was my fault for not having an income that would make $240 seem like less. It was my fault for having known her in the first place. If you want to swim with barracudas you should expect to get bitten once in a while. And every month I send $50 to the Hall of Justice – I'm paying off a thousand-dollar fine for driving under the influence last year. That was also my fault (I should have made more effort to elude the CHP when driving home at two in the morning, in other words stay off the freeway on a Saturday night).

I'm more interested in moving to the East Coast or Europe than merely visiting. I've been immersed in books and writing for a long time while the women come and go. Is the culture more desultory or is it me? The dream is falling flat.

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[27] It was woven when the Soviet military occupied the country. There are stylized helicopters, hand grenades, and tanks, along with a life-sized machine gun. Two by four feet.

Flat as the body of someone lying in the street. In the morning paper: ANOTHER FOREIGN TOURIST KILLED IN FLORIDA. English. The last one was German (a week or two ago). In both cases they resisted being robbed, so they were killed. They were unclear on the concept, but so were the "robbers," who not only came away with nothing, they're looking at a long stretch in prison. Robbery was an excuse to kill a European and they were quick on the trigger. People were shocked by the predatory methods. The German man was in a van he rented with his pregnant wife. A vehicle with a black man and woman (seventeen and nineteen years old) bumped them from behind. The woman riding shotgun stuck a sawed-off weapon out the window and shot him through the neck.

What was running through her mind, or does she have one? At what point can we start talking about black people using white people for target practice? There has been little or no mention of race. The English man was killed by black men who walked up to his parked car, intent on robbing him. The man tried to drive away with his wife and they started shooting. The man was killed, the wife wounded. I wonder if they listened to Sister Souljah when she said that black people should take a week off from killing other blacks and kill white people. When will we hear from the black community? You would think there would be some comments, if only to distance themselves from the killers. There is a wide range of character amongst black people, from those who are civilized and capable as anyone, to those who pulled a white woman out of her car in South Africa. She was beaten and stabbed in the head. Nelson Mandela said, "The people who killed Amy Biehl are no longer human beings. They are animals."

Some would take that as a slur against animals, but the point is taken (the suspects were laughing in court when an account of the crime was given). There is a connection here between thinking and being human. If there had been a glimmer of thought it wouldn't have happened. Someone's life is worth more than a few hundred in traveler's checks, and there are the odds of being caught and spending the rest of your life in prison.

However, we should give black people more credit and assume they know what they're doing, in this case aiming at the back of the neck of a stranger driving with his wife. The motivation has something do with hatred of another race. That angle doesn't get much attention, as if the only hate crimes that matter are those committed by a white person. Maybe it's unsettling to consider the hatred coming from black people, and the media want to downplay the possibility that it's open season on white people. Sister Souljah was surprised when her remark caused an uproar because she was used to the concept. She doesn't operate in a vacuum, and is backed up by the body count.[28]

Those who beat the white truck driver nearly to death in Los Angeles (he is still disfigured) are considered political prisoners. FREE THE LA FOUR. Sounds like a civil war. Guess who's coming to dinner? It isn't Sidney Poitier.

More statistics: In 1991, 22 people in Great Britain were killed with guns. In the U.S.: 10,200.

The dream is falling flat as the origins of the universe according to a fundamentalist, the low ceilings which are required to believe that everything began

[28] Annual murder rates (approximate): Blacks killing whites: 1200. Whites killing blacks: 400. Blacks killing blacks: 6,000 (as Jessie Jackson pointed out, that's more in one year than were ever lynched in this country). Whites killing whites: 6,000.

6,000 or 10,000 years ago. It gives me claustrophobia just thinking about it. It's like being stuck in an airless theme park with plastic mountains and fake monuments.

The woman leading the way for this point of view in Southern California is Deirdre Holliday. Not enough hermetic airheads in this country. Thank God that more women are moving into positions of power and authority in schools and institutions across the country so we are assured of living in a more enlightened country (not). Civilization is often on the verge of falling into decline. It is stuck on Deadman's Curve, also known as the orbit of the earth. We feel a centrifugal force, the potential for losing it around the bend, which might explain the many dire pronouncements in the past. "The end is near." Looking back, you wonder what they were worried about.[29]

Meanwhile, there are women who're more interested in power than anything else. It took me a while to realize that. I'm used to women who are interested in the quality of life. Power is soliciting the quantitative.

2:30 p.m. I took a shower, getting ready for work, and thought of a line. "I think, therefore I am missing in action. I am MIA." Went to work.

The Attorney was there. The long will I typed out yesterday will have to be redone. The Attorney didn't bother to get the wife's name right. You can't make corrections on a will. I would like to make out his, but "being of sound mind and body" wouldn't wash.

V. was at the next desk for a while. I flipped through the *SF Weekly* and read her horoscope. I like to test the reflexes of a realistic woman, and found some phrases for a Libra.

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[29] I read that the 1850's were a "hard, angular and groveling age." There is a problem with the vagaries of language when such a phrase would apply to other times.

"Did you have a childhood trauma?"
"No, did you?"
"An ill-fated love affair?"

No response. A few minutes later she asked if I want to have lunch tomorrow.

I went on an errand, descending on the elevator. A white man and a black woman got on. She was in a wild outfit with long matted rope hair and we had a friendly conversation. I had that old feeling of cultural schizophrenia, where relations between the races are okay, except when they're not.

I walked home after working for four hours, having violent thoughts along the way. I was reading about modern German sculpture when Jon called from the wine country. I had considered going there this weekend, but it turns out he will be in town. He is representing his small company, Solar Graphics, at some event. I was in a good mood, like having an intelligent male friend was a missing link. He is a misfit and a bit eccentric, very experimental, accommodating the aesthetic and the scientific with some music thrown into the mix. Not so literary, more empirical, with more in the way of alcohol and altered states. I have been cutting back on alcohol. The writing is an altered state, if not a static situation leaving sparks in my hair.

He seems to be at odds with women, or is treating them with more respect. He knows they can go through his life like a buzz-saw. We talked about dead trees and stoneware drums and the ambiguous Korean woman he is seeing more of.

10:30 p.m. I turned on the tube. A documentary on Spain which extended my good mood. I picked up a wooden instrument and was onto something. You never know what forces are operating from one day to the next. There are monthly shifts in your worldview, comparable to renewals. It sounds a little vague, but how to fathom those

times when you have a fluctuating aptitude for something? Some days I'll pick up the guitar and it's lifeless, like smoking Mexican dirt weed. More often it's a line of cocaine with a glass of wine. Tonight the instrument was hallucinating. It was doing things I hadn't heard or done before, with innovations off the cuff. How to explain a two-hour outburst:

A lot of sleep last night.
I'm finally over that woman.
It felt like I was out of the country (a film about Spain).
An astrological shift.
A friend on the phone.
I got paid.
All of the above.

Now and then whatever you work at and practice will surprise you when it shifts into a higher gear. Another level, a further capability, and seemingly of its own accord. A missing accord. The shock of evolution.

12:30 a.m. I lay the guitar down and went over to the typewriter.

4 a.m. Went to sleep.

Thursday, Sept. 16, 1993

I woke up from a dream. It was the usual situation of not enough sleep, a semi-conscious state with sunlight coming through the bamboo blinds, a vaguely erotic condition with a hard-on in the morning. I lay there for an hour, but no more sleep.

I called the office to verify a rendezvous with V. She reiterated her plan for us to meet at one.

12:00 p.m. I was sitting in a comfortable chair in a bathrobe with coffee and a cigarette, taking notes. The phone rang, it was her. "Come now." I pointed out I was just

getting into the shower, but she said to be there by 12:30. I started to negotiate, but she said, “Okay, forget it.” So sentimental. I said I would be there, which wasn’t hard to do. A quick shower. Throw on slacks, shirt and tie, and I was out the door. Barely fifteen minutes to get there (took the bus). Imagine a man thinking he could rush a woman or be so demanding.

12:30 p.m. I walked into the main room of the office with desks here and there and approached hers with her back to me. She said hello without turning around (she saw my reflection in the window). She was doing some last-minute numerical work.

That reminds me, yesterday the Attorney wanted to send away for a $98 law book on cross-examination. He didn’t know the sales tax. Neither did I. He said to ask one of the girls in the office and he had a point. I went over to where V. and her trainee were sitting. Maria not only knew the sales tax, she knew what it was in four states (8.25 percent). I picked up the calculator and put it down, not sure how to work it, and started figuring numbers on a pad. Maria got impatient and whipped out the results on the calculator, like operating one of those was second nature.

She wore a low-cut tight sweater. V. later said it is not appropriate for the office. When she leaned over you could “see inside it.” Maria told her that her latest project was getting the twenty-four-year-old legal assistant to notice her and take her out and have babies with her. The low neckline is part of the strategy. A future pregnancy is lurking in the shadow of her cleavage. The guy on the receiving end of this attention is not sure what to do about it. Conservative and white (his father is an attorney), he is tall and awkward, and here is a woman with a nice figure which she shows off whenever she can. She is more than a foot shorter and has been throwing herself at him in the slow motion

of an office routine. Sooner or later he might respond. I said to V. that Maria might get hurt. V. replied, “It’s her own fault.” She was angry at having to train someone who can’t concentrate because she is flirting so much. I said maybe her hormones are acting up. V. shrugged and said, “Could be.”

We walked to the Hunan place. It was a nice day outside, windy, with her in a hurry. Sometimes she is not clear on the directions, and now and then we bump into each other. We bump into the physical fact of each other to confirm that it exists.

Walking back after lunch we were crossing the street with traffic coming. We had a head start but a motorcycle was coming up fast. I slowed down and nearly stopped in the middle of the street to make sure she got across. It had the opposite effect as she ran into me. There was a quick decision with the motorcycle bearing down on us. I went across and she ran back, then crossed a minute later. “How come you stopped?!” she asked with a smile, having weathered a full-body collision.

During lunch the conversation was bouncing around while we had smoked ham and sushi, very hot. She said she would give me her address and phone number and was surprised I didn’t have them. I asked her what it was like coming to this country from the Philippines at thirteen. She didn’t remember it as being traumatic or surprising, just that there were more stores, and a lot more in those stores. The insularity of this woman is a wonder to behold. The facts of life continue from one country to another. It wasn’t much of a change, especially when you ignore the surrounding culture.

I’m the opposite, to put it lightly. I wonder if that’s one reason we get along, with her a missing chord of feminine self-containment. I have had numerous encounters with women, not to say girls, who are so self-centered it takes your breath away. The reduction

you feel when not much of your existence matters to them or registers on their senses. They operate within a tight closed circle, a self-referential world, and that condition generates their poise and confidence. It comes with a cut-off point, an ongoing amputation of information they have no use for.

Where was I? Walking with V. who has blossomed in the time I've known her. She used to be demure and quiet, but now talks about anything. She said something earlier about breastfeeding, and how a woman gets her figure back after giving birth. Also, Maria expects a higher salary than she deserves (according to V.). Her main experience seems to be with men. I said, "How long have men been on her mind if she's only eighteen? How long has she been capable of having babies?" V. said she had her first period at eleven. Some girls at ten. I said, "No wonder you are so mature," and she agreed, laughing. I've noticed that she takes to the occasional compliment like a plant to water.

Returning to the office I did some work, then went out to break a twenty to pay her back for lunch. Walking in I laid a bill on her desk with a little "Mon Cheri" – a cherry-filled chocolate. It quickly disappeared into her purse while saying, "Want some gum?" She has an unsentimental view of things, and a background in accounting, while the culture around her is dripping with innuendo and love problems. It's like a juvenile soap opera which is sort of dumb, and most of the time the women should know better or they get what they deserve (in her opinion). One of the more refreshing things about her is an old-world mentality where most of this *sturm und drang* over love is avoided. You find a man and stick with him. It is assumed you need each other. The arguments pass

like bad weather, and the sex will take care of itself. What's the big deal? You do it, then you fall asleep.

I think that she is steeling herself as it were, like when she wears a black leather jacket. She has a soft center which needs to be protected. It can be touched with a rose, if not the right word, now and then.

I did some work. The Attorney never showed up. He's at a case management conference. There was a phone call from the clerk of a Superior Court in another county, pointing out a probate case we filed was wrong.

5 p.m. I walked home.

I don't know if my existence is a burden, but it's lightened by her presence and the thought of her. I'm finding out how many ways there are to be in love with women. It comes with a varying longevity. I've done ten years and I've done two weeks. The random one-night wonder with a friend or acquaintance. The women who remain as friends, or leave behind a smoking ruins and a blown-up bridge. I've been with women who were nine years older than me[30] or seventeen years younger.

Other connections were platonic, but I'm not sure they were more distilled for that. Some women associate the sexual with the problematic or a power trip. It's in a realm of competition or the transitory. A few of them are known for leaving an emotional turbulence in their wake, but I was spared the meat-grinder vortex of a relationship.

I came across some rhetoric so self-serving it's like masturbating in public. There were women in a debate with Norman Mailer in 1971 (this was in the memoir of Larry

[30] Actually, twenty years older if you include the mother of a girl I knew in high school. She was all of thirty-nine and it was her idea. I think my skinny-dipping in her pool had something to do with it.

Rivers). One of them, Jill Johnston, said, “Until all women are lesbians there will be no true political revolution.” Her ten minutes were up, but she kept talking. Mailer said, “You’ve read your letter; now mail it.” “What’s the matter?” laughed Johnston. “Are you afraid of women you can’t fuck?”

At the moment it may have sounded like a witty comeback, but it makes no sense and hardly applies to the situation. In a debate you have an allotted time span. What does “afraid” or “can’t fuck” have to do with it? Those are loaded words, and some feminists use them whether or not they apply. It makes the man look foolish and the woman look courageous. With respect to Mailer, if he was afraid he wouldn’t be there. What would the fear amount to with her intelligence being less than his? The conceit of “can’t fuck” may allude to her being a lesbian, assuming he would even want to, so the line should read (if verisimilitude has anything to do with this), “What’s the matter, are you bored with rude women who prefer a plastic dick and talk too much?”

A couple of hours on the guitar with the tube on. Another documentary on Spain. I spent a month or two there over the course of several visits, but not since 1981. Much of what I’m going on about concerning women would require some revision in another country. Spanish women are another story, not to say an opera.

Typing for hours.

2 a.m. Went to sleep.

Friday, Sept. 17, 1993

I woke up in the morning and looked out the window. There was a chain saw in the sky. It was levitating. The ascension of an unholy saw. It hung from a “sky hook”

crane about four or five stories high, being lifted to a workman on a scaffold. This neighborhood is on the cutting edge.

I kept hearing a refrain every few seconds, hitting the same moronic vocal inflection. “Fuck you… fuck you…,” at least ten times. I looked out the window and saw a young white guy with short hair walking by and hesitating, having some friction with the workmen across the street. The mentally compromised don’t always look disturbed or down and out. Some girls might have thought he looked okay, and if they go by surface impressions they might be meant for each other. Two broken records in bed.

Four loads of laundry on a whim, hauling it downstairs in back. I have to get a handle on this impulsive behavior. It sidelined a morning on the typewriter, but a man can’t live on words alone.

I read the paper about a fire yesterday in Mill Valley. It turned out to be the home of Grace Slick (fifty-three-years old) with an airplane going by and dropping red fire retardant. It mixed with the water, so it looked like the street was running with blood. Her home is mortally wounded. There were “thousands of dolls” in a pile, half-burned and smoking, along with a burned guitar. It was the county’s fault.

In the news: the sub-literacy of students in this country. A Latino protest over immigration limits. An armored car guard was shot.

The guard, a black man in his fifties, was shot by “two young black men” who got away. He’s in critical but stable condition.

The literacy of students: 25 percent don’t have “basic” reading skills when they get out of high school, including nearly half of black students. Is there a McLuhan angle here when students watch an average of three hours of television a night? You could

leave aside the issue of whether TV is dissolving and/or warping young minds. There is the question of what one isn't doing while staring at a hypnotic screen. What it does to a person's time (which is limited on this earth) is damaging. There is another generation of blurred minds with a lot of energy and the false sophistication of their exposure to sitcoms.

Is there government assistance for the video-impaired? Is literacy a form of imperialism? For that matter, when will stoplights be seen as a form of totalitarianism? They are everywhere and you can't argue with them. They promote a dehumanizing conformity, and we must put a stop to it.

Immigration protest: there were signs and messages along the lines of "ABOLISH THE INS." The temerity of having any laws about immigration and borders, like no other country in the world has those. The protest made no distinction between legal and illegal immigration. Vast numbers of Mexicans were recently given amnesty. The policy has not been an iron wall. Given the steady increase of Latinos in this state it's hard to swallow a claim of being left out.

A Chinese supervisor (and a legal immigrant) on the conservative side, Hsieh, tried to get some puerile political mileage out of this. "It is people of color like you and myself who bear the brunt of their actions." There was some mention of the "anti-immigration hysteria… infringing on the freedom of legal immigrants." If millions of people cross the border illegally, they are telling those who chose the legal route to eat their dust. Should there be no limit to immigration while the quality of life in crowded cities slowly declines? If you question it you're guilty of RACISMO.

The issue is even more obtuse and misconstrued when someone like Richard Rodriguez compares tourists going to Mexico with Mexicans coming to California. It is one of the more fallacious comments I've seen on the subject. It doesn't follow that one is like the other (maybe he's a non sequitur-ist).

Corollary: I read that things have settled down in El Salvador, the civil war is over. There are hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran refugees in this country. That alone would seem to refute the accusation that this country discriminates against Latinos. There's more to it though. They came here on the basis of being refugees from a civil war, but the war is over and few want to go back. They regard their status here as having an altered definition. They're not refugees from a war, but legal immigrants.

The authorities in El Salvador prefer they stay in this country to the north because their own economy would be dead in the water without the money being sent back from those who're here. It amounts to over $600,000,000 a year. I'm not sure why this doesn't get more attention in the debate about immigrants. They drain their communities of funds with a steady stream of currency being sent out of the country. There are billions of dollars being sent to Mexico, China, and elsewhere. You could say those countries need it, but it makes the immigrants look like they're not all here.

By the same token, if the U.S. is a country and not just a place with banks and parking lots, it should reinforce the concept by not sending so much money to Israel. Three or four billion is siphoned from the Treasury every year like we don't need it.[31] The money could be used for job programs and small business loans in depressed areas.

[31] $4 billion would provide scholarships for 200,000 college students at $20,000 a year, or 400,000 students at $10,000 a year. A large percentage of those students would be black and Latino. Some of that money would circulate in the communities where the students live.

There is bad faith and duplicities on all sides of the immigration issue. If the border is for keeping people out, it should also keep jobs in (it isn't doing either one). There is an assumption that this country is an open space with a silver lining and it shouldn't have borders. People bring their own borders and customs. We're not supposed to have a common language which is discriminatory against foreigners who don't speak it. That's like if I went to France and was oppressed because everyone was speaking French. Reminds me of the Sheik in New York who was on trial for his involvement in the recent bombings. He said this country isn't living according to Islamic law, and he will do whatever it takes to change that. He should read the Constitution sometime.

Where was I? Reading the paper too much. There was a controversy over Channel 32, a "minority-run public TV station." "The station's directors have a history of mismanagement that has cost the station several grants…Furthermore, the group says that the station's board and staff are mostly African American professionals (no Latinos)."

2:30 p.m. I went to the office and worked on a theory of the will. The Attorney left early. V. walked by smiling with a conspiratorial look.

After work I walked her to the underground, talking about the attorney she works for. He is sentimental about her leaving. She told him:

> "I'm sad, I'll miss this place."
> "Really?"
> "No." (laughing)

A few minutes later she exclaimed, "By crook or by hook I'll be married next year!" and shook her fist.

I walked home (the pool was closed for maintenance). Not sure what the evening would amount to. It could go off in several directions, any one of which would be okay.

Being amplified in the sound-room or studious at home or friendly with a woman. Then B. called about having dinner.

8:30 p.m. I walked to a nice neighborhood, and she was late. I found myself sitting in a Burmese restaurant and staring at a fish tank. It was six feet long with a couple of exotic-looking fish, silver-pink, about two feet long with artificial-looking scales. They had no fins or tail. I felt a little faint and they were hypnotic to look at.

B. showed up, apologizing, and kissed me three or four times. We got a table. She had the usual hard time deciding what to order, with her mind operating on a multi-channel frequency. I had the hot braised rock cod with rice (it was spicy) and a Tsing Tao beer. She ended up with lovers' prawns (one on top of the other?).

A long meal with an endless conversation. One of her pressing concerns: should she buy a plane ticket to the East Coast by midnight?

10:30 p.m. We walked to her place a few blocks away where things unfolded in a curious manner. It was like a woman on the phone saying she absolutely has to get off, then goes on talking for half an hour. She was tired from being out a lot this week, and will drive to a hot springs tomorrow with the German woman. We nearly rented a movie, thinking we would make an early night of it. We don't need that sort of thing for diversion, having a self-generated rapport between us. We probably couldn't have agreed on one anyhow. *Basic Instincts*? *Damage*?

She opened a bottle of wine and I was there until four in the morning. How did that happen? One thing led to another. She was on the phone with the airlines around midnight while I looked at a map of Northern California. It remained open between us on her bed for the rest of the night, which seemed symbolic.

I was on her nylon-string guitar for a while. The D-string was broken which didn't help. She bought it a year or two ago and never touched it.

There were photos of Tony Serra's party which were poignant. That's where I met the woman who has come and gone. I wasn't having any coffee, but was a little subdued for a while. I caught a glimpse of what I'm turning into and I wasn't sure I liked it. I thought of older men in various movies, the cynical lone sophisticates. It's possible I'm none of those, but it was close enough to make me pause. There was a casual pose in one of the photos and I didn't like the feeling it conveyed. What happens when the arteries in your soul begin to harden?

We talked about a subject that is close to her heart. It is usually kept hidden or euphemistically veiled. I was there as someone who would listen, but I'm getting tired of it. It leaves me feeling vaguely peripheral. "I suppose you're writing all of this down," she said to me a while back. I suppose I am.

The subject of her sexuality and related innuendoes floated in the air with the lights turned down and soft music in the background. She was in a confessional mood concerning her relations with another woman. It was after 1 a.m. and she was testing the waters with a dainty foot, so to speak, seeing what sort of ripples were generated. I was recoilless, not surprised, and not condemning. She ventured further, up to her waist, her bosom, neck, and over her head concerning what is going on with her and Ilsa. Finally, hesitating, she said, "Promise you won't tell anyone." I said it would be in Herb Caen's column on Monday. She has a circle of friends who she thought would disapprove if they knew she was sleeping with a woman.

Which is what she finally got around to saying in a roundabout way. One minute she was not admitting it and the next she was. We talked about the dynamics of two women who are lovers. All of this was not exactly news to me or unfamiliar territory. We compared notes about the problematic force field that is generated when you have an affair with someone - all the more so when it's between two women (according to her). She nodded when I said a woman can fool a man a lot easier than another woman. I quoted a line from Marlene Dietrich: "Sex is much better with a woman, but then one can't live with a woman."

It was interesting, almost touching, how she has handled this. She said she wasn't a shrinking violet who was seduced by a life-long lesbian. She had just as much to do with it. Their mutual doubts and suspicions are a problem. B. wonders if Ilsa (who mans a bisexual hotline) is too embedded in a lesbian milieu that B. has little interest in. And Ilsa has some valid doubts about B., wondering if she is stuck in the straight world and will be pulled into the arms of a man (B. admits she wants to get married some day). This is a fling in a different direction.

I tried to tell her it is more than that and she should take it seriously. The German woman objected to her "holding back," including in bed. That led to an interesting discussion where her usual discretion was eroding. She realized we wouldn't get anywhere if she was being circumspect. She is having an affair with this woman and doesn't know how to integrate Ilsa with her friends. I said, "What's the problem?" No one has to know she's a lesbian, and what if they do? She said, finally, it's not that Ilsa couldn't hide it, but she wouldn't want to. What if they were kissing or holding hands in public?

This business of hiding something made her feel uncomfortable. “My mother would die….” I threw it back at her. What sense does it make pretending that she doesn’t feel a romantic current, having been diverted from real love for so long? The situation has a certain magnitude for her. She is nearly thirty-three with a conservative background, though a lively socializer. She smokes pot on occasion and definitely drinks. This is more or less the first time she has followed through with her interest in a woman. For all she knows it could dissolve in a week or a month. There was some talk about Ilsa pulling out, but she “kicked up a fuss” and wrote a letter. They have had some emotional negotiations.

One problem: Ilsa is “verbal” and mechanical, giving instructions and asking too many questions. “Did you feel it?” That sort of thing is a turn-off for B. She wants to manage this on a more subtle level. Maybe she asked for it, being enigmatic and not “letting go” in ways the other could recognize and find satisfying. We were on the subject of the female orgasm, where the other person has a hand in it, so to speak, and might be impressed by the forces being unleashed. B. is a little unclear on the concept, how a woman in the throes of passion could overwhelm the other like an aggressive wave. Apparently, she has never been with a woman who is yelling and kicking over a lamp. I said it’s one of the nice things about two people in bed, the woman in her vulnerability is letting go and the other finds it captivating. If she wants to have a greater hold on Ilsa, the wrong thing to do is hold back. That could leave the other woman feeling ineffective and discouraged, wondering if B. is not all there for her.

B. nodded, thinking about it. She doesn’t like a situation where someone is “pushing my buttons” like a machine with predictable responses. She likes the notion of

herself as a lush woman though. “I don’t mean you drink too much,” I said, “but from the sounds of it you could overwhelm her with your sensuality.” She is 5’ 9” and athletic with a lovely figure and long dark hair. The other woman sounds like a hard body who is short and slender and matter-of-fact and talks fast. B. is more in a realm of dizzy ephemerals and soft nurturing dimensions. The pictures in her room have a feminine-mythic soft focus (no wonder she doesn’t have a driver’s license), which is not to say the feminine is a myth.

Meanwhile, she kept putting on the same Annie Lennox tape until I requested something else from her collection – David Bowie or Jefferson Airplane.

I was more relaxed as the night wore on. We were going through a bottle of Merlot. I had my shoes off, lounging on a white sofa with a candle on a mirror in the corner. I couldn’t see her very well in the dim flickering light. She took her hair down and transformed into a more realistic version of herself, “coming out” as it were, and warming to the subject. This is someone whose relations with men have been socialized and superficial, not to say evasive, and with some men wondering if she wasn’t frigid. Here she was in a different light as a warm-blooded woman who has finally connected with another woman and is able to relax on that point, even though it meant her relations with others might be complicated and her “reputation” up in the air. I said, “You’ll find out who your friends are. So what?”

She has been dying to talk to someone about all of this, but there was no one she could talk to, except for an old friend from college who “became a homosexual,” but she doesn’t see him very often. She could let her hair down with me there. I’m in that situation now and then. The paradox of a listener: someone will unburden themselves to

someone else because the listener matters a lot to them, or doesn't matter at all. It is easier to "confess" to a neutral party, if not a peripheral person, and that neutrality was getting on my nerves. I wonder if I got it from my father. As a minister he would counsel members of the congregation. They would talk to him about their private lives and personal problems. I have taken this in a different direction. A writer isn't worth much if he doesn't listen to people's stories and concerns, hopefully with an open mind (and a glass of wine).

That leaves me in the disconcerting position of an observer on the sidelines. I think therefore I'm missing in action. The neutrality is disturbing, though it borders on an otherworldly calm. Some women want a disembodied soul mate, that being harder to come by than someone lying on top of them.

B. recoils from any overt lesbian identification. She wants none of this femme-bottom-butch-topspin routine. Part of her quandary about pursuing women is how to pull it off in a context where some of them are waving the pink flag. They have strident slogans, dramatizing the earthshaking phenomenon of spending time in the arms of someone of their own sex. She was reaching for another method, more subtle and European perhaps, where she could be in love with a woman without having to march down the street, shave her head, and buy a whip. Some women need to get psyched up by stereotypic means to pull it off. She has no interest in riding bare-breasted on a motorcycle. I said that won't be necessary, but she would look good if she tried it.

4 a.m. I walked home after a kiss at the door, carrying an African violet she gave me. I was thinking how she was more natural, honest, shy and sensual in this version of herself.

Saturday, Sept. 18, 1993

Late morning, not enough sleep.

I went to a place down the street, a cheap counter, having a $1.99 breakfast. I read an article about the $700,000 wedding of a conscientious feminist icon, an earth girl who became a fly-by-night role model. If this country didn't oppress women so much, she could have had a million-dollar wedding.

Walking back through the wandering derelicts I dropped into the corner store for some milk. There was a thickheaded black man with his butt coming out of his pants. He complained that they were nearly out of King Cobra. There are no billboards in this neighborhood telling black people to pour a cheap high-powered liquid down their throat until they're dead, so I'm not sure what put that idea in his head.[32]

That reminds me, last night I was waiting for B. outside the Burmese place. There was a bus stop on the corner with an ad for the Sojourner Truth Foster Agency. It showed a black kid with a man and woman holding his hands. They were white and he looked rather glum. His head was in a kind of white face. 73 percent of foster kids are black (black people are 13 percent of the population), and there is a dire need for black foster parents. Otherwise these kids might fall into the hands of… white people. They will grow up alienated from their culture. Maybe that is the same culture which produces so many unwanted kids. Given the inherent racism of the entire white race (I'm just about quoting here), someone should tell these white foster parents where to get off. Trying to

[32] Some activists want us to believe that black people are mindless pawns who don't know what they're doing and will do whatever a billboard tells them. In other words, they're shallow and impressionable (victimology has a way of reducing the very people it is proselytizing for).

be helpful is imperialistic. It has to be, they're white. So who is taking care of whose kids in this country?

It was two or three in the afternoon before I had something going on the typewriter, and then it wouldn't quit.

5:30 p.m. Jon arrived from the wine country. I barely had time to throw some newspapers into a pile and rearrange the garbage. He walked in wearing an olive suit he bought for $10 in a secondhand store in North Dakota. His hair is thinning, but with a distinctive head and features it hardly matters. I haven't seen him in a few months, since he went snorkeling in Belize and nearly drowned.

He was in town for a trade show. Hence the suit which he soon took off, putting on jeans and a T-shirt. He is nearly a caricature of some of my bad habits. I wonder if this is how I appear to other people who are calm and sober. A somewhat nervous manner with a constant beer and cigarettes. We went down to the corner store for some beer, then sat around the place and talked for a couple of hours. He went through five beers while I didn't finish one (I was recovering from last night). I think he went through twelve beers to my one that night, but then I had two glasses of wine while he had one. He said he can really suck it down.

I was in a good mood. There is a Chinese line about women holding up half the sky, but I think a good friend holds up some of that. Maybe I feel it more, having a tendency to be alone because of the writing. Talking with him was a relief. I spend a lot of time with two men whose conversation is limited - an Attorney who is short-tempered and terminally distracted, and a laconic pot-head who says he's dumb (the Phantom).

8:30 pm. We went to the Cambodian place a block away and around the corner. It seems out of place in this neighborhood with its white cloth tables and pale blue walls. The waitress caught our eye since she was standing by the table - slender, young, a quiet expression, looking a bit formal in a white blouse. There was something rarified and fragile about her. We ordered pineapple catfish soup with rice and spring rolls, and chicken curry in coconut milk. He had another beer.

During the meal there was some mention of the Phantom and his preoccupation with Asian women. Jon is not so categorical or obsessed, although he's been to Thailand. I wondered how to break the ice with the waitress. Jon assumed it was impossible to get acquainted. I thought of a Cambodian newspaper I had seen with a strange-looking script (I almost said inscrutable, but any language is inscrutable if you don't know it). When she came around I asked if she had any Cambodian newspapers. She said she would look, and returned a few minutes later with a couple of magazines. They were mostly in that language, interspersed with bits of English. "No message breast implants" made us pause. "Miss Texas Cambodia." I flipped through it while she stood there and I asked her a couple of questions. She said she can't read the language, but she speaks it.

It slowly turned into a conversation with her explaining her background. She had a calm demeanor, along with a sense of humor, and was warming to the occasion. Maybe she is bored with her job, but she was curious. We joked around a little and she seemed to like it, having the innocent boldness of a young woman.

The first years of her life were in refugee camps in Thailand, then the Philippines. She came to this country when she was six or seven. She is more or less Americanized by way of California, and has lived in other cities. Now she's in the Tenderloin at Eddy and

Jones. I said I live on Hyde and Ellis. I thought she was eighteen or more, but it turned out she is sixteen and goes to a high school across town. She is familiar with other high schools, including the one down the street from where I used to live. That led to some mention of the fire and my having been evicted, though it was negligible compared to what she has been through. Born in 1977, with the Khmer Rouge and the killing fields occurring from 1975 to 1979.[33] I'm not sure if her parents are here or even alive, and I didn't bring it up.

She was asking questions and we went on talking, with her leaving a couple of times and then returning to the table. She continued of her own accord when hardly anyone was there, asking what my rent was.

We finished the meal and were there a while. The only other people were her and an older woman in back, with her on the phone and talking like a sassy high school girl. She told us earlier that the neighborhood is a little rough. She was walking with her boyfriend and told him to watch out for his backpack. He said, "How come?" "Just do it." They were nearly robbed by black men.

Jon was smitten by her, and thought I should come back a couple of times over the next week before I did anything like giving her my phone number. When she brought the check, and having exchanged names with Ciport (as in sea port), I tore off part of the place mat and wrote my name and number. She took it since we were getting along. It was up to her if she wanted to call.

We walked back to my place with him wondering what the age of consent was in this state. I wasn't sure. He said it's sixteen in North Dakota, which I think is the average

[33] It is estimated that 1.7 to 2.5 million people died.

in this country and in Europe. We were there for a few minutes when the phone rang. He laughed, “What if it’s her,” thinking it was far-fetched. It was the Phantom. I explained to him why his phone call was a letdown. He was impressed, being obsessed with Asian women.

We talked for a few minutes, then got off the phone. A minute later it was ringing. It was him again, he forgot to mention something.

I got off the phone. We talked. Then it rang again. I picked it up and it was her. I said, “Hello Ciport,” and Jon nearly fell out of his chair. She was still at the restaurant. We had a nice conversation, not too long. I’m not sure what was the point of the call. At some point she said she is practically living with her boyfriend, a Filipino. Maybe she was pulling back by mentioning her circumstances, just in case we had the wrong idea. I didn’t care one way or another. I was more interested in talking to someone from another country, hearing about what she had been through.

We talked about driver’s ed. and music. I said we were going to the Blue Lamp tonight. She knows about it, but never goes to clubs, being under-age. She doesn’t know how to dance, and doesn’t know much about music. I asked what kind of music she listens to. “Rap.” A few minutes later she had to go, as they were closing. “Talk to you later,” she said.

Jon was stunned, although it may have been the beer, fatigue, and occasional hits off a small pipe. I wasn’t having any. Eventually he splashed some cold water on his face and we went out around eleven. There were a couple of hookers across the street and more on Geary where you turn a corner and there’s a woman with bare legs and anatomical hot pants. He isn’t used to this, living in a town of 5,000 (St. Helena).

We went into the Blue Lamp and walked out. A dumb band. Now what. Saturday night and things were lively. He was open for anything, though neither one of us is inclined to prostitutes or even knows how to arrange it. We headed for a tower which was visible from my place. We levitated to the 46th floor and had a drink, sitting by a window with a view from here to Nevada. The city was laid out like a sci-fi movie, something to do with city planning in outer space.

Half a bottle of wine was a long time coming and the disco behind the bar was getting on my nerves. When the wine arrived I was staring out the window. The strobe-lights were reflected in it like lightning in the clouds and there were reflections of people dancing like magnified spirits writhing above the bay.

The conversation wandered all over the place, from romantic confusion to *Half of Man is Woman*, and the Korean woman he is seeing (she is twenty-three). Her parents insist that she marry a rich Korean. It sounds like selling your daughter. She won't do it, enduring her mother's slaps and her father's insults - "You're a slut." She wants to get out of there and Jon is worried that he is the means of her escape. He is not ready for marriage, but things are progressing between them. She is still a virgin, but doing everything else she can think of. She told him that she dreams of sex, and had a line that was effective: "Do guys really like it if a woman sucks their cock?" He didn't say no.

We talked about other things, how he used to live in Los Angeles and hated the commute, slamming the windshield with his hand once, cracking the glass. He moved to Oakland and would commute across the Bay Bridge every day (now he walks to work in less than a minute).[34]

[34] A section of the Bay Bridge fell when the earthquake hit a few years ago. He and the Phantom were living in a warehouse in Oakland. It was not far from the elevated freeway which collapsed,

1 a.m. We descended on the elevator with my ears popping and walked to the Blue Lamp. It is something of a low dive (wrote love) and there was a better band. I was in the mood for some moody loud stuff, which it was. Unfortunately, the band was not on for very long. We stayed until nearly 2 a.m. and left. He picked up another beer and we walked to my place past a couple of guys having a quiet conversation with a prostitute.

Jon and I sat around for another hour. I relaxed on the guitar for a while. Around 3 a.m. I gave him a blanket and a pillow and he rolled out a sleeping bag. There were comments about the dead tree which fills up half of the kitchen, and the guy who fell out of a window across the street. Jon dreams of doing things which he won't live long enough to realize.

Passed out without a second thought.

Sunday, Sept.19, 1993

10 a.m. Woke up with someone speaking Russian on the radio. Jon got up and lit a cigarette. He was gone by eleven, returning to the trade show. I lay there for an hour or more in an ephemeral semi-conscious state. I was in and out of it and hardly knew the difference.

1 p.m. I got out of bed, unclear on the concept of it being Sunday afternoon and what I was supposed to do. Doing nothing seemed like a good idea with the light pouring through the bamboo blinds and all over the mattress. I had the game on for a while.

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flattening cars and killing people. The earthquake shook them out of Oakland and they landed in a flat near the Haight, the one with a sound-room. A few years later one of the rooms was available and my friend Ming moved in. That's how I got to know them. I wouldn't have met any of them – Ming, Jon, the Phantom – if I hadn't gone to the beach with a woman in the 1980's and noticed a girl lying naked on a towel. I started talking to her when my friend fell asleep, and we were sleeping together within a week or two (now the ex). Ming was her bosom buddy.

At some point I turned the channel and found myself in Spain in the 1600's. A documentary by a writer whose books never held my attention like those of Borges, Julio Cortazar, or Octavio Paz. He sounded like a PR man for the imperialism of the Spanish, like it was the greatest empire known to man and beast, or even priest. It spanned an ocean and a continent, an over-reaching economic system which was ruined by plunder. The money ended up in Northern European banks and helped to finance the Protestant Reformation. "Spain was poorer because it was rich." An economy based on new world riches was like being hooked on cocaine. You fly high for a while, but it undermines your foundations.

Cervantes and Velasquez. The Inquisition. African slaves brought to the new world.[35]

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (a Mexican nun and writer in the late 1600's). With the typical rhetoric of the narrator, "Some would say" she was the greatest poet who ever lived. She lived alone, sequestered with her books and her contemplation of the relations between men and women. She was too much for the male-dominated court, and at forty-four her materials, including pen and paper, were taken away. She died at forty-six, "after ministering to other nuns stricken during a plague."

Goya in the early 1800's. I thought of the spurious comparison with the late Basquiat, his psychotic stick figures, and the satirized superstition in the novel, *The Apes*

[35] English-speaking people get most of the blame for the slave trade in the New World, but it was founded by the Spanish and Portuguese who encountered slavery in West Africa when they sailed down the coast in the 1400's (the Arabs had been buying and selling slaves in Africa for centuries, and so had black Africans). When the first English colony in Virginia was founded in 1607 the slave trade in the Americas had been going on for a century. Approx. 96 percent of the slaves in the Americas were shipped by the Spanish and Portuguese. They went mainly to Central and South America. (David Wheat, "Iberian Roots of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1640.")

of God,[36] that youth = genius. The title of one of Goya's etchings is "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters."[37] It might apply to Basquiat's work, but it is harder to combine the monstrous and the realistic.

"Would sunlight manage to dispel the shadows of decadence?" That hit home as I lay there with no clothes on in the parallels of light and shadow coming through the bamboo blinds.

The population of Latin America is 400 million. It doubles every 25 years. It would seem that populations can oppress themselves with over-population, though the occasional dictator makes it worse.

Mid-afternoon I went out with some notion of going to the cliffs. I saw a few clouds and changed my mind, returning home. Jon returned after five, picking up his stuff. It was a slow day at the trade show and he was going home a day early.

6:00 p.m. I went out, energized for some reason. I walked two or three miles by way of Folsom Street. Something on 10th Street caught my eye. It was on the side of a building, two stories up. The words were inflated like soft dough, maybe six feet high and thirty feet long: THEMOSTFUCKED. There was a hard-on coming out of the (big) 'O'. I don't think it was more obtrusive than a billboard. When it comes to corporate propaganda, I prefer the human touch.

I noticed an alley where there were some torn and ripped posters and fliers. One of them said, JUST SEX. It showed a boy and girl around twelve years old. He was shorter and naked with a little half erection and her with the beginnings of small breasts.

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[36] Wyndham Lewis (1930)

[37] The sleep of reason has produced a few heartbreaking women.

They were sideways to the viewer and facing each other. He had a shy finger on one of her breasts with the gesture echoed by his skinny boner.

I walked over to 9th Street. The area had a deserted Sunday feel to it with buildings living up to the notion that everything falls apart eventually. The entropy is haunted by non-entities. A merry-go-round of ruin and renewal.

Sign on a telephone pole: ALTERNATIVE INDUSTRIAL GOTHIC.

I walked across Market Street and through the Civic Center, past a big hole in the ground for the new library (knowledge is deep). The fountain in front of City Hall was back in operation after being dry for five years (in honor of the drought). It is a levitating stream of water that isn't going anywhere. There were some downwardly mobile people who're not going anywhere, with their future up in the air and their minds evaporating.

I went home and watched *60 Minutes* (with something about corruption in the U.N.). I was on a wooden stringed instrument for a couple of hours. I reach for it automatically as something to hold onto, a flotation device in front of a video drowning pool. I also hold it when the TV is off, so maybe it's a flotation device for a wider vortex of mortality.[38]

Earlier there was something on the radio (KUSF), a live version of "Red House" as interpreted by Jimi Hendrix. I saw him in Los Angeles in 1968. I hooked up the stereo with speakers on either side of the desk and turned it up full blast, an emotional voltage going through me like a seizure.

It was followed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, a song from *East-West* ("I Got a Mind to Give Up Living"), one of the better albums in my humble hard-chord

[38] An instrument of torture as far as my fingers are concerned.

opinion. I scribbled down the lyrics,[39] worked out a blues progression, and had a new song to fool around with.

> When I read your letter this morning on your place in bed
> When I read your letter this morning on your place in bed
> That's when I decided that I'd be better off dead.
>
> It read, "There is no use looking or ever hoping to get me back.
> Oh, no use looking or ever hoping to get me back.
> Because it's all over now and baby you can bet on that."

Tuesday, Sept. 21, 1993

The Phantom dropped by with guitar strings and a whammy bar for the Stratocaster, and I put a new string on.

We went to the corner store for a few beers, and then sat around talking. He was jazzed up about having bought some 8-track recording equipment. It was under $900 used. EQ this and EQ that. I don't know much about it. The conversation drifted into other vectors and he had four beers to my one. Things were getting pretty comfortable, sitting around a round wooden table in the main room. The place was straightened up. Our Chinese friend is back from Alaska and we thought she would come over, but there were negotiations with the ex-boyfriend and she was tired.

The Phantom is easy to please when we're talking. When I put an idea into his head I see a light bulb go on. He almost glows with the appreciation of a thought, especially when it concerns women (the porno flier from the receptionist had his undying respect).

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[39] Most songs on the radio were not longwinded until Bob Dylan came along. I write songs now and then, but some of them are long and the words don't stay in my head. My mind is a stream of consciousness, and won't stop long enough to memorize something of any length.

Around eleven he had one last cigarette for the road before he left, but then he didn't leave. I think he found another beer in the refrigerator which I'd gotten earlier. That's how I ended up going to the corner store to pick up some cigarette papers and another beer for him. He gave me $5. I went out and walked across the street. It was the usual rancid atmosphere with a few derelicts who're getting by on government assistance.

I went into the store, got a Becks, walked over to the counter and handed the man $5 and waited for change. Then I remembered I needed cigarette papers and decided to use my own money instead of the Phantom's. I was pulling out my wallet when lightning struck and it was gone. A young black man had drifted into the store and was standing behind me. I was only vaguely aware that he was there, watching my every move. He grabbed the wallet out of my hand the second it cleared my back pocket and ran out of the store. It was so sudden, and feeling the invasive shock of being robbed I walked out of the store and around the corner and saw him on a dead run halfway down the block. A couple of seconds later he was looking back and disappearing around the corner. I said to someone standing there, "He took my wallet," and they looked concerned. The Middle Eastern guy behind the counter walked up, looking more concerned. He didn't know the guy or recognize him. Oddly enough a police car drove up across the street. I motioned them over with a white woman cop driving and a male cop riding shotgun (literally). They had a prisoner in back, but I explained what happened, sensing while I was talking that it was a lost cause. I only had a fleeting impression of the suspect, not much of a description.

I went back in and got change from the $5 for the beer, forgot the cigarette papers, and returned to the apartment. I walked in with the Phantom on the phone with Ming. He

was still in the good mood I had left him in, but I wasn't. I told him what happened. He looked a little shocked and told her on the phone that I was robbed by a "brother." I liked that - a brother. The Phantom over-corrects in the direction of never being critical of black people, even when it was his own van being broken into twice or my wallet being stolen. It's not the first time I've been through this, along with friends and family, where the general notion is that we should be grateful our encounter with a black man wasn't more damaging, as if to give him credit for being restrained. It may have meant nothing to him if he stuck a knife in my side and took the wallet, except that would have impeded the theft. You have the extra motion of the knife and only one hand free to grab the wallet which I might drop the second I'm stabbed and he would have to pick it up, losing a second or two in the process. What if I was not sufficiently wounded and would further impede his escape and slow him down another few seconds as he slips on the blood? There are many ways a white man can impede a black man's progress.

There's a more practical side to not inflicting physical damage or wounds, rather than ethical concerns. I think for example when a black man had my brother down on the floor with a gun to his head, working late behind the front desk of a hotel in Hollywood, he could have pulled the trigger, but he saw no need to waste a bullet. He didn't want to attract attention with the sound of a gunshot, and my brother was not resisting, which is to say he was not disrespecting a person of another race.

I wondered how the situation would have escalated if I had chased the thief, running through a neighborhood where a lot of black people were hanging out. A white man chasing a black man, and the adrenaline of both would escalate the situation from the relatively painless loss of a wallet with ten bucks in it (along with my ID and the

photo of an ex-girlfriend) to whatever happens in the arbitrary magnification of a confrontation. Suppose I caught him, then what? There is something too absurd about hurting someone over ten bucks or a wallet. There is the likelihood of his assuming that my chasing him was a sign of disrespect for black people. So there we are, both of us out of breath and psyched up by the run, a primal situation and for what?

It reminds me of the incident in Oakland where a black woman chased another black woman out of her building for smoking crack in the hall. I don't think she was the homicidal type, but she had a knife and the knife had a mind of its own, or maybe the circumstances did with everything becoming blown out of proportion when running after said woman. It was a relatively minor situation escalating by the minute and the second, further magnified by people egging her on and tripping the woman trying to get away and by the time she falls on her with the knife it's like the knife is stuck in forward motion, accelerated by the chase which is draining oxygen from those areas of the brain which might have told the knife-holding woman it is not going to do you much good, much less her, if you stab her three times in the chest. Later she said she was caught up in the heat of the moment.

I was in the apartment, trying to think of what was in the wallet, the annoyance of having to replace my ID. I thought of a line I had in my notes (which remained in my notes for sounding scurrilous or heavy-handed): "The rich multicultural experience of being robbed by a black man."

It's like you're standing there and suddenly are bitten by a snake. You feel a foreign presence lunging into your space and taking something. Your ID flies away on someone else's legs. It's a negative lesson. I thought that people around here have a live

and let live attitude with strangers, and you're not supposed to recoil if you're rubbing elbows with a black man in a liquor store who might feel insulted if you kept your distance. I let him get too close and paid the price.

So who is perpetuating a negative stereotype, him or me? If I wrote a story involving a black man as a thief some people might complain. (The *Chronicle* notes when an assault or robbery occurs, but won't mention the suspect's race, even when he is at large in the community and a full description might be useful.) What about real life? The list of felonies and misdemeanors against my friends, family, and myself is getting longer, and 95 percent of the perpetrators are black men. That doesn't mean I avoid black people in other walks of life, but, "Once burned, twice shy." What happens when those around you have been burned a number of times?

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 1993

Morning, not enough sleep. I went out for cigarette papers to the corner store where I was robbed last night. The wallet hadn't turned up. What are the odds he would have taken about a second to remove the money and throw the wallet in the gutter? Maybe he would hold onto it for a while, having put one over on the white man, ha ha.

Nevertheless, I walked down the block in the direction he had gone and went around the corner. It's a rundown neighborhood with more black men standing around. It struck me that the Cambodian girl lives around here. The noise and commotion were absurdly loud. Heavy equipment at a construction site, jackhammers in the street, sirens, someone yelling, arguments.

12:30 p.m. I was on the typewriter when B. called, half-apologizing for running her mundane complications and dilemmas by me, thank you for sharing, then proceeded to run it all by me at full speed. She was working under a false identity while on unemployment (her mother was perturbed) and wondered if she should fly to New York this weekend. I never had a chance to mention recent events, but it's politically incorrect to interrupt a woman.

1 p.m. Ming arrived. I showed her around the place which didn't take long, being one main room, and she adjusted to the circumstances, saying she liked it.

She sat on the bed with a cigarette, wearing a long black dress which was a bit low cut and cowboy boots. Her straight black hair is longer than before, almost below her breasts. She said when she was twelve it was "down to my butt." There were comments on how much this felt like the old place, which is not too surprising considering it's the same occupant, with more or less the same (somewhat edited) possessions. The architecture is similar with this building being from 1926 and the other one from 1925.

We went out, walking to Geary for breakfast, and passed a shop with Chinese herbs and strange things in jars. We went in. She was familiar with a lot of it, the dried seahorses in a jar (apparently an aphrodisiac), ginseng roots, charts on acupuncture and other things I have no knowledge of. The man, speaking in broken English, showed us some reflecting Ben Wa balls rolling around in his hand. Walking out she said they weren't the ones that women put in themselves "down there" in order to feel good. These were nearly two inches across.

We went to a halfway decent place for breakfast and were there for an hour. She talked about three or four men she's pulling strings on. Maybe she wouldn't put it like

that, but she is mystified at the men who fall for her. You would think she doesn't have a romantic bone in her body, and she has said as much. I wonder if that constitutes a kind of vacuum in which the men are falling harder, becoming more romanticized with her being less so. I don't know if her being Chinese has anything to do with it, but the men tend to be white.

The Phantom of the sound-room is more or less under control, resigned to a secondary role as a concerned friend who will do anything for her. The ex-boyfriend is more problematic. He is two years younger (twenty-two), with her being his first love. He comes from a home with a mother and sisters who Ming refers to as ballbreakers. She worries about him, wants to "make him whole," and then disappear. I said if she does that he would still depend on her, and her leaving would leave another hole. She wants to find him a girlfriend, but doesn't want to see him with another woman. There was a half-hearted admission that maybe she is stringing him along, giving him a faint hope that sometime in the future they will be together. It's like she is reluctant to cut him loose if he constitutes a territorial conquest.

She talked about the guy she was living in a trailer with the last four or five months in Anchorage (who is two years younger). He used to be a manic-depressive of some sort, but now is ambitious and practical. He made her time up there worthwhile in terms of a job and providing somewhere to live, having been there before. In return she would let him masturbate on her stomach every other night. It was a compromise, a way of avoiding any further contact. After a couple of months of sleeping together they had sex, more as a way to relax after a hard day of packing dead fish – the particulars of which I was hearing a lot about, including slimy skins. The contacts trailed off when they

were too tired. Her objectivity in this respect would take your breath away. It's like a man has a pressure valve which needs to be released once in a while. She made sure he knew there was no romantic connection here. They were business partners and that was it.

There are plans of going to China next month. She will meet him in Korea using a cheap flight he arranged ($670 round trip). He wants to start a fish egg business having contacts in Korea or Japan.

What got me is how she speaks of him in a deprecating way. It echoed other examples of vicarious women who live through a man – his accomplishments, possessions, and contacts. They avail themselves of those, assuming that what is hers is hers and what is his is half hers and somehow to her credit. Reminds me of my ex-girlfriend who hooked up with an older man of means while she had next to nothing. She said, "We're buying a house." I thought, he's buying a house. You get to live in it.

Speaking of vicarious assumptions, some of the younger women in the office work for a prominent attorney and are known for being aloof and condescending because he has expensive clients. Their presumption is so subtle they may not know it's there.[40]

But I digress. I noticed with her sitting in the morning light that her features and her character were slightly altered from having spent a few months in Alaska. It's not surprising if working in a processing plant for days and weeks on end while living in a trailer would have an effect. She looked and felt a bit worn out.

[40] Some people live vicariously. That might account for their having a hard time figuring out who they are.

We walked back to my place. I told her what it is like in this neighborhood, an aging historical density of brick and iron with all sorts of people. Most of them are on the lower end of the social spectrum. I think it was challenging the leftwing politics of her college days. It sounded good in theory as she talked about it with her fellow students (most of whom were not working), but here are the common folks, and sometimes they don't look so good and sound worse.[41]

3 p.m. In the apartment, running late. I had to get ready for work. We were in the bathroom together with her putting the lid down and sitting on the toilet while I took a shower with no curtain. She talked about her hair.

I put on a shirt, slacks, tie, and and we left in a hurry. Having her around enlivened my routine. We took a bus downtown and dropped into a bank where I had to negotiate a withdrawal using my passport (wallet stolen). I took out $120 and she got most of it, which she said was typical. She needed a loan with her money stuck in a bank in Anchorage. We were taking care of some mundane things, but they were transformed into a magnetic burlesque, that being the force field that is generated between us. It is something I put the highest value on in being with a woman, when the energy between you can transform the ordinary into something else – if only a theater of the absurd.

I walked her to the bus stop. When a bus pulled up I leaned over to kiss her and she threw her arms around me. Talk about enlivening the ordinary.

4 p.m. I arrived in the office (late) with a lot of work, but managed to walk V. to her underground train at five. Walking with us was a young Jewish guy, a legal assistant.

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[41] Her leftwing sympathies suffered a setback when she had an ethnic studies class with a radical lesbian Chinese professor. When it came time to talk about Chinese history, the professor let a few young black women dominate and divert the discussion. Ming was so frustrated she went home in tears.

He was blunt to the point of being gauche. It turns out he saw the documentary on a Stone Age tribe in the Philippines. We were telling her about it, and he kept insinuating that they were her relatives.

Earlier he said to the both of us, “You’re inseparable.” V. said matter-of-factly, “I’m leaving next week and he’s going to miss me.” That reminds me, when we were leaving the office I used an habitual expression, saying “Hey man….” She exclaimed, “I’m not a man!” and hit me with a newspaper. Maria (V.’s replacement) said, “You guys are weird.” She was crying in the bathroom the day before because someone in the office doesn’t want a relationship (she fell in love within a week or two). At eighteen she has a baby with no man around, and wears fuck-me outfits to work, but it is other people who are weird.

I worked until nearly 8 p.m. with no one there, then walked home, picking up something on the way.

At home I was gravitating to a quiet evening following a phone call from my brother in San Diego. He’s a surfer and a physical therapist. At thirty-one he is divorced (it lasted two years). His ex-wife is wholesome and intelligent, but narcoleptic – falling asleep the minute they would sit down together. He’s a black belt college boy with a good job and a good physique, but wonders why things aren’t working out better with women. Is the connection shredded if they have the mind of a kitchen blender? Do they feel like they’re competing with the ocean for his attention?

10:30 p.m. I read for a while, then lay down. I wanted to go without the usual beer and coffee-driven typing, and to smoke less. I even managed to avoid the newspaper, and give my system a break.

Thursday, Sept. 23, 1993

7:30 a.m. Woke up early, a lot of sleep. Last night's avoidance of the writing and the tension of a poison pen routine had a positive effect. All day I would be on, like having the wind at my back. You would think that would tell me something.

Typing for a while, clear-headed. The construction site across the street is now in operation. There is an enormous crane on wheels with metal support legs. Five stories high, lifting a long concrete girder which was guided by the hands of a workman. Later on the crane was hooked up to a fifty-foot high pile driver, slamming a girder into the ground a few inches at a time, dust coming off the equipment. The calibrated sinking girder with twenty – and later thirty - feet of it sunk into the ground.

Jackhammers and junkies. One more quiet than the other. Earlier I noticed the same couple from last week was sleeping on the other side of the lot. Now they were sitting up and doing something. I brought the binoculars over to the kitchen window and saw him preparing his morning shot with her sitting behind him, clutching his arm like a living tourniquet. I want to hold your veins? He seemed to have trouble finding one, poking the back of his hand, then licking it and rolling up a sleeve. That didn't work. He turned around with her leaning her head on the back of his shoulder, holding the other arm while he stuck that one.

I left the window and returned a few minutes later. She had a blanket thrown around her, being more discreet about her needle work. He seemed to be nodding out with her stroking his forehead. Stupor in the bushes. I wondered what sort of day they will have. Maybe they're from out of town. They had a white plastic bag saying PIER 1

IMPORTS. They could wander around town in a numb state, killing time, like junkie tourists or white ghosts. She stood up in a miniskirt with dark torn nylons. There was an injection in her upper thigh, a close encounter with a little mirror, and she was ready to face the world.

I called Ming and said it was nice out. She looked out the window. "Oh shit, it's clear!" We had a quick reverberating conversation. Talking with her is like a pinball machine. She said my ex-girlfriend called and left a message. "Give me your measurements, you ho!" She is supposed to be a bridesmaid and still hasn't called her. Yesterday while I was putting clothes on she stood in the middle of the room with a tape measure around her breasts and peered down. She seemed to think they had diminished slightly or were less firm. I said her dress was holding her in. She came up with 36 plus. Her hips were similar. Her waist we won't talk about, or she would rather not. I think it's fine, but what do I know? You would think her destiny is connected to her waistline, and her density to her self-preoccupation. The latter is seductive, regardless of her measurements.

We made plans to meet out at the cliffs.

11 a.m. I took a bus with a science-fiction book, *Valis*. I'm still avoiding the newspaper. I would like to drive a nail into that two-dimensional coffin. I was refreshed from last night, and the ride to 25th Avenue was a lot smoother, reading a continual novel instead of a fragmented newspaper. A line was ringing true with some déjà vu, the author's preoccupation with the Greco-Roman and how the Empire is still with us. "…[T]his explained his double exposure, the superimposition he had seen of ancient

Rome and California 1974." I had been through something similar, going from Los Angeles to Rome in 1975.

I read this on the way to the beach where most of my preoccupation with thought and language is absorbed in the sand like water, or evaporates in the heat and light. It is broken on the rocks, dissolving in the water, blown away. I hit the beach which was nearly deserted and walked to the far end. I saw her in the distance with a bicycle lying next to her. When I walked up she was lying near the water in a green one-piece swimsuit. I put a towel down next to her and took off my clothes. Things were looking idyllic with an old freighter approaching on the horizon, a woman lying next to me, and the fog keeping its distance.

After a while she was on her stomach and asked if I would put baby oil on her. She mentioned how sore her shoulders were. It's been a long time since she had a good massage and she has built up a lot of tension. I got the hint and started rubbing her shoulders and upper back with her moaning or exclaiming how it hurt, how good it felt, laughing, then groaning, until eventually I straddled her, giving her a back rub down to her butt. All of this while I was naked, but there was hardly anyone around and we are used to this. There were some stirrings, a semi-erection for a while, but it subsided.

I rolled off. She was relaxed and getting sleepy, but said she wasn't very warm. A breeze was coming off the water. I pointed out that no one in their right mind sits this close to the water, so we got our things together. We walked to a protected cove away from the water where a few people had been blown to the foot of a heat-generating cliff. It was another microclimate and a lot warmer, just what she needed.

She took off her swimsuit and leaned back, rubbing baby oil on her breasts, her stomach, and her legs. I'm a historical reference point and am supposed to monitor any changes in her body and her character. She wants me to let her know if she's getting weird. I said she didn't look much different than before, and asked if she had trimmed her bush. It had a spiky look, with straight black silken hairs sticking up. She said no, she hadn't cut it.

Ming has short muscular legs and firm slender hips. She said her behind is not as firm as before, sensing something extra, and thinks her stomach is too soft. This is self-criticism on a level that few men would care about or even notice. When she sat up gravity pulled her breasts into a nice form, full and pointing forward, but a shade too low in her opinion - the downside I suppose of being a heavy-breasted woman. On the other hand, they are mercurial and conform to every little change in her position, whether leaning back or bending over.

There was some mention of feeling separate from her body (I'm separate from her body too). I said that might have a lot to do with an elusive climax. She wasn't sure about that, but admits that her emotional states have an immediate effect on her physiologically. There was an ongoing theme here, with her main erogenous zone not the most responsive thing in the world. She implied that someone rubbing her pussy or her foot would have a similar effect. Given the tensions and the non-romantic reverb in her that is not surprising, especially for a woman who is not yet twenty-four.

She wanted to know about the phenomenon of the masturbating male. She is preoccupied with the subject, asking me personal questions which were too sophomoric to return in kind. She wants to have a penis for a day and play with it for hours. Ming

likes the idea of waking up with a hard-on, and mentioned some notion of impregnating herself. I said that would be difficult. If it was hard it wouldn't bend around and back into her cunt. It was that sort of conversation for a while. She was on her stomach, up on her elbows with her head down, getting drowsy, and then went to sleep.

I put on my swimsuit and walked across the nearly empty sand to the water. There were a few evaporating vapors overhead and the water was cold. I did some running on the beach, then went in. I dove through a breaking wave and got used to the water, swimming along the shoreline while suspended in the water near a long suspension bridge.

I washed up on shore down the beach and walked back, then dove into the waves again. It was too inviting. I walked back to the foot of the cliffs where she was sitting up and leaning forward, her breasts like big soft teardrops. She said she fell asleep and was being lazy. I said,

"A jelly fish… with poison tentacles…."
"Excuse me?"

I dried off, sitting on a towel cross-legged with my back to the sun and facing her. She got involved in putting a seagull feather, a tiny piece of driftwood, and a yellow ice plant flower around my genitals. "It's beautiful," she said. I took her word for it.

I had brought two apples and some apricot-pineapple juice, but those were gone. She was thirsty and I was running out of time, so we put our clothes on, gathered up our things and left, walking down the beach and up to the road. She was in a good mood, pushing her mountain bike and reverting to a tomboy mode.

4:30 p.m. I arrived in the office. V. was finishing a complaint from a form. She walked over, stood on the other side of my typewriter, and wanted to know how it read. There was a close-up of her big dark eyes. We were focused on a word, "rear-ended," which I thought was hyphenated. Also, if the defendant was driving alone, how can you say it's him and Does 5 through 10 in the car? Half an hour later I walked her to the underground and she gave me a little apple from her sister's tree. I went to a café and then returned to the office, working on a second amended complaint for breach of contract, fraud, etc.

7:30 p.m. I walked home, and it turned into a long night. I was absorbed for a while in an article going back about 500,000,000 years. It was a time when "virtually all the phyla, or groupings based on body design, of animals alive today came into being. Perhaps encouraged by an increase of oxygen in the seas, this Cambrian explosion was the greatest burst of animal evolution the planet has ever known…."

Maybe if I had more oxygen I would evolve a little more. I'm preoccupied with the concept of "came into being." The chemistry of evolution. It's an old tune which goes something like this:

> "Life originates as single-celled organisms in the ocean [I wrote signal-celled]… the dense atmosphere is primarily carbon dioxide… photosynthesizing bacteria pump large amounts of oxygen into the atmosphere… the land is barren… oxygen builds… it surges… large single-celled organisms appear…"

It took three or four billion years. The earth is 4.6 billion years old. As the molten crust cooled it condensed into oceans. Nearly a billion years ago multi-celled metazoans appeared, diverging from bacteria, fungi, or algae. They were "typically slug-like bottom dwellers or gelatinous blobs." Are those from my side of the family or yours?

> "Rising oxygen levels in the seas may have helped trigger the unprecedented spurt of diversity. The increase in oxygen enabled sluggish Precambrian animals to behave more energetically. It may also have helped in the manufacture of collagen – the protein building block of connective tissue, cartilage, and, eventually, bone."[42]

Have connective tissue, will travel.

There was a continual Darwinian adaptation, with evolution pushed along by the escalation of the predators. "Predation probably encouraged the creature… to evolve an arm or overlapping scales." The ones that did, a few freakish mutants, were more likely to survive. There was "an escalating arms race and new offenses followed new defenses. Wiwaxia's spines probably caused its predators to make their own evolutionary leaps – such as bigger mouths or improved hunting strategies."

"The ability to secrete shells led to new body designs, ways of feeding, and methods of protection from predators." Where there's a will there's a way. "Trilobites… were evolving eyes and a variety of sense organs… legs were another critical invention."

> "Modern onychophornas (multi-legged velvet worms) … have evolved strong jaws but still use variations on the stab-and-suck strategy. Before dining, however, they spit immobilizing glue at their prey."

Aside from the metaphoric possibilities of interpretation here, I'm still trying to figure out how something could evolve eyes. How does that work? It would seem like hallucinatory paranoia was one of the main engines of evolution, although these developments took millions of years. Life was generated in the ocean when nonorganic materials next to thermal vents became organic or produced organic matter. After the earth revolved around a nearby star a few billion times those cells of organic matter from the bottom of the ocean turned into a man typing these words on a typewriter.

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[42] Rick Gore, "Explosion of Life: The Cambrian Period," *National Geographic*, Oct. 1993

My grandparents are water, earth, air, and fire.

The molecular explanation of a clam (secreting its secret). The concentric lines of force seen in shells or wood. The repetition in a random world. Veins and roots. Polarizing the erratic. Controlled chaos. Static electricity hits the primordial soup. Waiter, there's an original life form in my soup (a bacterial filament). Sorry sir, I don't know how it got there.

Life is static and in motion. A spasm in the plasma. When the ocean burps, a few more species come into being.

The digital extremities of the species I belong to have evolved so they can hold a cigarette. There is a smoking gun theory of evolution. Things evolved around the need for a quick getaway. The evolution of theft.

The evolution of oxygen-absorbing lungs with an inflated sense of their own importance.

The evolution of armor, roots, passivity, aggression, and deception. If you want to be close to nature just get robbed or mugged, and grab a free lunch.

Civilization is a secretion of customs, laws, protections, and restraints. It borders on the artificial, if not the shell-like with its buildings and shell corporations. There is a paranoiac will behind it, rhyming with the paranormal and genetic parallels. A sense of timing which congeals into the historical.

From the first coral reef to the Chrysler Building and its corollary beliefs.

11 p.m. A work out on the guitar. It was interrupted by a phone call from the Czech woman. Among other things we talked about my wallet being stolen. She thought I

should be thankful it wasn't worse. What kind of warped perspective is that? When Simone got off a bus in Oakland one night and was jumped by several young black males who tried to drag her into the bushes, they were showing some restraint by not using a gun. What *savoir faire*.[43] She mentioned that an old friend of hers, the accordion-playing Czech who frequents local clubs, was set upon in the Western Addition by the usual suspects. Three or four of them beat him up, broke his finger, stole his jacket and anything else they could get their hands on.

Meanwhile, there is the rhetoric of non sequitur, as if you'll have more followers if you say things that don't follow. From *Race Matters* (by Cornel West, a professor at Princeton): "Either we learn a new language of empathy and compassion… or the fire this time will consume us all." This was following the LA riots. The country is sodden with a "language of empathy." Let them eat effete phrases. You would think that depressed neighborhoods and racial frictions are a takeoff point for more poses and theatrics with a microphone. There are still more black men in prison than in college. Maybe schools should have a prison-like aspect, if only in a sense of discipline and longer hours, uniforms, no weapons, and no automatic release. Sounds serious. The prevailing conditions aren't serious?

The second half of the line doesn't hold up either. What fire is it that will "consume us all?" I'm hearing echoes of James Baldwin, a son of a minister whose rhetoric is sinister. Given the recent threats of war, the occasional riot in South Central Los Angeles is practically a street party. Many of the "rioters" were treating it as such, emerging from a looted store with big smiles, and half of them were Latinos.

[43] Fortunately, an older black man ran up and chased them away. Along with being a gentleman I think he was angry at the negative stereotype they were promoting in his neighborhood. She was headed for the Oakland library, doing research on African musical traditions in the Caribbean.

Maybe consumerism will fire us all.

Speaking of rhetoric that sounds good but doesn't follow (in going for the lyrical it abandons the empirical), there was a Dylan song on the radio the other day: "Hurricane" (1976). It's about Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, the black boxer who was convicted for murder.[44] There was a throw-off line, "If you're black you better not show up on the street unless you want to draw the heat." Maybe it fits the mood of the song and it rhymes, but you would think the streets were deserted and black people hide behind closed doors. It is the opposite, they hang out on the street more than anyone. If they're arrested more often for being under the influence that might be one reason.[45]

Friday, Sept. 24, 1993

I went to sleep around three in the morning. Woke up early when the construction site across the street started up, and went back to sleep.

11 a.m. I woke up and called Ming. She had some news to relate. She consented to go out for drinks with the Phantom, knowing he is carrying a torch which flares up in her presence, but he seemed to have it under control. He said, "It would mean a lot to me." A couple of vodka tonics and they returned home. It was late. He had to get up in a

[44] Musically it's pretty good, especially with the violin, but he stopped performing it after not many shows. It was co-written with Jacques Levy, who provided a narrative which Dylan had a hard time coming up with, having written too many songs with the hodgepodge method. However, there were inaccuracies (where Hurricane was not all that heroic), so he set it aside.

[45] During my second year of college I lived in San Pedro and had a part-time job in the Long Beach Probation Department. We had some Latino high school kids who were arrested for smoking pot, something that was not unknown to me and my friends (one of the probationers found a roach in my old Dodge panel truck). However, they were getting stoned in their front yard, which left them wide open for the police. My friends and I were more discreet.

couple of hours to go to work. He asked if he could lie down next to her for a while. Okay. Sometime later he woke her up and was apologizing profusely for something, slightly mortified. He had a little "accident" involving self-abuse, or was it a spontaneous combustion in the seductive aura of her presence? We wondered if men get erections when she walks down the street.

So now he is back on "probation." She regretted having let him sleep in the same bed. "No touching." When will she learn? Even worse, he admitted having tried to get her pregnant in one of their encounters before she went to Alaska. He told her he had a long talk with me which helped him figure out her "psychology." She inquired about it. I said it was more like him getting drunk and going on forever like an obsessed broken record about her. He had mentioned trying to get her pregnant, which I found hard to believe, much less that he would tell her. Apparently, he falls apart in front of her, admitting everything like he wants to be punished.

She said my ex-girlfriend was in town from Lake Tahoe and they would meet in a brewery. She was not in the mood for a drunken slumber party though. I said I wanted to avoid the ex. Then I had to get off the phone, but Ming was unclear on the concept. I was late for a lunch date.

12:30 p.m. I arrived in the office. One reason V. is so refreshing, there is not an aura of emotional entanglements in the background. We walked to the Vietnamese place on the edge of Chinatown and North Beach. She wore a men's blue suit jacket with the sleeves rolled up a little, black stretch pants, and an iron medallion saying GRENADE. We are familiar with each other now, and she is letting her guard down with occasional comments on love and lust. She likes the local gossip, mainly as a woman with a head on

her shoulders who can't imagine what other women will do. She also told me how she gets ready in the morning - shower, washing her hair, mousse, full body lotion - and gave the measurement of her waist.

Sweet and sour prawns on rice. Imperial rolls.

1:30 p.m. In the office she asked if I wanted to go with her to file something at City Hall. We walked to the underground train and glided to the Civic Center, then walked past the fountain. She said she has to avoid men who whistle or make remarks. There was some discussion, "no offense," as to how old of a man she would consider being with or marrying. I am beyond the pale since I'm not Catholic, along with being the wrong race. This connection has some other reverb to it. I wonder about distilling love and sublimating the libido, with the latter hard to do. Love is in the air, at least the air she breathes.

She keeps it in perspective with a sarcastic attitude. V. is used to the old-fashioned mode where a man wears his heart on his sleeve while the woman is condescending and resisting every step of the way - even while staying in step. It's a way of testing his intentions or resilience, while maintaining her autonomy.

City Hall, third floor, stamping the papers with a white bandage around her thin wrist.

We walked back to the underground. Another power glide, emerging downtown. We walked to an electronics store. She was supposed to pick up a phone battery, but it wasn't ready. She spoke with a Filipino man behind the counter in Tagalog. It was like another side of her with an altered persona (or the real one) coming out. It's odd how people assume that foreigners with faulty English are less than them, rather than more.

They have two languages, or 1½. She has a capacity for languages which I don't have, but little aptitude for writing.

V. comes across with an occasional heat wave of familiarity, suggesting that we go out for lunch all of next week and that I should have her phone number for rendezvous after she quits her job. She wants me to be there early on Monday for her birthday. There was a rueful comment that she never got a poem from her fiancé, who she had to badger early on before he gave her sufficient time and attention. Then she exclaimed, "I have to pee," and nothing else mattered at the moment.[46]

In the office, working on the dissolution of a marriage. It was for the Latino man who is in prison for killing his girlfriend. It would clear the way for conjugal visits from his current girlfriend who called the other day, getting that point across. Every three months she could spend the weekend with him in the prison in Vacaville.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the rapid transit station, then headed for the pool. I swam a mile and walked home.

8 p.m. Phone call from B. "You're finally home." She wanted to go out (mambo on a pier), but I wasn't interested. She had other things on her mind, being nearly beside herself with the ironies and contradictions of being with a woman. I still thought the other woman might have a few questions herself – one of them being, as B. admitted, that she wouldn't "let go." She doesn't trust the other woman enough. Ilsa might have a wandering eye for other women if this one can't relax. B. thinks that Ilsa "objectifies sex," and is suspicious of her past, the promiscuity of it. Suspicious of her present too,

[46] This connection has no strings attached, pure spirit as it were, however unlikely our having met. A rapport like this is its own reason for being, and it was natural for her to encourage it since I hadn't put any pressure or demands on her. It is interesting what can develop when you stand back, seeing what transpires or is generated in the space between yourself and a woman - what is coming from her in other words, what subtle overtures and feelings.

with Ilsa surrounded with women. Suspicious of the future – if Ilsa gets tired of her and moves on. B. called her on that point, and it shook her up a little. “She collapsed.” There is an undercurrent of B. demanding something more in the way of love and commitment, and sensing how the other woman operates is to hide her feelings behind a wall of the physical. That is not uncommon. Some people are wide open with their bodies, assuming their most intimate areas are the heart and mind and they’re a little touchy in that respect. B. is touchy when it comes to being touched and flaunting her physique, but her heart is out there.

I said, “It sounds like she should give you a little more love, and you should give her more sex.” That stopped her for a second. There was more to it however. This question of being drawn into a lesbian world, so to speak. Tomorrow they are going to a lesbian convention at a resort in the woods and she was flipping out at the thought of it. “I’M NOT THAT QUEER!” She has a low regard for the “life-style” of the lifers, and was going on about how self-conscious she will be if Ilsa introduces her as her girlfriend. I said, “It’s not like she will parade you around on a leash with a black leather collar,” and went on about how B. was over-reacting. She was stereotyping a situation which sounded like people relaxing at a resort. So what if there are naked women in the pool?

Oddly enough, I was advising her on turning the tables on her girlfriend. She is dealing with the vagaries, the short attention span, the maddening aspects of a woman, though it is an affair between two women. She said it was more comfortable and easy with a man. She didn’t have the usual smokescreens which the other woman could see right through, having “X-ray vision.” I said, “From the sounds of it, you’re taller and more statuesque. You might as well use it.” All she had to do was lounge around the

pool, kicking her feet in the water (clothing optional) and see what sort of effect it had on Ilsa if she attracted attention. B. thought she would look dumb in a bathing cap and nothing else.

The conversation wandered into related tangents and territories. B. was more earthy, or maybe honest, her discretion giving way to curiosities and questions on her mind and no one else to air them out with. I thought she should lighten up if Ilsa wanted to go to a sex film. She said it was suggested and she doesn't like the idea. There was some mention of "sex toys," but no further comment. B. thinks there is a sleazy aura in the background of this woman, and now another couple is showing some interest in a *ménage a trois* with Ilsa.

B. was dying to run it by me, saying the man in that couple got acquainted with a woman at the scene of an accident or robbery. They went out for drinks. He went home with her, and her roommate turned out to have "breasts and a penis." The two roommates put on a performance, having some kind of sex in front of the man who may or may not have joined in. This is the sort of thing that B. finds "unseemly and I don't know what else… I used to be in the D.A.R.!"[47]

10:30 p.m. I got off the phone and had a long night on the typewriter.

3 a.m. Went to sleep.

Saturday, Sept. 25, 1993

[47] The Daughters of the American Revolution, a conservative organization founded in 1890. It is for women who are "directly descended" from someone who was involved in the war of independence in the 1700's.

Late morning. A large metal claw across the street was tearing up chunks of the parking lot and dumping them into a long truck. I was looking out the window for a while at the heavy equipment, hearing the groan of the engine. A man in the cab maneuvered the levers on a swivel seat. I wondered if those machines are a cultural artifact, or is that giving too much credit to those of European descent?

The same junkie couple was on the other side of the vacant lot, sleeping in the shade. It was warm out.

3:30 p.m. I had been typing for hours, then realized I had to run to the bank. I made it by one minute. I walked to Polk Street and Xeroxed something for V., then dropped into a shop of Hindu artifacts. It was crowded with a profusion of delicate if not exquisite objects. I narrowed it down to ten different things for her and gave up. With six or more women having birthdays in October, I'll have to ignore the DUI payment.

5:30 p.m. At home, having a temporary relapse as far as reading the paper. The phone rang. It was Ming. "What are you doing home, it's nice out." She had a lot on her mind, much of it depressing. She is drifting away from her old high school friends. It really hit home being out last night with a few of them who I'm familiar with, including the ex (who I'm way too familiar with). She had come all the way from Truckee. They went to Tanya's place in the upper Haight with the ex getting "sloshed" and saying, "I never have to work again in my life!" with respect to her impending wedding. There was a lot of beer and pot, along with a few lines of speed. It felt too retrograde for Ming, and she realized how Tanya lost weight over the last six months. She's been doing a lot of speed (before that it was beer).

Ming couldn't figure out why Nora isn't bloated, considering her drinking. It seems the man she's going to marry is a match made in heaven, as both of them have a taste for beer (he's from Austria), and he provides the ways and means. Another woman said, "You're so lucky," and Ming wondered, "Who are these people… have I been away so long?"

What really bothered her, however, to the point she might drop out as a bridesmaid, the fiancé had some positive opinions of the Third Reich. He was brought up in Austria to regard Hitler in a more respectful light than the rest of us do. That made me pause before I slammed the whole concept over the left field wall. There is no excuse for it. He was born in 1950, five years after the war, and however indoctrinated by his parents he attained the age of reason a long time ago. If he had half a brain there's no way he could be sympathetic with the Nazis, and it's not like they were good for Germany. I said the Germans are ultra-sensitive about the past, and a few unemployed skinheads with swastikas can generate 100,000 people marching against them.

Ming was disturbed. There was some mention of this man adhering to the concept of the Aryan race, and her being Chinese. It didn't make her feel any better when I said the Nazis were allied with the Japanese.

7:30 p.m. She arrived, yelling outside the window since I was on the phone with the Phantom. He was still worried, if not traumatized, about whether he had blown it with her. He kept repeating something about being "punished" until I thought he wanted to be, or saw her as a dominatrix. He does something bad, masturbating in bed while she is asleep, and then is so distraught he wakes her up and tells her about it. She didn't have to know what happened.

Ming walked in wearing a heavy black lace wrap which she pulled off, revealing a purple sleeveless blouse and a black skirt past her knees, with pointed lace-up boots. We sat around talking for a while with both of us a little subdued. Not out of sync, exactly, but she was feeling out of focus. Six months of working in a factory might have something to do with that. The bloom is off the rose. She is tired and worn out. There are weird situations with friends and acquaintances, one of whom wants to be punished (she can hardly take it seriously). She now admits that "You were right," about her having contradictions, and how those come out with the men in her life. Maybe she isn't good for them, having foregone some of the usual guidelines of a young woman. Did smoking pot in high school blur those boundaries and definitions? She is in a quandary at times as to who she is, saying she has slept with women before (not often) and it was okay (not her best orgasm), but doesn't miss it. Having smoked out or deconstructed the usual guidelines and reference points, it left her floating in an amorphous state (I call her an amoeba sometimes, which she takes as a comment on her figure). She is androgynous, autonomous, and multicultural (a Chinese woman, most of whose friends are white).[48] She was compelled to go beyond the narrow life her parents had in mind for her while refusing to be limited as a woman. "I can drive a fork-lift." She is unclear on the concepts of love and romance.

Her identity among her friends is now blurred if not warped because of passing time. They are getting older, in their mid-twenties, and there have been the inevitable changes and rifts. She used to smoke a lot of pot, now hardly at all.

[48] Except for Tanya, who is half-black, along with Native American and Swedish.

I used to say she was a little sinister, half-kidding, and she would object. Now she doesn't. The concept is on her mind, having had a lot of time up north for self-examination as she put it, and something she was saying clicked into the equation. During her second year of college (at a school up north) she invited a close friend to drive up for a visit. The girl lived with her mother in a well-off neighborhood in San Francisco, and did a lot of cocaine. While driving home along the coast she was in a car crash and died. Ming felt guilty and dropped out of college, returning to San Francisco. She was cut adrift and skipped a semester. That is when we got acquainted, around 1989.

How to fathom if someone is operating under a dark cloud, inhabiting a realm which some may find alluring, but the side-effects are harmful? You end up sounding mystical in trying to understand it. She inhabits a plane on the edge of which is heat lightning and broken bonds, if not the occasional collision, arrest, or broken heart.

Looking back, I see her in a disturbing warp of turbulence. It would be easier to figure out if it was her fault. Most of the time it isn't, but things happen in her vicinity. She invites a good friend to visit who dies on her way home. She has left a trail of wounded men. She moved into the flat near the Haight where two male roommates had a long musical collaboration. When she left a year later the music had disintegrated and they were barely speaking to each other. When I got to know her I was with the woman currently known as the ex. They were bosom buddies in high school, and though there were other forces pulling us apart, Ming was one of them. We had a stronger mental connection which the ex recognized sooner or later. I don't think that Ming wanted to drive us apart, but the intensity of her presence causes cracks to appear in the

relationships of others. Maybe the fissures were already there.[49] She also shattered my glass coffee table by sitting on the floor and leaning on it. That may have been the same night we were wrestling on the mattress and I hit the broken edge of the table and blood was streaming down my arm.

For that matter, when did I get arrested for driving under the influence? I was driving home from one of her parties, which I initially had no intention of going to, having to drive across town, but she insisted. It was a long night considering where I ended up – a holding cell in the county jail.

Oddly enough I ran out of ribbon when I was going on about her inhabiting a realm of disruption and discontinuity, with her being the first victim of those diabolic energies running through her life.

8:30 p.m. I put on a burgundy shirt with brown slacks. "Nice pants," she said, who knows a lot about them, and we went out. The mood was picking up in the night air as we walked a block and half to the Cambodian place.

We went in and the waitress from last week was there. She looked more formal with her long black hair pulled back, and she wore a dark pantsuit. A bit more serious, not as open as last week when she was chattering away with Jon and me. Through the course of the meal she had a few words, but it wasn't much and Ming noticed a certain reticence. Maybe Ciport would have preferred I wasn't with a woman, and there is no love lost between Cambodians and Chinese. It's possible she wanted nothing to do with me, but if that was the case why bother to call? Meanwhile, we had a nice meal, including

[49] For what it's worth, she has admitted to having an interest in the men of other women.

pineapple catfish soup and halibut curry in coconut milk. We were there for a good while, until no one was left except the waitress and an older woman in back.

We said goodnight to Ciport and walked home, picking up a bottle of wine. Ming was getting a walk around the neighborhood, eyeing the hookers. Back at my place we were speculating what would make that sort of life plausible or worthwhile - financially at any rate. A woman could stand around for eight hours a day and if she averaged only one man a day at $50 a throw (Ming said, "A blow-job.") that would come out to $1500 a month and without paying taxes. One could live on that alone - it's more than I have - especially if you share a place. Some are on public assistance, with this other income being off-the-wall and off-the-record, moonlighting on the street.

10:30 p.m. We were sitting at the round wooden table while I poured some wine into the tall and fragile blue glasses. The music was going through some changes, from a Wagnerian opera to one of my radio montage tapes[50] where the mood shifts give you whiplash (it's good for parties). At some point I went off on a tangent. Maybe it was the tapes or the sight of her on her hands and knees on the bed looking out the window at the hookers on the street. She wanted to yell at them. Her figure was suggestive, but concealed.

I started describing a man and woman who were coming close according to the music. He bends her over backwards and she's halfway out the window in a passionate kiss. The music shifts and he pulls her in until she's on the bed. He pulls her nylons off and things are becoming pretty steamy as imagined or projected. I had them going

[50] "Mystic Eyes," Them (1965). "Ace of Spades," Motorhead (1980). "What's Inside a Girl?" Cramps (1986). "World Destruction," John Lydon and Afrika Bambaataa (1984). "Surfin Bird," The Trashmen (1963). "In the Nursery," Throbbing Gristle (1970's). The songs rarely finish since the next one cuts in abruptly.

through various permutations, making love standing up with her arms flung back or sitting cross-legged in an interlocked position. Ming approved of the narrative, saying, "Then what?" until I finally stopped and let her handle it.

And she did, although it was more in a vein of the sentimental and sadistic. There were repeated mentions of how he loved her dearly, and then a scene where she ties up his hands, blindfolds him, and does all sorts of things to him (not painful though). Her descriptions were slightly circumspect and not vulgar. The music was going through sudden changes from an aria by a soprano to some experimental viciousness, until she had the woman stretched out naked on the kitchen table on her stomach and said, "Take it."

I said there were bananas on the table and she laughed. I said, "Banana sodomy." She laughed, and then refused, this girl doesn't do that. I continued until they were in some sort of Tantric situation and she took it from there. I think he carried her up ten flights (naked) to the roof of the building where a mattress lay under a full moon. He put her on the mattress… and the tape ran out. He ran down ten flights to turn the tape over and ran back up. She had them sitting in a full lotus position gazing at each other. He had a hard-on bigger than a "zucchini" she had seen with bulging veins, and yet it was so sensitive the slightest touch would set it off. Then, as if by third eye contact, she had him ejaculating over a lamppost. After that they went downstairs, lay down, and fell asleep in each other's arms.

I said we could write a story. Ming liked the idea, though I pointed out we hadn't provided any physical descriptions. She said the woman has dark hair with large breasts and is tall (this latter characteristic is not her own). The man is slender. I pointed out she

had him coming up with five erections, which in my experience is a bit far-fetched. Three perhaps. She said it was over the course of several hours. I said okay, but it was asking a lot.

Following the oral sex narrative, we got on the subject of women I have been with - who was orgasmic and who wasn't. The most socially proper woman I have slept with (the older European) was the most orgasmic, to the point of yelling "I'm coming!" and nearly kicking out the windows. I was trying to recall a situation, maybe ten years ago, saying it was after E. and J. and just before C., J., and B. (not counting P.), and she said, "You've had a lot of girlfriends." I said "Not for my age. And some of my girlfriends I never slept with." She said, "Oh right, when you were fifteen."

During the conversation a short scented candle was burning. She used her hands to mold a little phallus from the creamy warm wax. It turned out rather life-like in her capable hands, though only an inch long.

One might get the idea she had something on her mind, especially with her mentioning something about sex between friends. She has a contradictory view of it. She will say that it's a nice thing, and then admit that sex with friends can make things warped or complicated and is hardly worth it. She is famous for her ambiguities, her tendency to draw a man in if only to have a better look. At any rate, I knew she had to leave soon. She was being picked up by her sister tomorrow morning at the ungodly hour of 8 a.m.

1 a.m. I walked her to the bus stop, and the whores were out in force. Another Saturday night with a lively atmosphere. She was amused and curious, walking down Geary Street while remarking on the low-cut blouses and the "serious boobage." It was

not her style, but she could give them a run for their money if she ever wanted to look like that. More hot pants coming down the street. She wondered why the men have such nice legs.

Police cars were converging on the corner with their lights revolving. There must have been four of them and there were some immediate arrests. Several young Asian guys were outside the High Tide cocktail lounge. They were handcuffed and sitting on the sidewalk. We waited for the bus like innocent bystanders. Ming was watching with an open curiosity. It is a disastrous situation for those being arrested. I am less relaxed in the presence of the police.

We moved on with her continuing to walk so close she was bumping into me or rubbing against me in her heavy shawl. She is not that tall**,** but solid, soft, and too beguiling at times.

I walked back around 1:30 in the morning. The sordid aspects of the neighborhood are starting to outweigh the other considerations. She said she was worried about me living here. I wasn't worried, but was thinking I have had my fill of it - the diminishing returns of living in the Tenderloin. I don't have many interactions with the people around here. What I have is often not too positive, like being mugged by someone's voice, hustled for change, and recently robbed.

3:00 a.m. Typing for a while, then went to sleep.

Sunday, Sept. 26, 1993

Late morning, woke up. Not enough sleep. I was typing for a couple of hours, then ran out of ribbon – on a Sunday when most of the stores are closed.

I have been speculating on Ming's character, the fatalism of a femme fatale who usually doesn't look the part. She is not morbid, but for a long time thought she wouldn't live very long. I had to familiarize her with the concept of living longer than me, though she still hasn't agreed to it. Maybe some are born under a bad sign. That doesn't mean she is ill-fated, just dealing with a life full of wandering, confusion, and strain. The circumstances of her coming into existence were a little remote, being practically an after-thought if not an accident. Her brothers and sisters are much older - her parents were in their forties when she was born, and she grew up feeling unloved. Her father is a patriarchal man who bought his wife in the south of China in the 1940's. Ming was born in Hong Kong and came to California when she was one year old. Her father is a semi-powerful figure who was head of the Six Companies Benevolent Society for a while. He is known in Chinatown, but what he did exactly she could never describe. I'm not sure if that implied something shady or not. Some heavy-duty peasant roots are involved, with her a big-boned Scorpio woman who was redefined by rock and roll, hallucinogenic mushrooms, and a lot of pot.

She had some bitterness concerning the girls in high school, particularly those of Chinese descent. They would taunt her, "Who do you think you are?" and push her around for consorting with non-Chinese. Ming had very little to do with Chinese boys, not liking their patriarchal tendencies for one thing. It was burned into her senses and her mind to not be passive, quiet, and dependent like her mother. The latter couldn't leave her father (he hit her when Ming was a girl), saying, "Who would take care of me?"

And yet she told me one of her ambitions is to impress her father by making a lot of money. She loves her mother, but resembles her father who is like a bull in a China

shop. That sort of power has an allure which overshadows anything to do with love and cohabitation.

We say we love each other and mean it, but you realize over the years and various love affairs how love is redefined, taking on a different gravity or dimension with each woman. You home in on the spirit of the woman. The erotic surfaces in no time or remains an undercurrent, adding to the force field, but avoided for the most part. You never know. There are variations of love and collaboration, and not all of them lead to sex.

Where was I, on a lazy and subdued Sunday afternoon. It was warm out, but I was in the mood for zoning out with a domestic insulation, turning my back on the world. There was a lack of sleep.

I had the game on during a workout on a wooden instrument.

Reading. I tried to fall asleep, but it didn't work.

I forgot about the Folsom Street Fair. It's not far from here, but I don't have much to do with leather boys or women in bondage. I think about the relativity of phenomena, with one thing feeling as good as another, whether staying in or going out, calling a woman or not calling a woman, writing or doing drugs (not really). I'm not sure if this is a good thing or not. It could lead to the TV being on too long. There was a workout on a beat-up Stratocaster with a lousy amp. I hit a stretch where it sounded okay, standing near a window and looking up Ellis Street like someone throwing bolts of lightning at it.

7 p.m. A long night of the tube. *60 Minutes*. A black man killed his wife for the insurance and wasn't prosecuted. A black woman friend said it was because they're black, and the authorities didn't investigate. Talk about mixed messages, when you hear

people in the black community complaining about too much police presence, and then you hear it's not enough. Her evident sincerity, while sounding like her head is made of wood. She had a curious line concerning the insurance money. "Enough to make a n_____ want to kill you." If a white man said it he would be in trouble, though it's probably enough to make a white man do it, and it's been done. She was interviewed by Ed Bradley, who the Phantom said had a good singing voice, and once did a version of "60 Minute Man."

I was playing guitar with the tube on. There was a documentary about kelp beds with a twelve-foot-long blue shark floating by.

9 p.m. Cutting back and forth between Channels 9 and 5. *The Secret of Life* and *Sleeping with the Enemy*. The infinitely complex thread of DNA with 6 billion genetic determinations vs. a bad marriage.

11 p.m. Reading old manuscripts, the pages torn and scarred with crossed-out lines, the margins cursed with a hard-to-decipher cursive handwriting.

2 a.m. Went to sleep.

Monday, Sept. 27, 1993

I woke up in the morning fairly rested. Not to get too mystical about it, but a pencil-thin streak of light was coming through the window. It ran along my leg to the upper left chest where the pulse originates. I know a woman who is turning twenty-six today.

11:00 a.m. I went out in a coat and tie and slacks and walked to lower Polk Street with its ambience of a male whore toilet. I found a card in a shop, a baby angel from

Raphael, but the Indian shop with the bracelets was closed with an iron gate. I had a cigarette and thought about it, then left. Walked up the street and bought a star lily.

I walked into the office around noon, and V. was at her desk in back. I lay the flower there with a heavy tropical scent. She seemed to like it. It occurred to me that she has been here a year and four months. Last year when she turned twenty-five I gave her a flower and it seemed to break the ice in a subtle manner, while shifting some ephemeral gears into a closer focus. It put us on a path where we would be gravitating to where we are now. I'm not sure where that is exactly, but it feels like a dry champagne with no strings attached. Laying the flower down I thought of it as a final gesture with her leaving in a few days.

We went to lunch at the usual place, but with five others sitting at a round table. Compared to our usual rapport, which has the aspects of a good poem, it was like writing a poem by committee - one which is used to prose, and bad prose at that.

An hour later we were back in the office. I ran into some short-tempered static from the Attorney, the usual arbitrary pressure and concerns. It was not for the client necessarily, but because his house payment is due and he was trying to rush a settlement.

3 p.m. V. wanted me to go with her to file something at City Hall. These excursions are a breath of fresh air. I end up floating from here to City Hall and back, with things becoming effortless in her presence. It makes me wonder if I'm deluding myself, but she seems to relish these errands. They have a certain practicality which makes them okay (her being engaged to someone else). She talks about her fiancé as if there is no distinction between love and practicality. She doesn't care what he got her for her birthday, but it better be expensive.

My going with her had a useful side to it, in other words. She had someone to walk with past the bums and derelicts, like walking a gauntlet on the way to City Hall. The public domain is being allowed to slowly deteriorate. She filed a municipal complaint at a wooden counter. An overweight woman flung it back at her, not bothering to get up. V. was annoyed, like the woman was too heavy to get up, and yet, "It's her job."

Walking back, we stopped at a café and had a soda at a table with a curious repartee. V. has a careful accent and veers into a more serious vein at times. She comes up with comments and observations one would not expect. The older woman in the office gets off on it. V. will say things with the blunt honesty of a child. Some are taken aback, if not amused. I think she gets tired of being the good Catholic girl, or maybe she has an impatient maturity. There were comments about the carbonated soda, how it would make her burp on occasion. And then in her delicate voice, "I don't fart," smiling. She said her boyfriend does, but she doesn't.

A white guy in a jacket with no shirt, a drifter with a European accent (not sure what country), walked up and asked for a cigarette. I let him roll one. V. was recoiling. When he left she asked if he was on drugs.

We took the underground train downtown. She takes it every day. It reminds me of her, who seems to operate in a quick rush and a no-friction glide. However, I doubt she would characterize her life as a smooth ride, having a bandaged wrist, back aches, and she isn't married yet. We returned to the office, and a few minutes later went out again, delivering a couple of envelopes to other attorneys. That took us on a long circuitous

walk. I was there so she wouldn't get lost, although I said "Where's north?" and she quickly pointed in the right direction.

7:30 p.m. I went home, having been working late. I was walking in when the phone rang. The Phantom of the sound-room asked if I wanted to come over, but I was tired. Then Ming was on the phone. She had been wrestling with her ex-boyfriend, and said they were going to a movie, *Un Coeur in Hiver* (A Heart in Winter). We practiced our bad French on each other, where "*Un homme pour ma coeur*" becomes "*Un homme pour ma con*" (related to the early German "*kunt*"). She said, "Do you want to do something tomorrow?" Okay.

I worked out on a wooden instrument with something on the tube. I was watching cells divide and ghostly spinal cords forming in a time-lapse. Cells are the basic building blocks of any being. Their functions are triggered by genetic signals from our DNA, like a central authority which trains the population for certain occupations known as: liver, heart, lungs, blood, etc.

Gender according to xx or xy. A well-timed signal sends a message through the cellular mass: we're building a male, pass it on. Otherwise it remains female. There are different ways you could look at this. The female is the original being, which would reverse the fairy tale of Adam and Eve, and might explain the presumption of some women that they are life itself and men are an experimental or expendable tangent. You could also look on it as the male having something extra.

10 p.m. I went out to the corner store for some water and apple juice. There was a skinny black hooker up the street, along with a few white ones. Walking into the store I was panhandled by a black man who hovered near the door and then inside the store. I

was having a negative reaction to another black man lurking in the aisles. It was a few feet from where I was robbed. He was in his thirties, rather large, and seemed to be a dumb hustler. He may have been in an altered state while lurking near the King Cobras and saying he needed ten cents. I don't know if it was his lack of dignity or the fact he wouldn't quit as he drifted over to where I was paying for the water. He eyed the change, saying he just wanted ten cents. It was not much, but he wouldn't go away. I handed him the change, and then had a few words. I suppose he could have knocked me through the wall if he wanted, but I was talking loud, a bit sardonic, saying I was robbed in this store and it's not likely I will ever get ten cents or the time of day from him. For all he cared I could drop dead at his feet as long as he had gotten his change, which is pretty much how he handled it. I ceased to exist for him as he turned away and faced the beer cooler. I walked out wondering what had come over me. If I can't control these outbursts it means that, 1) I should consider moving, and 2) I'm becoming more like those who live here with their hair-trigger tempers, giving vent to their disgust with everything (when they're not medicated), including the low-grade human beings in their face. You rub elbows with hustlers who don't care if you live or die as long as they get some money out of you, and it starts to wear you down.

On the typewriter for a couple of hours.

2 a.m. I turned off the lamp and went to bed. The night was coming through the windows. I looked down the street at the riot control lights. Around the corner (wrote coroner) a light was pulsing in the dark. It belonged to a police car. A black man stood in the middle of the street and stared.

Tuesday, Sept. 28, 1993

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office and we walked to Old St. Mary's with the organ coming out in force. Unfortunately, we missed the "Prelude and Fugue in D Major" by Bach (1685-1750). There was a lullaby which nearly put me to sleep or left me wanting to bolt. It was followed by a finale to a symphony from the turn of the century which made the walls reverberate, putting the fear of God in everyone. It was like the stained-glass windows and the statues were emoting notes.

Having said her prayers V. was sitting there, a little bored. The church was nearly full. I think more people come to these recitals for the music than the mass. Maybe they worship music. Rather than the transcendental word there is a transcendental sound reverberating in their eardrums. It is next to godliness. Don't worry if a god can hear your prayers as long as you can hear an omnipresent sound wave.

Afterward we had some tacos on a granite ledge, a breeze blowing her black hair over her face. She removed the bandage from her thin wrist to show a thin gold bracelet.

I walked home in the evening after work. The Phantom called, wanting to play music. I took a bus there around eight and walked into a near-empty room. Ming was on the floor on the phone (a roommate had moved out). I talked to her earlier. She wanted to do something tonight, then said she might go to a movie with a female roommate, *The Joy Luck Club*. I wasn't interested. Now it was off and she was on the phone and I was ready for the sound-room. The Phantom doesn't want her down there for some reason. All I saw of her that night was when I walked in. She was sketching a demented portrait on a pad while talking to an older woman.

I headed for the garage, and shook hands with a new drummer who lives downstairs. He seems to be strong with rough edges and tattoos, in his late twenties, his long hair pulled back. He set up his drums – they were behind a blanket in the back of the garage, next to half a dozen motorcycles in various stages of repair. We went into the sound-room. He sat behind the drums, I plugged in, and the Phantom picked up the bass. I had a loud edge on the Les Paul and the night ignited.

One of the finer things about the undercurrents made of sound, complete strangers can turn on the equipment and cut loose. No questions asked, no strings attached (except for those on the guitar and bass). It helped that he was a good drummer. I get into a stream of consciousness, moving in and out of recognizable structures and chord progressions. It has the makings of a spontaneous combustion with some random syncopations. They materialize out of the blue, three guys caught up in a force field which is greater than the sum of the parts. They are caught between the well-defined and the UFO (unidentified floating oscillations), gravitating back and forth in a spark gap. Flurries of notes appear which you haven't done before, surprising yourself. The momentum has a mind of its own, the forces making for a synthesis of something further.

Three hours, during which we went through a lot of changes, stretching out. There were a few short songs where I threw my voice into a microphone. The metallic volume turns into a jagged metal sculpture. The guitar is like a flamethrower, the voltage of emphatic notes. You nail a winged minute to the wall with flung knives. I don't know if this is self-realization, or something closer to self-amplification with an emphasis on the anonymous, transcending your identity as you know it. No wonder musicians have a tendency for being friendly. They are not all there. Their identities dissolve in those

unconscious sonic currents, up to their necks and vocal chords. They are over their heads in the overheard.

It was a workout, during which the Phantom went overboard on the bass like a man floundering in the water and drowning us out. I said something about it, trying to be diplomatic. He said, "Let's switch," so I ended up on bass for a while. It threw me off for a minute, but then I had something going. I tend to do a walking bass routine, since a repetitious three or four-note pattern can be tedious. It wasn't bad, the bass a thick-string version of the first four strings of a guitar, E – A – D – G.

Eventually we took a break. The Phantom had already disappeared a couple of times. The drummer had a compliment for my bass playing, but maybe he didn't want the Phantom on bass. During one of the latter's breaks, we had something nice going. I've been missing a good drummer something awful, with the discipline of syncopation operating with a certain whiplash.

The Phantom was instrumental in our being there, but whenever the music was on the verge of falling apart it was usually because of him. He tends to lose it in a session like this, heading for the apocalypse in no time, even when he blows a harmonica into the mic. At one point he was on the trumpet, which he never learned how to play, but that didn't stop him. The drummer looked at him askance a couple of times, like when we took a break and were sitting around in the garage, having a beer and cigarettes. The Phantom was finishing a six-pack and asking him odd questions which he wasn't comfortable with, including what music he likes. The Phantom mentioned Soul Asylum, and I said I know a ten-year-old girl who likes them.

We went back in for another hour or so and I was back on the Les Paul. We quit around midnight and they walked out. I was winding down, having been running on sheer momentum.

The drummer disappeared. I went upstairs with the Phantom and found the flat dark with everyone asleep, including Ming. That was surprising, it wasn't that late. Even worse, the Phantom was in an edgy mode where she is concerned, still carrying a torch, and it annoys her to no end. (She said later, "Why can't men differentiate between lust and being friends?" I said, "Maybe if you kept them out of your bedroom.") He was giving signs that she was asleep and shut the bedroom door, therefore off limits. He didn't want me to sleep with her, though she would have taken it for granted.

I left, exhausted, after standing for hours. I walked to the main drag in a foggy wind. A few minutes later a bus pulled up and I rode to my neighborhood, about two miles, though I was not in the mood to be there.

1 a.m. There was an arrest down the street with three or four police cars and a van blocking part of the street. A black man was handcuffed with the lights revolving.

Wednesday, Sept. 29, 1993

In the morning Ming called, wondering why I went home last night. I could have slept over. We made plans to get together later.

11 a.m. B. dropped by. I made coffee and we sat around the wooden table, peeling a couple of oranges and talking about her weekend in Guerneville. There were hundreds of women at a resort in the woods, many with their girlfriends. She said it was like what I suspected and nothing for her to worry about. Their being lesbians was secondary to the

fact of it being a resort. There were naked women in the pool and hot tubs (she wore a bathing cap). What got her was how many of the women were plain and ordinary, and how much gossip there was about each other (especially a bisexual contingent).

There was more about the woman she thinks she is in love with. She still has questions. Ilsa is a nonstop talker and it wears her out. She doesn't know if she can trust her, and is not sure if she is being used as a sex object. B. can't tell anyone about it and was dying to tell me everything with her tendency for relating things in minute detail. She admitted she could tell her sister on the East Coast, who would "chuckle."

Oddly enough, she pulled out a map of the western United States, planning a trip for two or three weeks across Nevada, through Utah, north to the Canadian border and on to Banff. She is going with an old friend who lives in Oregon, a man. This didn't make sense to me if she is concerned about the fidelity of the woman she is with. She has finally established something with a love affair, but is going to leave for three weeks, traveling with a man.

1 p.m. B. left and half an hour later Ming showed up in overalls, a white blouse, hiking boots, and long black hair. She talked about her problems with the Phantom who apparently is blowing it with her (as he tends to do). He swore he had it under control and they would just be friends, but now it seems he is shadowing her.

She looked out the window at the empty lot, on the other side of which the junkies hang out. I told her about a black man with a shaved head, maybe forty, with a younger light-skinned black woman. There was a tiny flame and a crack pipe. They sat on the ground next to the bushes with a piece of cardboard which was blocking the view from the street, though in full view of a hundred windows, including mine. The woman was

constantly peering out, wide-eyed, almost waif-like with short hair, and wired with her arms in constant motion. Twenty feet away there were a couple of the junkie regulars – two white guys with long hair, maybe in their thirties, with a show of arms. I realized what all the toilet tissue was for on the edge of the lot. They roll up a sleeve and "wash" an arm with tissue. Having prepared the needle, they tie up the arm with a white cord and put the needle in. Then they gather up their things and leave.

The black man was in a stupor with the woman animated. When they left, walking across the lot to the chain-link fence along the sidewalk, her arms were waving around and she was barely coordinated, moving with nervous gestures and jittery glances.

Two other guys appeared, walking across the dirt to the bushes. Ming had the binoculars out and watched for a while. She felt like she was "spying," but on what? People in a vacant lot in full view of the kitchen window. She was also preoccupied with the streetwalkers, spotting one and speculating. Eventually I put on a shirt and tie and slacks and we went out, headed for the library.

We dropped in on a Buddhist temple a block from here. Buddha had a circle of blinking lights behind his head. The altars had offerings of fruit and incense and little cups. She said her father had something similar in his home, putting whiskey in the cups.

I was curious about the Chinese belief that money is required in the after-life. It is the opposite of how the Christians look at it (although some Catholics want to buy their way into heaven). The Chinese must have a drop-dead attitude towards money, assuming it is next to godliness. I'm not sure how that squares with the Buddhist notion of detachment from material concerns, or is that only if you're a monk?

We continued to the library. I returned some overdue books and got another library card (stolen). We stood at the wooden counter while next to us an old woman with a gravel-like voice was haranguing and relentless, like she was dictating the rules about checking out books and wouldn't hear otherwise. She had a heavy accent and some Russian books in her wrinkled claws. From Russia with suspicion. The middle-aged woman behind the counter was recoiling, not sure what to do, and being way too nice. This country brings out the worst in people, including those who arrive from countries where life and the authorities are harder. They hit this mild-mannered atmosphere and whatever they wanted to say where they used to live and couldn't is coming out – even when it's uncalled for and out of place. You can get away with any attitude you want, it's part of the American dream. Those attitudes are amplified in a moral vacuum[51] generated by a cultural disconnect between the many factions and ethnic groups.

I gave her *Culture of Complaint*, with her expressing some interest. We had a quick kiss and I left, with her remaining to do some research on how to start a business. Any focus in her life seems to be in that direction. She has said more than once that she will "keep" me, although I'm not comfortable with the concept. It is too close to how she operates. The big house under her control is a metaphor of how she structures things, with the men in various compartments according to their uses and excuses.

4:30 p.m. I went to work (late).

8 p.m. I walked to the pool and met her in the hotel lobby (the pool is in back). We were supposed to go swimming, but the pool was closed for maintenance. Now what? She mentioned a jazz lounge a few blocks away, so we walked to the Mason Street Wine

[51] Unfortunately, moral vacuums are easy to come by on a planet which orbits in a void. Some of the worst occur in relatively homogenous populations when a civil war breaks out or a dictator starts to doubt the people's love for him.

Bar and were there for two or three hours. An intimate atmosphere with a four-man combo. We sat close to them at a small table, having a glass of wine and then another of the sort I don't have often enough – a smooth pinot noire.

Stand-up bass, drums, alto sax, piano - casual experts with a cause and effect which kept us there. I was in a loosened tie with a woman in overalls who was leaning on me or we leaned on each other, having a close conversation. Ming was giving off ambiguous signals. She tends to have that sort of closeness with a man, and even though I know better there was still some question in the back of my mind, magnified by my libido, if she was in the mood. She might be often in the mood, but it's diffused or undefined and without yours truly in mind.

The intensity that some put into romantic love, which tends to make her nervous and claustrophobic, she puts into having a friend. It is something she values highly – as much if not more than a lover. The intensity is transferred from the love affairs which aren't happening or which she avoids, and it gets ambiguous once in a while. Especially after a couple of glasses of wine and her close physical presence, putting perfume on my wrist.

For the last hour we were in a lounge in back with large paintings and an open vault for the wine. We sat across from each other at a small table which made the conversation more direct. She got into one of her practical inquiries as to what I plan to do with the writing. I hear that from my mother and others from time to time. It is a point of view, looking for tangible results, which could keep someone from writing anything at all, and a lack of which could keep a writer in obscurity.

We left around midnight, walking to my place. It was a situation where I wonder whose mind and body are more integrated when it comes to planning one thing and succumbing to another. She thought we should continue on to her place and spend the night there, which was a good deal more effort. I was more in the mood to sleep here. We sat around for a while until she lay on the bed. A few minutes later she announced that she was sleepy.

It was barely one in the morning when she sat up and took off her overalls and shirt, wearing a lace bra. I threw her a black T-shirt which she put on and then struggled to get out of the bra beneath it with a sigh of relief. I put on a bathrobe and got into the single bed beside her. There was a full moon in the window overhead with moonlight on the pillows. I got the binoculars, and we took turns looking at the moon while we lay on our backs.

Thursday, Sept. 30, 1993

9 a.m. Jackhammers and heavy equipment. We revived an old routine where she is stiff and sore with neck and backaches, telling me where it hurts and how good it feels being massaged, and moaning. I sat on top of her while she lay on her stomach in a T-shirt and lacy briefs. It turned into a massage from her shoulders to her feet, including her behind. She doesn't have wide hips, but has gotten a bit softer. She would say "a lot softer."

We ignored my morning hard-on. It was semi-erect with the bathrobe falling open. At one point I was sitting on her legs and slapped her lightly with it a couple of times. I think it was to remind her that it's there.

We got into a wrestling mode, which was more me wrestling with her while she went limp – either curled up or stretching out, her arms flung back while I lifted her into the air (while lying on my back). I would roll her around, none too gently, and we hit the floor a couple of times. I stood up, holding her in my arms. She magnifies her weight so much and then assumes I must be strong to pick her up.

There was a lull and then we were back at it for a while. She is highly physical, or maybe it takes a lot to get her started. Some men have been misled when she's so physical in her relations with people. It is misconstrued as wanting to go further. Even if it includes something sexual that isn't necessarily "further" for her. It may not mean anything, just wrestling and a therapeutic massage. That it didn't mean anything has left more than one man feeling rejected on two levels: love and fucking, thinking he must be lacking something.

We put our clothes on, or rather she did. I was lounging in some black briefs for a while since our plans for the morning kept changing. She was at the kitchen window with the binoculars, watching a couple of the regulars with their furtive needles in the vacant lot where a lot of vacant people visit.

I showed her the article on the evolution of multi-celled organisms, saying, "Which one are you?" Then I had to talk fast, not meaning to imply she was a "slug-like bottom dweller" or a "gelatinous blob" who was living a "passive low-energy life." There was some discussion about things evolving because of fear and hybrids. Some of my best friends are paranoid mutants (present company excluded).

There was something about how it's a good exercise in the morning to "wrestle with a big Chinese girl."

10:30 a.m. We went out having finally settled on eating breakfast. I wore a coat and tie, having to go to the office. She was in her overalls. In a café on Geary we were talking for a while about race problems in this country. When you live in certain neighborhoods you have to watch out for the vultures. For the sake of argument, I questioned the sentiment that "diversity is strength," or that we need immigrants to be refreshed. She admitted that some Asian countries are fairly homogenous, not weak or dead in the water, and not exactly welcoming to foreigners. I said you could make the point (judging by the results) that diversity leads to fragmentation, loneliness, and crime. Or is it just a coincidence that one of the most diversified countries on earth has so much of those?[52]

At the bus stop I kissed her and she disappeared. I walked to work.

12:30 p.m. I rendezvoused with V. and we walked to a Vietnamese place in Chinatown next to a small park. Fish soup, noodles, and spring rolls with tea. I was shifting gears, going from the presence of one woman to another, and they're so different.

Afterwards we were in a shop full of Chinese imports looking for wooden roller balls for V. to use on her back and neck. This is another tense woman. She had some shiny shiatsu balls for her hand and kept dropping one, then demonstrated on her neck, pulling it back and forth. She said, "You have to be naked though," and smiled. Her reality is an antidote to mine, a counterpoint that is inherently charming. She doesn't have

[52] Maybe fragmentation, loneliness, and crime are manifested differently in other countries, especially when much of the crime is at the hands of the government. In a free country it's the citizens who take the law into their own hands and wring its neck.

to do much and I'm under her spell, which facilitates communication. We walked back to the office with her in a hurry (and me humming).

There was a lot of work, but I left around five. I walked to the pool, a bit tired, and tried to outswim my fatigue. It was a slow mile. At one point I was swimming to the deep end with a young German woman standing at the edge of the pool. She looked statuesque from that angle, wearing a one-piece suit with sculpted curves. I nearly forgot what I was there for.

I walked home.

8:30 p.m. The Czech woman called. She threw out her Latino drifter boyfriend again. The mental disconnect was so dismal it was getting to her. Later she suggested we go to a hot tub.

I called the Actress in Marin who was in the bathtub. I heard her splashing around, and this on a full moon. We talked for nearly two hours.

She said Maya was turning ten and is contrary to a fault, at least to her mother, and disagrees all the time - the downside of having a daughter with a mind of her own and a quick one at that. She said she is looking forward to her daughter going through puberty when she would need her mother's advice. The mother (as well as Ming) thought it was exaggerated, this notion of girls being thrown off by their adolescent changes. It's not like it happens overnight. Ming thought she was dying the first time she had her period, but her mother threw her a pad and said get used to it. End of discussion.

Meanwhile, the fiancé was questioning if Maya should be so exposed to worldly matters. He was brought up in repressed circumstances (according to the Actress). There is a tendency for men to assume the innocence of girls, where a woman or a mother

knows better. And knowledge is not synonymous with someone acting on it. It is often the opposite. It is usually the least educated girls who have babies at fourteen or fifteen, while education is a form of birth control.

We went on talking. She has a fine grasp of things in the news and political matters, like they mean something. She also said she worries about me in this neighborhood.

I got off the phone, feeling hungry. I was considering the options when Ming called. She had one of the worst nights she has had in a long time and wanted to run it by me. This is someone who is grounded in the tangible, but at times it knocks her around in no uncertain terms, and her contradictory relations with people make it worse.

She borrowed her older sister's car, late afternoon, and drove to Sacramento with the Phantom for company. She went there to get fitted for a bridesmaid dress for a wedding she is having doubts about. Ming doesn't like anything about marriage, and is doing this for an old friend who she doesn't see very often. They are drifting apart, so there is that to contend with. She is beginning to resent Nora's demands on her, taking a couple of days out of her life, driving to Sacramento, the rehearsal, the wedding, and she is even supposed to pay for the gown. She doesn't approve of the ex's drinking, and said a mutual friend of theirs was feeling out of touch with the bride. It is not uncommon for a formal occasion to have a certain amount of hypocrisy involved, but who knows how far it went.[53]

Meanwhile, everything went wrong with the trip, except for the car breaking down. They never met up with the bride or the fitting woman, the bride's mother having

[53] Hypocrisy is the spice of life for some people, and not just Republicans.

given the wrong directions. The fitting time was later than she thought. They got lost and finally left, driving back to San Francisco. This is a woman who is thoroughly sick of cars and driving, and tired of a certain man who won't give up on his cloying efforts to have a romance. She was already on edge and he managed to say the wrong thing, asking if the guy in Alaska was good in bed. As the Phantom said later, rather dejectedly, she gave him the most withering condescending lecture and apparent sign off. He said it went on for twenty-five miles.

They had just gotten back. I said, "The minute I let you out of my sight…" She will drive back tomorrow. Meanwhile, another old friend has been invited to the wedding and is reluctant to go, the bride having borrowed money that she was giving no signs of returning.

1 a.m. I went out, walking to Tommy's Joynt a few blocks away. There were some young black men hanging out on the sidewalk, using the n-word like it's going out of style. I walked further and saw a sign. It expressed the sentiments of a country full of mechanics when it comes to sex. ROSES ARE RED, VIOLETS ARE BLUE, WE HAVE LUBE FOR THE OLD KAZOO. A message about the lubrication of the lower intestine was surrounded with white lights.

Friday, Oct. 1, 1993

Typing for hours.

2:30 p.m. Went to work.

Yesterday the Attorney demonstrated one of his defining moments where the irascible meets the irrational. It is not enough being a rude son of a bitch, but he was

wrong as well. No other attorney in the office raises their voice like that, much less in front of others. He will come out of his office in a bad mood like I had done the worst thing. In this case, an inconsequential letter on behalf of a woman friend of his who was objecting to not getting air mileage credits for something. She carried out the transaction before said credits went into effect. Her case was dubious, but he dictated a long and boring letter. I told him it was putting me to sleep. He had thrown it on my desk last night in a resigned manner saying it would do, or something to that effect. I mailed it, not knowing he had dictated another version in the last few minutes. The next afternoon he was pissed off that I mailed it. How could I when he had expressly told me otherwise? I said it was news to me that he had another version. I went into the office, got the tape, and typed out the new version and showed it to him. Sometime later he came back out and said it wasn't much different so we might as well stand by the first one. All of the previous sound and fury signified nothing, except for his inhabiting a middle ground between pompous and senile.[54]

Meanwhile, I was finishing the work and talking with V. (she is staying another week). I told her I was lying in bed last night and looking at the moon through binoculars. "You're lying."

This was followed by one of our conversations where I refer to something in the Bible. I'm careful about it since she takes it seriously, but I refer to Jesus like he was a real person. She tends to see him as a son of God, so you better be careful what you say. I said he never had a credit card. That was like suggesting he had a bad credit rating or

[54] One of the first things he said when I started working here is that we would get along better if I considered him infallible.

something. She sort of agreed about his not being materialistic, but said I was on the verge of violating one of the commandments. She forgot which one, blasphemy I think.

7 p.m. I walked to the club on Broadway, the idea being to drop off a present for a ten-year-old girl at a high-tone topless joint. I walked into a plush environment with velvet ropes, a huge mirror, Persian rugs and wood paneling. I told someone I knew the head chef, Michael, and was there to give him something. Those were the magic words. A minute later I was led up the stairs into the main room by the *maitre d'*. I said hello to Michael through a window on the kitchen and was led to a small table with a white tablecloth. The headwaiter came by. He said anything I wanted was on the house, more or less. I was thinking I should know more chefs.

Fortunately, I was in a dark coat, tie, and slacks. Most of the others there, with some just having drinks, were men in suits. There was a steady succession of women who walked by in G-strings.

It's an "intimate" club in more ways than one. There was a wooden runway extending into the room. It had mirrors and brass poles for the women to work out on. There was a horizontal pole over their heads. Some of the women were gymnastic female contortionists. Two girls at a time (they refer to each other as girls) would come out and run through a few songs. They end up wearing nothing but a G-string while writhing slowly on a pole. They climb the pole and slide down slowly with their legs spread wide. They rub their pubic bones on the pole, constantly holding and squeezing their breasts in case you didn't know they were there, or maybe to keep the nipples from going to sleep. Most of them had small or medium-sized breasts and were photogenic, with an emphasis on the slender and the nubile. Some of the most athletic firm behinds in town were

showing off their muscle control. The women writhe on the floor, arcing their backs and doing the splits. There were continual motions which the body lends itself to, the arms and legs in rhythm with the music. Each woman displays her body like a fine-tuned instrument. It is suggestive for the most part, but with a certain refinement.

There were about twenty women I found out later. They have to pay a stage fee for the privilege of working there, and their income comes from tips. They make more if someone wants a "private" dance at a table. There is a private room ($20 - VIP) for an even hotter routine. Some would call it exploitation, but I think the women are treated fairly. It is a glorification of women and their form and how they move. Individual characteristics are coming out, and it is a multi-racial group. Four or more are Asian, and there are a few dark-haired women of Italian or Latina background, not to mention some tall Nordic women.

Speaking of variation, if anyone was gymnastic and wild it was the white girls. The more fluid and graceful tended to be Asian.

Meanwhile, the meal. It was a long time coming. Waiting to order I had a glass of pinot noire. I waited for the first course of soup which was delectable. Waited for the second course. Halibut with baby potatoes in a sauce of salmon and butter. Fresh bread. Waited for dessert. A chocolate torte, along with a second glass of wine (a Cabernet Sauvignon). It took a good two hours, by way of rationalizing why I was there so long.

There was another half hour in which I was talking to one of the dancers. There seems to be a policy of mixing here. A few had come by the table who were more than friendly. You would think the fantasy is not just beautiful women who take their clothes off while you sip your drink, but women who are friendly and open to men. What a

concept. I had very little response. Some feminists have characterized male-female relations as a mercenary pretense, but I try not to operate on those terms. I don't like pretending, and I don't have much money.

I'm not sure how to explain the conversation with Stormy. We hit it off immediately. She left and then returned, pulling up a chair and slipping out of character when I told her the circumstances of my being there – a friend of the chef. Later I asked if I was keeping her from her work. She said that was fine, she wasn't in the mood. There was a sense of my not being a regular customer, and her not responding like it was part of the job. She was taking a breather.

Unless I am completely gullible (that's always a possibility) she didn't seem the type to be working here. She is in pre-med school and is from Massachusetts. Her father taught literature and writing, and didn't allow a television in the house. She said the motto was, "Kill your television." I said, "Before it kills you." She is doing this because it pays well and the hours are okay. The conversation wandered all over the place and took some curious bends - from the anatomy lab to the bones of dead monks in Rome (which both of us have seen). There was a Eurocentric slant to the conversation, with her having lived in Germany until she was ten.

I was trying to remember her routine on the stage earlier, thinking back through a flurry of women. She seemed to be the one having the most fun, not taking it seriously, with short blond hair and nice proportions. She is further evidence that a woman above the shoulders is the main event. If it isn't happening there, forget it. Her mind inhabited her face, infusing it with her spirit. We seemed to be on a similar wavelength. There were some curious moments with a half-naked woman crawling on the runway while we talked

about dissecting bodies or the philosophy of the body being secondary according to those long-dead monks.

She got some paper to write down my phone number. We were planning on playing tennis sometime. Then she sighed, “I have to get back to work,” and left.

A few minutes later the girls were streaming through the room in their lingerie and rubbing a little against the customers, using their behinds. A Chinese woman came up with long black hair and asked how was the meal. I said (with apologies to the chef), “Not as good as you.” It was not much of a line but she smiled, squeezed my shoulder, and walked on.

The chef took a break and came by the table. We were talking and I handed him the present for Maya (his fiancée’s daughter). An oyster shell and pearl suspended in a small cognac glass which held a scented candle. I also gave him a rolling eyeball which I put into a milk carton. He said, “How was the meal?” I should have told him it was better than the floorshow.

By the time I finished the second glass of wine and the coffee it was nearly ten and I had had enough. I said goodbye to Michael and mentioned having made a tennis date with Stormy. He was amused or surprised, since he doesn’t mix with the dancers. It is against the policy of the club and would distract him from the cooking. I walked out while a group of Asian men were being seated.

I walked down Broadway to City Lights bookstore, feeling fine. The strip joints on that street compared to this one are like cheap beer compared to champagne. I went into City Lights and picked up a journal (*Poetry Flash*) and walked home (2½ miles). Now and then I like this town.

At home I was relaxing, thinking I could fall asleep but didn't want to waste a full moon. I made coffee and was on the typewriter by 1 a.m.

Half an hour later I went to the corner store for a beer, Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. You would think I would have learned by now that near closing time on a Friday night is a good time to run into some of the worst elements in the neighborhood, many of whom are in an altered state by then. This time it was a mean-looking Latino or Native American with long black coarse hair and dark glasses. He was sort of ugly and spoke in a macho whisper, like he could barely restrain himself from doing violence to whoever wasn't standing back in awe of his presence. I had the not-so-edifying experience of arriving at the counter ahead of him. He had his own idea about how we were supposed to line up at the counter, like this was all so significant. There are a lot of touchy ex-convicts in this neighborhood. We were at the counter and I let him go first, but apparently I did it wrong. I stood there and he didn't like it, maybe I was too close. He gave me some threatening instructions about going to the back of the line. I said, "It's okay, I'll go after you." Unfortunately, I looked him straight in the eye, which was an intolerable affront, not being a deferential white man who should have known he was talking to a superior ethnic person. His mind was half-eroded by cheap beer and whatever else he was on, a warrior of the liquor store.

He said, "Don't you speak English?" and then, almost immediately, in a low voice, "I'll be waiting for you outside."

He was with a younger woman with long dark hair. She was calm or passive and followed him outside, saying, "It's not worth it…." I paid for the beer, with the Middle

Eastern guy behind the counter shrugging, half apologetic for the strange characters they get in there. I'm beginning to wonder if I should avoid this place. I walked out and he was waiting and said something. I walked over to him, having another multicultural experience, but I had to deal with it, however stupid. I said, "I'm sorry if you think there's a problem. I have no argument and I don't want to fight." He stood there like he was trying hard to figure out if his honor was intact (like all of this was so honorable in the first place). The slow reptilian gears were turning in his head, and anyone drinking the horse-piss he bought would have to compensate like hell for a sense of honor. He muttered something. I said I was robbed there recently and the place made me nervous. That didn't have much to do with anything, but it seemed to throw him off and maybe was a plausible excuse for my having offended him so deeply.

He was so locked into a simmering macho stare-down he was going cross-eyed, but he considered his options, wanting nothing so much as to lash out with his fists. The mere fact that I existed was enough, but he had a woman with him. He said something about how close I had come and better watch it next time, and I walked away.

I returned to the apartment in a lovely mood, considering the night I was having earlier. It serves me right for living here and having a proclivity for contrasting situations. It amplifies the highs and lows of my existence to a pathological extent, and the flux can wear me out. The characters I run into might be asshole rejects in their own communities. They prey on a white man because he's there, and half the time their own people don't want them around.

I was back to my old notion that things would be more civilized if we had swords. You wouldn't have to touch someone except at arm's length with a blade. It is more of a

balanced confrontation, a fair fight. I need my hands for other things, like writing and the guitar. A sword fight is not like brawling on a sidewalk or some coward with a gun who shoots you in the back from a block away. I still might have been wounded – go out for a pale ale and die – but with better odds of putting him out of his misery.

I was on the typewriter until four in the morning.

Saturday, Oct. 2, 1993

In the afternoon the Czech woman called. She was on the street and wanted to drop by. Half an hour later B. called. We were talking when the Czech woman arrived, though B. was halfway into a monologue and had to finish it. Her crowded social life has gotten more complicated what with her having an affair with a woman and wanting to hide it. Not only is it making her jumpy, it doesn't send a positive signal to the woman she is with.

What was driving her nuts at the moment was her old friend Phoebe, an actress in Mill Valley who she has been preoccupied with for several years. She assumes they have a paranormal connection, if not a previous life together. Unfortunately, in this one they are comically incapable of being in sync. Phoebe is in another low-budget lurid stage production (while in real life living like a nervous virgin). Her role: a German dominatrix with the same name as the woman B. is having an affair with. She couldn't get over that. I thought it would have been interesting if B. took her girlfriend to the play, but Phoebe is dropping out of the role. She can't handle the whips.

The Czech woman was here so I got off the phone. She brought some warm chicken salad and tea, looking and sounding tired and subdued. She dropped by last

night, but I wasn't home. We hung out for several hours, and I was on the guitar for a while, whether or not she was talking. We both read the paper with occasional comments. Eventually it was Jack Daniels, incense, and a book of spiritual enlightenment (by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh). She insisted I drink with her, but I said it was too early, it would throw me off if I'm writing later. She said, "A little." Okay. She poured some into the coffee, but I only had some of it. She went through a large cup of coffee and whiskey, and then was taking straight shots from the bottle.

I flipped through the Bhagwan book, a little wary. It is not my cup of spirituality. There was an essay written like a free verse poem. It might be useful if it brings about a mental change of pace and redirects my thoughts - all of which I could get from reading about the calibration of machine parts.

There was a nice bit on having no beliefs, particularly when the beliefs come with blinders or tunnel vision. He preferred having no belief system. That would leave many people feeling like they're drifting in the void (which they are anyway). He mentioned the arbitrary group identifications people have, feeling strengthened and enhanced, but not for anything they have done. They are caught up in a massive wave of similar sentiments, like nationalism. Rather than worrying about a void of no beliefs he trusted the earth and the universe.

That reminded me of something I was talking about with Ming the other night at the jazz club. She has an evolving socio-political point of view which is not as dogmatic as when she was in college. She mentioned a class which left her thinking twice about some of her sympathies with radical race and gender issues. It was taught by a Chinese Marxist lesbian professor who was putting down some well-known Chinese women

writers (Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston) for writing about what they know and who they are. They didn't write enough about what the professor was concerned with, like poor women. The professor also managed to let the class on women's lit (multicultural, with mostly women students) become dominated by a few loud black women who managed to sideswipe the scant two or three days given to Asian woman writers. Ming was on the side of black people (including the Black Panthers), while automatically condemning white people, but real life is slowly putting theory and idealism into perspective. She wondered why it was supposed to be a one-way street, with black men and women blowing their own horn onstage, even turning their backs, while others are supposed to sit there in mute admiration, maybe thinking it would be reciprocal and it isn't. A one-way respect was demanded. This is someone who supported black causes while feeling threatened in her own neighborhood by black men (with a friend of hers held up at gun point, for example). She admitted one day that some of them are vultures who could care less about your politics.

I'm gravitating towards the unaffiliated, like someone who doesn't identify with any particular faction or group. Whatever group you lean on comes with a blind side. I thought there was some value in that point of view, especially for a writer, and I wonder how close it comes to the enlightenment notion of having no beliefs. You trust in the earth, which sounds a little obvious, like trusting the sun will come up in the morning without the help of the military, and the bad guys will drop dead and be swallowed by the earth someday, and the moon will put you through its phases. It puts the ways and means of a man into perspective when he can't trust his own government.

The other night the Actress made the observation that I am more preoccupied with natural phenomena than most people she knows. The desert, beaches, weather, even trees. That made me pause. I wouldn't argue with it, but it came as a surprise. I thought I was a terminal city boy, but writers are as self-deluded as anyone – maybe more so when they're over their heads in their own stream of consciousness. She also wondered, when I mentioned the junkies in the empty lot, how I could be so detached or jaded. I wasn't sure how to take that. The cold-blooded observer, the detachment of a cynic. I said it had something to do with feeling compelled to observe things around me and maybe describe them. If you're going to do that you need some detachment, or you'll be an emotional ruins and a nervous wreck in no time, and not worth much as a writer (the tears smearing the ink on the page and making it hard to focus on the typewriter). I could hardly have a more cold-blooded detachment from junkies than they do from themselves and others in the neighborhood. I doubt if they care if I live or die (if I fell out of the window and was lying dead or unconscious on the ground they would go through my pockets).

How does this fit with the notion of having no beliefs and putting your trust in the universe? If people shoot up in an empty lot, are trees an antidote for disappointing humans? That reminds me, I still have a dead tree in the kitchen. Floor to ceiling, it's been there for nearly two months.

Where was I? Digressing all over the place. Late afternoon with the Czech woman who had been tired and withdrawn, but was coming around after the first few sips of whiskey. She admitted she might be an alcoholic whose contradictions are wreaking

havoc on her love life, not to say her spiritual condition. She wanted "guidance," hence another Bhagwan lecture.

She went off on a tangent, taking straight shots of whiskey and laughing. She read something in the paper which left her thinking what a strange country this is (I wouldn't argue with that). It was a review of a one-woman show starring Annie Sprinkle[55] - an ex-prostitute who made porno films and had several thousand "partners." All of this was treated with derisive mirth by the Czech woman, wondering what will this country think of next. Ms. Sprinkle will lie back for anyone who wants to view her cervix with a flashlight (having flashbacks to the womb). She also masturbates on stage. The Czech woman wants to send the article to her friends in Prague who could use a laugh.

We talked about her affair with the Latino man which had disintegrated. The only good thing about it was the sex. Also, when you find a good-looking man, chances are you won't be the only one in his loose schedule. She said he would openly flirt with her women friends, one or two of which she isn't talking to anymore. "Women can be so slimy," she said, when it comes to gravitating towards another woman's boyfriend.

7 p.m. She left, and the mambo music on the radio gave way to Albinoni's "Adagio" turned up full blast. It was a subdued and slightly depressing afternoon, if only in being overcast. A sullen atmosphere, though I shouldn't slander the weather with the fallacy of making it emotional (it's not man-made). Oddly enough, it corresponded to the wedding of the ex-girlfriend a hundred miles away. She is a fading familiarity. Some would prefer not to remember the past. When it overlaps on the present it can leave you feeling like you're two places at once.

[55] Her real name is Ellen Steinberg.

I lay on the bed thinking about how a Zen monk would trigger a state of enlightenment with a form of shock treatment. A sudden impact, jarring a student. It is more subtle when delivered in the form of a non-rational koan, and more overt when a student wonders how to find enlightenment. He is caught up in his mental habits and their chain-link logic. In order to break those links, the monk sits there quietly, then hits him with a stick.

I wondered if this applied to my living in the Tenderloin. It is a hot bed of arbitrary shocks, not just the sudden noises, or walking out and seeing someone who stops you cold, interrupting your train of thought. Strangers who are not exactly holy men, but drifting with a certain disconnection from the usual cause and effect existence. There are jarring incidents of being threatened or robbed. Strange as it may sound, it felt like having my wallet stolen was a Zen moment. It was almost worth it. That might explain why I walked out of the store in a state of wonder, watching an anonymous thief running away with my ID. How much do Zen moments have to do with divesting yourself of everything inside your wallet: from money to identity (and ego). One minute it's there and the next it isn't, a reminder of the transitory.

8 p.m. A Russian opera on the radio. I lay down with a Mexican blanket over my head. Half an hour later I went out, walking to the Cambodian place. It was empty and open. The same young waitress was there with an older woman. She was more open than last week when I was there with Ming. I was at a table close to the counter in back where she was peeling apples and asking if anyone turned in my wallet. I told her about it last week.

Chicken curry with pineapple, chile, coconut juice, and rice.

A quiet meal, interspersed with her occasional questions and comments. She was back in her friendly mode and ventured several questions, asking where was my woman friend from last week. Maybe she wanted to know if Ming was my girlfriend, and what about my male friend from the week before that? I wasn't very talkative for some reason. She was flipping through a catalogue, looking at dresses. She has gone from a refugee camp in a foreign country to San Francisco. School is of no interest to her. I asked her what classes she is taking, forgetting that for some that is a boring topic.

When I was leaving I said goodnight. She said, "Careful," and smiled. That made the desultory conversation seem better, and the curry was good.

11 p.m. On the typewriter for a few hours.

2 a.m. Heavy metal on the radio (KUSF).

3 a.m. Went to sleep.

Sunday, Oct. 3, 1993

9 a.m. The phone was ringing (forgot to unplug it) and it woke me up. Ming said, "Hello sleepyhead!" No idea why she was calling so early, just wanted to talk.

I managed to make coffee and hold up my end of the conversation for an hour. We told each other about our weekend. I mentioned a nightclub. She told me about the wedding and how she didn't like her off-the-shoulder blue gown or being a bridesmaid. It was an atavistic if not hypocritical pose, but it went off okay. The bride and groom were getting "sloshed" at the reception, that being something they have in common. The groom wasn't as bad as she thought, more of a "cute German" in his forties (he is Austrian), and not so much the Hitlerian sympathizer she had heard about.

Meanwhile, her boobs were nearly falling out of her dress, the shoes hurt, and the old friends of the bride were not exactly there in force. There were her and two others who showed up late, missing the wedding, and one of them was moody. There was a hired DJ who took over the atmosphere, spinning some awful tunes.

11 a.m. I walked down the block and she drove up a minute later. I stood there like a male whore getting picked up by a woman. When I got in the car she handed me a twenty. I said for that amount I don't go below the waist. She was dropping off the car at her sister's place in Oakland. I was borrowing $20 for a play that afternoon. It was overcast and I was going to the theater.

2 p.m. I took a bus to the north end of town near the water. It's near my old place in a building which is slowly being rebuilt after the fire in March.

I walked through the rolling open grounds of Fort Mason with a view of the bay. Considering where I have lived for the last six months this sort of thing hits me with a sense of wonder, like I'm seeing it for the first time. It's hard to believe that people live in such gentle and refined surroundings. It felt like I was coming from the gravities of the gutter in a district of the walking dead and people on parole, and then I'm in the vicinity of sailboats.

The Magic Theater is in a warehouse on a pier. *Poetomachia* ("War of the Poets") by Amy Freed. It was loosely based on the lives of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Ted Hughes, and Robert Lowell. They interacted (over-acted?) in some plausible and implausible ways. I was surprised to find how satirical and funny to the point of caricature it was, though it loses something when you have satirical substitutes for someone's poetry. It seemed like an approach-avoidance when it was revealing the

pathologies of poets, exaggerating their obsessions and their worst lines, but with something missing. The caricature is ringing hollow with diminishing returns when it trades in the authentic for a few laughs. It's like giving weird dialogue and magnified sex organs to the figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

That's a cold assessment since the play held up. Two hours long and I wasn't bored. It had a hypnotic hold on me, although it helped that I was sitting in a dark theater and feeling faint if not ephemeral, not having eaten much. One of those rare situations where the writing is as good as the acting. The opening scene was brilliant, a takeoff on an interview with Ted Hughes and Robert Lowell. The former is preoccupied with primal mulch, or mulch ado about nothing. He has an animal obsession, if not the cosmic bestiality of a Michael McClure. The Ted character had a deep low voice, thoroughly imbued with himself and the sexuality of the primordial ooze. The interviewer turned to the Lowell character for his comments. He's an old man nodding off and said, "If my aunt had a dick, she'd be my uncle."

Two airy intermissions, or were they watery since we're on a pier? I went outside for a long view of the natural and relaxed. I went back in for a close up of unnatural tensions in the literary world.

When it was over, the theater half full, I stood around in the lobby. I recognized the actress from a previous play (she knows the Phantom since they work at the same diner in Berkeley). She did a drop-dead version of Emily Dickinson. One thing about the playwright, Amy Freed, she is familiar with Camille Paglia and has a good balance, satirizing male poets who're out on a dead limb or brandishing some dirty roots, but giving it to the women too, the ones who flush themselves down a toilet of themselves.

Goodbye cruel world, here goes my hermetic self-important vortex. She had Sylvia standing in a window, making a silhouette of an ancient goddess, but her last words before she jumped were: "HE PUSHED ME!"

There was no mention of her kids. No actual poets were quoted. I'm not so sure that Lowell was a lie, or that the stick-in-the-mud poetics of Ted Hughes (which I never made much headway with) were more important than fidelity. I found Sylvia more inspired, not to say wired, as she was guided off the rocks and shallows of technically competent writing by Ted. She found an inkwell for her ultimate pen, an indigo of inner vertigo from which there was eventually no return.

Anne Sexton was seen as a skin-deep aging alcoholic. One woman looking at another with a critical perspective. Her inkwell is her own body, and maybe there is pen envy. The diminishing returns of being her. The dialogue was ringing true, for example the polite interrogation of her adolescent daughter, asking if her pubic hair was growing.[56]

I spoke with the actress for a while. She said I should wait for Ms. Freed. I had sent her my poem about Emily and Camille, and she wanted to say hello.

A few minutes later she appeared and I was introduced. It could have been a little awkward but it wasn't. We were on common ground, having similar reference points and sympathies. She was clutching a book of colonial American poetry – her next play is about Cotton Mather (a Puritan minister in Boston, 1663 – 1728). She had a sharp profile and long blonde hair. Strands of it were nearly in her eyes, which had a blue and

[56] The daughter, Linda Gray Sexton, published a memoir in 1994 called *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton.* There is a scene where the daughter is sitting at the foot of her mother's bed while watching TV, and realizes her mother is masturbating while lying naked in the bed.

penetrating gaze. Her literary intelligence was coming out. Friendly, with whatever edges one acquires in being from New York and in her mid-thirties. I wonder what sort of disenchantments she has been through with men, given the workings of a well-honed (hell-won) mind.

With respect to my poem, she said she liked its combination of high and low brow, which is similar to her own approach. We talked about the play, with references to Sylvia Plath and a recent article in *The New Yorker* by Janet Malcolm. Her interest went up a few notches when I mentioned the libel suit brought by the head of the Freud House against Malcolm and *The New Yorker*.

Then a short woman walked up and more or less took over the conversation, just like that. Heavily penciled eyebrows and thick make-up. It was like I wasn't there. She was dying to meet the playwright and was going on about how much she liked the play, but not saying anything of substance. Gushing a bit, and it was getting on my nerves. She wanted to leave her phone number. There is a stereotype of Jewish women being pushy and intrusive, and she was doing her best to keep the stereotype alive. She had a nosy curiosity which left her asking me questions about the trial (which she never heard of).[57] It drove the playwright away, though not before I was back into the conversation. I had been holding up the wall for a few minutes.

I stood around for a while, talking with the actress. I was distracted by the actors who were now seen in a different light, being offstage. They were walking around in the lobby. I don't have much in common with actors, and think there is a natural antagonism between them and writers. You would think they are ten feet tall on stage, inhabiting a

[57] Oddly enough I recognized her, an old client from the office with a couple of flimsy slip and fall cases. She is something of a career plaintiff. She trips and it triggers a profit motive which has better reflexes than she does. Someone has to pay.

well-defined character. Offstage they are half the size and not so well defined. They are out of character and de-costumed, almost deflated. They seem to fall back into the ordinary, even in their appearance, as a way to get their bearings. The guy playing Ted Hughes reverted to a dull-normal look from which he can pivot in any direction, theatrically speaking.

I wondered if his distinctive profile led him into acting. Several actresses walked by in their street clothes. One who was a howling suicidal poet who summons visions seemed like someone who has never had a parking ticket. These metamorphoses of ordinary people are something to consider. I thought of a quiet unassuming girl I knew in high school. When I saw her onstage she was transformed into a magnified presence. Similarly, I saw an English band around 1980 in a deconsecrated church. It was Young Marble Giants. Afterward the singer walked by. She was small and average looking. You wouldn't know what sort of voice and power were inside her until they were unleashed onstage.

There are transformations which are more apparent with women. Many have been held back from those, inhabiting a realm of polite restraint more than men do – at least in public. Many men have known the harrowing transformation which occurs when faced with a furious wife or girlfriend. In theater and music though I like the metamorphoses. They show us what's inside a girl.[58]

I'm hooked on regular doses of this sort of thing, even at my own expense. It's more interesting to know a woman prefers other women, for example, than to guard myself from that knowledge while wasting my time with her. When I was arrested for the

[58] The Cramps, "What's Inside a Girl" (1986)

DUI last year and brought to the station I opted for the blood test. It is the most accurate. I wanted to know the facts, even though it's harder to refute than a breath test.

There was a line in the play about poets who function as demythifiers and reality checks. They're "turning false gold into true lead." It puts lead in their pencil.

There was a scene where Ted puts Sylvia into a hypnotic trance, encouraging her to summon up an ancient vision of Aztec rites. Her eyes are closed, describing slowly what she sees. He is taking notes and getting into it. As the scene unfolds, she describes a fat and naked brown-skinned woman surrounded with masturbating men. A small man is on top of her, between her legs. Sylvia is disgusted by the fleshiness of the woman. It reminded me of women with neurotic fears of being absorbed by their own flesh, becoming mere amoebas of the physical. It might account for weight-obsessions which go beyond what most men care about or notice. It is kind of spineless when they blame men for their own dislike of body fat, as if they are socially determined automatons with no psychology of their own.

Sylvia summons a vision of a woman who is nothing but flesh and a lot of it, dull-eyed, on her back, spreading her legs like a vegetating slut. It is the sort of thing that most women aren't impressed with as a way of life. But Sylvia slowly brightens and her voice lights up as she describes what happens next. The confidence shifts from him to her. Ted looks more and more uncomfortable as she describes the fleshpot slowly sucking the man into her body until he disappears (with one finger sticking out like "a negative birth… in reverse"). When Ted brings her out of the trance he is not in a good mood and leaves. There is some suggestion that he might restore his confidence with another woman. The

specter of the Devouring Female is why some men will go from woman to woman before they're sucked in and they suffocate.

He bolted, but there was probably more to it. Ted didn't want to be consumed by a self-centered mental vortex which ended up devouring her. He may have been escaping from that, rather than her cunt. I've heard that men are afraid of women's pussies – or so some feminists like to think. That's why most men never look at naked women, and refuse to have sex with them. Oddly enough some women characterize themselves and their power in physical terms, but it's possible their minds would make a man think twice or head for the door. Some women's minds are like a whirling garbage disposal of mundane concerns and self-centered contradictions in which a man's thoughts and dimension are ground up. Some women have a mind like an adding machine from which you want to subtract yourself. Some women have a mind like a vacuum jar with X-ray vision. It judges every move you make while seeing through your male presumptions. The mind of a woman is more slippery and formidable than her pussy.

There was some suggestion of a cast party later on, but I left. I walked out on the pier with a warehouse on it and leaned against the wall, having a cigarette. It was a placid atmosphere with the swelling currents in the water. A seagull stood nearby with the arm of a starfish in its mouth. It couldn't swallow the whole thing, but didn't want to let go (might be a Ted Hughes poem there).

I walked to the end of the pier, feeling theatrical and faint to the point of transparency. This part of town is calm compared to the Tenderloin. The clouds hung over the town like a dreary lid. On the horizon to the north the hills were being hit with sunlight in the late afternoon. A seal's head broke the surface of the water and then dove

into its own disappearance. It was windy and I walked to the other side of the pier, but kept looking back. I might turn into a salty piling.

I walked a few blocks, passing a bush of violet flowers like something I'm not used to anymore, and took a bus on a curving road through the Presidio woods. It passed a grove of eucalyptus trees where I had sex with the ex one night. We were walking home from a party at two in the morning and ended up on the soft ground. It was her idea. This was nearly a year ago, with our affair having dissolved a year before that, but we would revive it now and then.

I knocked on the door of the flat with the sound-room. There was no one home. I stood there for a minute and considered leaving a note. Then I heard her voice and Ming walked up with a female roommate (they were buying toilet paper on Haight Street). She sounded gratified to find a man on her doorstep. "How nice… aren't you spontaneous…." We went into her room which was nearly empty. I wore brown slacks and a burgundy silk shirt (with a grey sport coat). Ming liked the shirt. She was trying to clean the room and getting nowhere. There was a map of the world on the wall which she didn't want, so she gave it to me.

The evening was unfolding in a way that I am less and less familiar with. People would come over and hang out, sitting in a kitchen full of plants with someone cooking rice and curry. There was wine and idle conversation with whoever was there. I wonder if I'm losing touch with that sort of thing, stuck in forward motion with the isolating reverb of the typographic. It reminds me of an Albee play where a long-married couple are visited by another couple and slowly realize their friends don't want to leave. The visitors

were overwhelmed with a sense of loneliness or dread while at home. They had gotten spooked, and were gravitating to a more communal warmth and support.[59]

I went out for some wine with Ming and her ex-boyfriend. He has long hair and works in an oyster shop. It requires a lot of shuck and jive. He dropped out of college for the time being, and we get along. He feels demoted around her, not the boyfriend anymore. There was a curious dynamic between them as they punched each other on the way to the liquor store. It was something she instigated, but they were being humorous about it.

We talked in the kitchen. He said his sister who is seventeen wrote a report on Sylvia Plath. The conversation was bouncing all over the place and off the wall, in and out of interesting topics. Then the Phantom of the sound-room showed up. He was disporting himself rather well, wanting to show Ming that he doesn't have to drink. He wasn't there very long, but was more alert and comical than usual - he does a good English accent.

Another roommate arrived, J., having flown in from Michigan. He was in a white shirt and tie with long straight hair combed back. A serious pothead and drinker in his early twenties who for reasons he is not sure of works in a financial office downtown. He keeps a long journal with a tiny tortured script, and tends to be a wired talker with a raspy voice.

Two or three hours later, around midnight, everyone was gone or asleep. The ex-boyfriend had left. I was sitting on the bed in her room – which is the Phantom's room. He sleeps in the sound-room off the garage. He would give up his room and anything else

[59] *A Delicate Balance* (1966)

for that woman. Her attitude shifted in the blink of an eye, saying it is harder having several men around than one-on-one or at a party. I said especially if two of them are ex-boyfriends. Okay, one and a half. She is on a different wavelength with each one, and her signals get tangled when they're in the same room.

We got into one of those close and quiet late-night conversations while relaxing. There were her quandaries about love and men and sex, and why it is impossible for her to focus on one man. I think I hit a nerve, with her going on about men being sentimental. They form connections which she isn't sentimental about. It's possible she is unclear on the concept of the romantic. I'm not sure if her upbringing had something to do with that, having grown up with more practicality than love. I said some men are more romantic because they're looking for sex. Some women are a little cold if they have technical difficulties in bed with someone. That hit her gently right between the eyes.

1 a.m. We were lying in bed when she sat up, removing her shorts and T-shirt. She struggled into some child-like red body-pajamas with a flap in back. It was cold. The place has no heat and lousy plumbing (the landlord is a black man, for what it's worth). I ended up wearing her violet long johns and a T-shirt. We fell asleep, lying close together.

Monday, Oct. 4, 1993

9 a.m. Coming to, more or less in unison. There was the usual morning routine with a laying on of hands. She craves the touch of someone, and is one of the more tense women I know. It ends up in her shoulders, back, and neck, along with her butt and under her breasts. She acts as loose and unconcerned as anyone, but stores the tension. I rubbed her shoulders and back, along with her behind (by special request). Eventually I had her

up in the air, balanced on my bent legs while I lay on my back. I gently threw her off the bed, somehow falling off myself.

The morning was overcast, a little dreary and low key. We didn't do much. Attending to the fundamentals of existence I suppose, communing in the ordinary which tends to be reconstituted in the company of someone you love. She would say it is the same for her, the company of others is a constant source of energy and renewal. We sat around in the kitchen for a while with the roommate who had flown in last night. He was taking the morning off - talking, making breakfast, and reading the paper.

1 p.m. I walked with her a few blocks. We had a quick kiss and I caught a bus to the Tenderloin.

3 p.m. I left for work. If you let yourself drift, while picking up vague signs, you might find yourself in the vicinity of something out of the ordinary. In this case, the President of the United States. I walked on Geary to the bus stop and noticed the streets were blocked off. There was something in the air. I kept walking, then glanced down a street near the Hilton and saw more police with barricades and a small crowd. I headed in that direction. You know that someone important is in town when there are sniper lookouts on the roofs. There was not much publicity for this, and only a small crowd on Ellis Street, some of whom were the local derelicts and unemployed.

There were a number of heavily equipped riot police standing around. I asked a black woman in uniform what this was about. She was doing absolutely nothing and was presumably on the public payroll, but couldn't be bothered and said to ask someone else. I have run into this before, like the imperious black woman bus driver who was unclear

on the concept of being a public employee while turning a cold shoulder on the public. It's like she compensated for the quota with an attitude.

A few minutes later the motorcade on the next block went into motion. There were motorcycle cops, a few vehicles, and then a couple of limousines. In the second one was Bill Clinton, sitting in the backseat with his profile in the window and a dim wave. I imagine the limo is bulletproof. He's a large man. For a passing second I was ten or twenty feet from him, which is nothing to write home about.

The motorcade had nearly thirty vehicles, including some press vans with reporters talking into mobile phones. There was an ambulance near the end, just in case. They cruised beneath the window of my apartment. It makes you wonder about the security of anyone – even the President – who will slip into town now and then for a meeting (there was an AFL-CIO gathering at the Hilton). There was some guy on the curb with a hastily written sign: NAFTA NOT. Anyone getting wind of his departure route could show up with a gun, but as I said the snipers were on the lookout, and who knows how many undercover agents were in the crowd.

I walked to work. The Attorney was in court, and I was talking to V. with her usual skepticism. I said I saw Clinton and she thought I was lying. I told her I saw a play about poets. "Boring." I mentioned that two women kill themselves in the play, and her interest picked up.

Tuesday, Oct. 5, 1993

12:30 p.m. I arrived in the office and went with V. to Chinatown. She wanted to pick up some "steam buns" at a little shop. She said, "I have buns too." I imagine they are pretty steamy. Now and then she seems to relish a risqué remark.

She also wanted to show me some figurines in the window of a store on Grant. I thought it might be little Buddha statues. She was looking for the window and then found it. As we walked up she pointed to some small and delicate carvings (wrote cravings) of couples copulating. I thought they were nice and went inside. She followed a minute later. For a while the woman behind the counter was pulling down one set or another and putting them on the counter. There were couples in the "Japanese style" which were detachable. A woman lying back in open robes, knees spread, with a little hole in which a man's erection fits. It had the finest detail, as you might imagine for rendering a hard-on which is half an inch long. The woman said they were made of alabaster (they looked like ivory). There were various positions, including one man with two women, one of whom was kneeling near his head and holding her yoni to his mouth.

The couples came in two sizes, around three inches and five inches. I felt detached, if not detachable, and looked them over, picking up one couple and separating them to see how it worked. More precious than these figurines was the fact that V. wanted me to see them, standing back and smiling like it was natural and kind of cute. It would have been a nice touch if she was conveying a message, but I don't think that's what she had in mind.

We looked at the precious stones – sapphires, opals, rubies, emeralds, and amethysts. She said the sapphire is her stone. Then we tore ourselves away from the exquisite to have some tacos. During the conversation I mentioned the men's club on

Friday night, using some discretion, and said one of the dancers had talked with me for half an hour at my table. “She must have been bored.”

5:30 p.m. I left work and walked to B.’s place, having phoned ahead. She is leaving tomorrow for a three-week trip across the Western United States, and was going to a musical tonight, *Crazy for You*. I wanted to borrow a racket in case Stormy was sincere about meeting on a court. The odds weren’t very good. As the saying goes, “Tennis is a game where love means nothing.”

B. is on the sixth floor, but when I stepped into the iron elevator I pressed 3 automatically (I live on the third floor in No. 310). I got out, walking down an identical hall to the door (No. 310) and knocked. A man answered which I was prepared for, her having said a friend was there. I was kind of forward. I shook his hand, gave my name, and asked if B. was there. He looked a little surprised and said I must have the wrong apartment.

I levitated to the sixth floor and found her (the man had gone). She looked semi-formal and after she kissed me a couple of times she showed me the rock on her finger. It was “from mother.” She took it off and I tried to put it on. It would have been a knockout in the sunlight, a two-carat diamond with two smaller diamonds on either side.

She was in a frenzy, though she managed to pour me a glass of wine (merlot does not belong in the refrigerator). Her mind was scattered across several levels. Cole Porter, diamonds, her mother, a broken guitar string, the loaning of a sleeping bag from her girlfriend, not to mention the racket. “You’re playing tennis with a stripper!?”

Half an hour later we were on the street and she met her ride, having arranged for her girlfriend to drop off the sleeping bag at my place. I walked to Hyde Street and ran

into Aisha, the receptionist from the office. She lives in the neighborhood and has an air of innuendo about her. She started to say our being neighbors was "Too close…" and both of us said, "… for comfort." I walked home, having a nice day for some reason. Things kept clicking, including the phone.

There was a phone call from my sister in Portola Valley. Among other things she said she met a rocket scientist, something to do with Computational Fluid Dynamics. He wants her on his softball team. "He's looking for a short stop?"

There were a couple of calls from B.'s girlfriend, Ilsa, and she finally showed up around 10 p.m. I went downstairs to the lobby, not sure what to expect. There was a momentary recoil but I got over it. B. had intimated that she has a hard edge and I could see what she meant. A hard-body slender blonde on the short side, where B. is a tall brunette with a fluid figure who is often up in the air. This one has her feet on the ground. I realized what B. might see in her, the matter-of-fact solidity which B. has a hard time coming by. A woman of Germanic background, and very tan with long bleached hair. She used to be an assistant city manager in Florida. I noticed she was wearing a loose jacket over a blouse of see-through lace and nothing underneath it.

She had a nice smile and handed me the sleeping bag. We talked for a while in the old lobby with its chandeliers, then I walked her across the street to her car. She had an immediate awareness of the prostitutes (and works with a bisexual support group). According to B. she is a little too objectifying, not to say mechanical, when it comes to sex. (I think sex is objectifying to the extent it involves body parts). She gave me her phone number and said I should come over some time. There are courts at her place which is only five blocks away. My place is nearly equidistant between their apartments.

I levitated in an iron elevator to a typewriter and a wooden instrument.

2:30 a.m. Went to sleep.

Wednesday, Oct. 6, 1993

10:30 a.m. Woken by the phone. It was Ming, saying she wants to go swimming. The conversation wandered through the latest confusion with the ex-boyfriend. It's like his confusions are seeping into her life, what with her being back here and hanging out with him. She realized she might like to have him around, and feels bad about making him wait for her. He had a miserable year since they broke up (which was her idea). She was struck by how emotional he is and wonders why she isn't. Ming is having second thoughts about keeping him in the picture, but her conscience is bothering her and she is being careful. She doesn't want to revive it and then leave him again. Her plans and ambitions don't include him. Not only is she going to China for a couple of months, it will be with her business partner from Alaska. She thought the ex-boyfriend knew that. He didn't, and was upset.

She told him she slept with the partner "a few times," which made it worse. How did they get on the subject? The ex-boyfriend made some reference to masturbating, and she said the business partner used to do it "in front of me." One thing led to another. She thinks it is a pleasant curiosity to watch a man jack off, and doesn't mind that sort of thing. It is not something she indulges in herself since it doesn't work very well (she tried it a couple of times up north, feeling pent-up and frustrated, but wasn't sure if the business partner lying next to her was asleep or not). She said if she ever needs a man they aren't hard to find, although I remember her going for months without anyone.

We were on the phone for over an hour. She is the fourth woman who has commented recently about how they tell me everything (the women in question are twenty-three, thirty-one, thirty-three, and forty years old). They spill their guts, their innermost thoughts, when it comes to love and men and women. There are permutations to consider, not to mention fluctuating phenomena, the things which hold their attention in a humanoid dimension.

Each one has made a similar observation: "I suppose you're putting all of this into your book." I am, although I'm not sure why. Because it's there? The obsessions and preoccupations which are fundamental and relentless, even when they sound redundant (the earth is redundant and well-rounded). After hearing their stories for a while, with the behavioral patterns unfolding, it is hard to ignore. Love is a dimension which can tear your heart out or give you a new one. There is not much you can do if it hurts. It is one of the few things you can't sue anyone about. People sue the city and county and anyone else if they so much as trip on a sidewalk, but when it comes to having loved and lost there is no relief.

Ming was not in the mood for swimming anymore. We went from talking about masturbation to her suggesting a hot tub.

12:30 p.m. I walked to Grand Central Hot Tubs and Sauna near the Civic Center and met her in the lobby. We got a room. It was cool and overcast outside, and this was just what the doctor ordered.

The rooms are lined with redwood and have a radio, rather than tile with piped-in music. The hot tub was hot. We kept getting out of it and lying on the side, half in and half out. There were some comments about her physical coordinates. Those are like a

constellation for some people. It's how they get their bearings, more so than the magnetic poles of the earth. She rearranges her hair with nervous hands like I will postulate the fingering of guitar chords. It is something to hold onto or to occupy your hands.

Ming was lying on the side of the wooden tub and grabbing her belly which is more than she wanted. She is 5'4" and pushing 140 pounds. She wants to lose ten pounds, though is not sure how to go about it. She hasn't been working out, though she keeps talking about it. One minute she is resigned and matter-of-fact about her form, and the next is sounding derisive, showing how her breasts are wider and less buoyant and her legs are not as toned as they used to be. It isn't anything most men would notice, but some women magnify their situation for better or worse.

There was an interlude where we were sitting side by side on a bench in the sauna. There was a comment about her pubic hair getting bushier. She said it was soft. I reached over and pulled it gently.

So when did she nearly faint? Kneeling on the floor under a cold shower? Or after she was lying on her back on the edge of the tub? I was sitting next to her and doing a soft motion on her chest bone with my hand. It made her breasts move. I described a scene where she is floating in the air.

"On what?"
"A seagull."
"Too small."
"Okay, an angel…"

All the way to China where she is welcomed like a long-lost daughter and ends up as a successful businesswoman in Hong Kong. That would be fine, she said, as long as she can have five husbands.

There was an interlude on the white sheet mattress, lying on her back with her legs spread. I stood there rubbing her knee. She was contented and didn't worry about the view between her legs. It disappeared into a dark bush, the reality and maintenance of which can leave it disconnected from romantic considerations.

I said, "If I am reverb, you're distortion." She wasn't sure how to take that. I scratched her skin lightly with long strokes along her torso and legs. She may have sensed the situation was drifting into some potential for a more satisfying outcome, but I didn't push it. We both know it is problematic when her sexuality is aroused.

She felt faint near the end of the hour and didn't like it. Ming looks at the vulnerability of certain feelings and wonders why she thinks that love is a weakness. It is wreaking havoc on her life. Did she get it from bitter feminist propaganda, a certain Chinese chill in how she was brought up, or what? She recovered, sitting on the mattress and drying off while I put my clothes on. While she was putting lotion on herself, we wondered what would have happened if she fainted and I had to carry her naked and unconscious out of the building, a fallen woman on Fell Street.

In the lobby we relaxed, having a cigarette and getting ready to leave. An odd couple came in and paid for a room. There was a sense of an older man with a younger woman hired off the street. I have seen her in the neighborhood. It was hitting Ming a little close to home. She commiserated, while saying, "What a slut." The woman was nearly the same age, and Chinese I think. There are not many of those on the street corners. She had the look of a careless punk-coquette. I've seen her in loose overalls, no shirt, and a black lace bra with a nice figure. She has an air of being a bit strung out or dazed and confused, and here she was with an older white man in his forties. He glanced

at us with a look that was numb or noncommittal. Ming was speculating on how the woman came to be doing this. Was it drugs? A cruel father at home? She wants to interview the girls on the street and find out how it works, how much they make, and how they came to be there.[60]

We walked out, heading towards the farmers' market in the Civic Center with her saying how good she felt, and mentioned the Phantom. He told her he went to a Chinese massage parlor and had sex with a young woman. He asked if he could call her Ming. The Phantom is concerned about his premature ejaculation, so maybe he was practicing. For her it was like talking about dry skin or sagging tits.

We felt purified from the sauna and were surrounded with fresh produce. She was gratified that green peppers were only 45 cents a pound. It's like a state of mind where vegetables are a wholesome diversion, and it reminds me of enlightenment. You wonder if enlightenment has anything in common with the worldview of some women. There are simple moments while the sand is raked in unassuming parallels. An awareness of the air. A stillness with a sensory magnification of the skin, a flower, a zucchini. There are men who get a contact high from being around a woman like that.

We went across the street to a Chinese restaurant which was nearly empty. Rock cod with black beans on rice. A weak soup in which she poured whatever spices she could find. She was supposed to be somewhere at two to help a friend recycle, or to recycle a friend, but was in such a good mood she blew it off. I think she is one of those for whom social relations and her own self-image are changing direction by the hour.

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[60] When Ming was in college a couple of years ago, she arranged an interview with the woman who runs La Casa de las Madres, a refuge for battered women. She asked me to come along in case she ran out of questions (which she did), and to handle the tape recorder. The woman was resigned to the fact that most of the wives and girlfriends go back to their abuser.

Is a woman more seductive if she gives the impression she can be seduced by the world around her? She is impressionable with her senses in the lead, however mercurial and eccentric. It leaves her trying to figure out what she's made of. The men who live by her sensual flux are sometimes washed up high and dry. They wonder what happened as her life-force changes course.

She was talking about the ex-boyfriend who she didn't write to when she was gone, saying he should know if it's in her heart, even if she didn't show it. I said isn't that the opposite of how she operates, with the tests that she applies to men? Well yes, now that you mention it. She thought she had a lot nerve to feel uneasy about the ex-boyfriend sleeping with some girl while Ming was gone (like maybe once), her having been with others.

She mentioned that she was uncomfortable with his mother, along with his twin sister, being mean or condescending to him. She thought the mother, who is long divorced, doesn't like men. The bossy sister has a young drummer right where she wants him, caught in her web where she can extract his essence. There was a song in the background, "Some Enchanted Evening." I said "It's leading to a disillusioned morning." Ming said her blood is green. I said, "Maybe your blood would eat through the floor like acid." It was in reference to a scene in *Alien*, but she didn't think it was a compliment.

We walked back to the open market with its hybrid pears and gaping fish heads, and picked up a few more things. I walked her to a bus stop next to the law school (and its lawyer larvae). We kept bumping into each other. She gets her bearings through physical contact of some sort, almost like a blind person. While waiting for the bus she

leaned her head on my shoulder. When a bus pulled up I kissed her and went to work, arriving around 4 p.m.

I left with V. around five. We were on the elevator with four young women from the office. Two were black and two were Filipina. There was some mention of an accident on the underground monorail. I mentioned an incident in the paper where a man was in a subway station in Chicago. He was drunk and pissing off the edge of the platform. His "arc of transcendence" hit the third rail (the one with the high voltage) (talk about future shock) and his life was over. His girlfriend sued the city, and after years of litigation won $1.5 million (there was no warning sign about urinating on the tracks). I had to explain it again as one of them could hardly grasp the concept.

V. is tired of a couple of women in the office who complain a lot. Her young replacement is ready to quit because of it. Not only are they authoritarian and demanding with the younger women, but their griping is hard to listen to. One of them is Jewish, in her mid-to-late thirties, and has a somewhat slovenly look. The other is in her fifties. V. is taken aback by how plainspoken they are.

I returned to the office and worked for a while.

7 p.m. I walked home.

11 p.m. Having gone without dinner I was feeling faint. I had something going on the typewriter when the phone rang. It was the Czech woman. She told me about an incident which was so tedious I nearly started reading the paper or falling asleep. Even worse, she used the word "weird" about twenty times until I finally said no, it's very common. The whole episode was a magnified non-event shot through with her hypocritical evasions. She is used to resisting men, but found she was interested in

someone. However, her girlfriend met him first. They were at Brainwash, the laundromat-café.[61] The man in question was giving meaningful glances in her direction. She didn't think he was interested in her girlfriend, but more in her. "Isn't that weird?" She thinks that women will run over other women for a man, so she was being careful. She finally realized I wasn't responding very much, and said we should go to a hot tub sometime.

We got off the phone and I was back on the typewriter. The tendency of women to tell me their problems is wearing on me.

2 a.m. Split pea soup and bread. Afterwards I went to bed, and lay there scribbling riffs from the letters in the phrase, "lightning rod."[62]

Thursday, Oct. 7, 1993

In the morning I felt relaxed, having sweated in a sauna.

12:30 p.m. I arrived at the office. V. and I walked to Chinatown with her picking up steam buns and being more diverting than usual. She was talking about "the fishermens," and something that was news to me. Her boyfriend is getting jealous. "Of what?" "You." That didn't bother her at all. I was taking her to the Fairmont Hotel after work and he had gotten wind of it. He gave her some rhetoric about how he would never see her again if she went, but it didn't phase her.

We went to the Vietnamese place through one of the alleys in Chinatown. They are not so different from the streets, but she was hesitating. She thought it might be

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[61] Many years later I was reading my poems all over town, and one of the venues was Brainwash. When the MC said we had ten minutes to update a fairy tale I came up with a stoner version of Hansel and Gretel. I later had an affair with a writer about my age, and one of her woman friends was the architect of Brainwash.

[62] Nihil god… rotting dig… thing noir… gin night lord… thin gringo.

dangerous (opium dens? Chinese gangs?), and then said, “What if there’s urine?” (it’s not the Tenderloin). It was a harrowing experience, but we made it through.

We shared a round table with two Vietnamese men. Barbecued chicken, rice, imperial rolls, and tea. The conversation was a breeze. I think our faces can communicate. When I tap into her past, with her having grown up in Manila, I hear about another world. She went to a private Catholic girls’ school with nuns. At twelve she had an older “boyfriend” who was sixteen. She wouldn’t let him kiss her, and could care less if he was there or not. It is not uncommon there for girls to marry at sixteen or younger.

She grew up in an insular world, partly for her own protection. Manila gets a little rough. I was hearing about the patriarchal customs. There are levels of pomposity from Korea to the Philippines which are hard to fathom. It’s like if you have a dick, you’re pompous. I wouldn’t say there is an international male conspiracy in this regard. How would it work? Men are not the best of friends in their own countries, much less across borders. More to the point, I’m not the only person of the male persuasion who is underwhelmed when confronted with a vain and patriarchal son of a bitch who has been spoiled by his mother and sisters, and assumes a neo-fascist order to the world in which he has a pre-ordained position. A lot of men find that sickening, and would like to take him down a few notches.

V. was talking about how there is no divorce in the Philippines, although there are differences between the older and younger generations these days. Sometimes I will ask her a dumb question about the Philippines and she gets exasperated. On the other hand, she is not well informed about the Spanish-American War in 1898. The U.S. was

wreaking havoc in the Philippines after it kicked out the Spanish.[63] For that matter, she never heard of Bali.

A word went by, "*mahal*," meaning love. I asked if there were different words for different kinds of love, or the varying circumstances in which love occurs. Or is it like here where the same word is used in different contexts, causing a fair amount of psychological confusion? (I love you. I love God. I love ice cream. My dog loves me.) She said, "Sort of," but it isn't used for mundane things.

Then she realized the time. We were late and left in a hurry. She likes to be rushed, and was brought up being conscientious and respectful of authority, unlike some of the women in the office who she thinks are bitchy and demanding. There was not much going on at work, so I read the paper. The Attorney was in the conference room with a client, a woman with domestic problems.

The ex-security guard walked in. I'm not sure if we're handling his case, but I spoke with him and heard the whole story. He is caught between depression and a certain defiance, a black man in his early thirties with a clean record. Six years in the military. Worked three years as a security guard until it fell apart. A month ago he was walking to work. He was two blocks away, on the edge of Chinatown, and crossing the street when two or three younger Chinese men appeared. They were escorting a Chinese man in his fifties across the street, and seemed to be his bodyguards. I'm not sure if that has a shady connotation or not. The ex-security guard got too close in passing, maybe brushing

[63] Mark Twain was so disgusted by what the U.S. was doing in the Philippines he joined the Anti-Imperialist League. "We have robbed a trusting friend of his land and his liberty; we have invited clean young men to shoulder a discredited musket and do bandit's work under a flag which bandits have been accustomed to fear, not to follow; we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world." "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901)

against one of them, and there was “an altercation,” beginning with the bodyguards speaking Chinese to each other. He asked them to speak English. One of them turned and insulted him in English. In no time he was fighting off two of them, which was not too difficult since he is strong and muscular (he lifts weights). They wouldn’t quit, however, and he was worried about more of them arriving. It felt like he was on their turf and anything could happen, so he pulled a gun. They backed off. He was really shaken when he said how close he came to pulling the trigger.

They called the police and he was picked up a few minutes later (I think in the lobby downstairs). He said the police were polite and sympathetic, but he still got stuck with a misdemeanor – carrying a concealed weapon (no permit). The worst part is a security guard can’t have a police record – no arrests – even for something regarding his own security. So he was fired.

The Chinese were never arrested. He wanted to press charges, but since he didn’t have any bruises from the fight it would have been hard. (I was thinking how a woman can make a case out of a ten-year-old thought crime, but something like this goes nowhere.) He is out of work and on the verge of being evicted (nonpayment of rent), and is having problems getting unemployment insurance. He is in the mood for fighting back against the security organization which dismissed him.

He said he is from Mississippi and wishes he was back there. This sort of thing would have been treated with more understanding. Guns are considered normal there, what with all the hunters, and the authorities would have understood that if he pulled his gun he probably had a reason. He might spend the night in jail, and then go back to work. Unfortunately, he had a woman judge who was for gun control and not on his side. I

wasn't clear on why he had to carry a gun in the first place, but it turns out he lives in my neighborhood and the gun is for protection.

He would have had a case if he had been unarmed and fighting with his fists. He was outnumbered, the bodyguards were threatening, and there were witnesses. However, the presence of other people was all the more reason not to wave a gun around. He's a nice guy though, and we wrote a letter of recommendation for him.

Half an hour later I was on the phone with a client. She wants to bring charges, although it sounds weak. Her husband is the lone Latino in a Honda shop. He has been there ten years and thinks they are trying to get him fired. The latest incident: some things were stolen and $800 is missing. He was accused, and put through two or three hours of demeaning interrogation. Later they apologized, but he is tense and upset. His mother is furious. The question is what sort of litigation would be warranted.

A few minutes later V. stood in front of my typewriter. She wanted me to help her write a complaint for personal injuries (vehicle related).

After work we took a cab up Nob Hill and got out at the Fairmont Hotel and walked into the lobby. She has never been there. I told her it was in the film, *The Maltese Falcon*, but she never saw it. We sat on a lounge while a woman fingered a harp underneath an ornate ceiling. It's an enormous room with columns to accommodate the egos of the guests. She was impressed. It was one of those perfect moments, having a cigarette and sitting near her. The look on her face was cool and collected, warm and reflective. Is it the caliber of this woman which is contagious, her curiosity and poise, or what?

I showed her the New Orleans Room where I saw Charles Brown a while back. Then we looked for the Tonga Room and found it on a lower level. It had an exotic dim-lit atmosphere, and she loved it as someone who takes to luxury like a flower takes to water. "Luxury, calm, and order," as Baudelaire put it. I never thought I would mention him and her in the same breath. I wouldn't say she hits me like opium – she frowns on drugs, for one thing – but something about her is addictive.

We were at a small table having pina coladas (hers without any alcohol), talking and relaxing. I wondered what sort of mood would occur away from the office and with one of us drinking rum. The other one was showing the effects, becoming more animated and familiar. Her capacity to get excited has an effect on me. It happens when you see the world through someone else's eyes, and her eyes are big. I told her they were a little bloodshot.

Her spirit as it touches on my life is like a lily landing on a murky pond and it's enough. I think she would be scornful of that image, having little truck with the poetic, and saying, "This lily has a sore back and financial worries."

She mentioned something about a film, having gotten wind of the *M. Butterfly* story, and was mystified. How could a foreign diplomat have an affair with someone from the Chinese opera who was a man in disguise? Her curiosity got the better of her discretion. I said as a pretty transvestite who stayed in character it was possible – all the more so if the foreign diplomat was in love with the image or the role and wasn't looking too closely. She said, "No… I mean the organs." She is realistic in that respect. How to get around the fact of there being no female body parts involved, and wouldn't the suitor have discovered that sooner or later? Maybe he did, but was being diplomatic. She was

saying how could one have a love affair with no female sex organs involved? We knocked it around for a few minutes. I said, "Consider the formalities of the time," and alluded to how a man could satisfy another without disturbing his clothing. Maybe it was oral gratification. She had to think about it.

I forgot to mention the scene in *Some Like It Hot* (1959) where a man in drag is tired of repelling the advances of an old guy. He rips off his wig and says, "I'm a man!" The old guy smiles, "Well, nobody's perfect!" We went on talking in a pseudo-tropical setting. Among other things, she told me her nickname in the Philippines was "Pinkie."

6:40 p.m. We left, walking through the main lobby and out the front door, looking for a cab. I was looking at the horizon and she was worried about the time. I live in a low-rent district, she inhabits the sublime. There were spectral vapors in the distance and the light was fading.

We descended in a cab into the canyons of the financial district. They were cut and formed by an endless stream of silver coins. We got out where we work and waited for her father. He runs the underground parking lot, and is something of an authoritarian figure. When I hear her speak Tagalog with him it sounds mellifluous.

While we waited on the sidewalk she was talking about the poor people in Manila. Young beggars come up, even in church, and tug at your jacket. She showed me how she would carry her purse, guarding it against thieves. While she told me this a black man with two young kids walked up and asked for change, so I gave him some.[64]

[64] I saw him months later in that location using the same routine with the same kids. That doesn't mean he didn't need the money. When I was in Grenada, Spain in the 1970's I saw a middle-aged gypsy woman holding an infant and motioning to her bare breast as if to say she needed money for her baby. I don't know if it was hers or not, but that doesn't mean she didn't need the money.

When V. left I walked home. There was a small amount of rum infused into the mood. I wondered what I'm doing with her, if it's like hovering in the vicinity of love while living alone. You want to hold onto the capacity for recognizing the potential, however impossible the outcome. The mutual recognition of it (even at a distance) is a form of love. She is used to the constraints of custom and necessity, but more and more she is revealing herself, describing her childhood, her room, her morning routine, her plans for the wedding. In the next breath she says we should do this again next week.

9 p.m. On a wooden instrument for an hour. Yesterday the sauna in the afternoon had purified the music. I'm not sure what was informing it now. A pina colada with a lot of love? There was a sudden sign off with a flurry of notes, and I lay down the guitar.

I forgot to mention a phone call this morning from my old history professor in Los Angeles. He was calling from his office and sounded professorial at first. Then he lightened up. There was some mention of the desultory conditions of the students. No discipline and they are not well-read. He is half-Jewish with a background in radical politics, but now and then will give it to the liberal Jews who have (in his opinion) diluted higher learning in order to reach more students.

He went to Paris a month ago and rattled off a list of churches and their stained-glass windows. I recognized some of them, like Saint Julien le Pauvre and Saint Etienne. He was impressed with the metro, but not with the deification of Napoleon. The French have a Napoleonic complex.

The Professor said he wanted to come up sometime and see his only grandson who is nearly a year old. I don't think he has seen him yet (his girlfriend won't allow it).

His grandson has a black father, but I'm not sure if he's still around.[65] I mentioned having my wallet stolen. He said it was time I got out of here. "You're too close to the edge." There are diminishing returns, or diminishing wallets at any rate.

10:30 p.m. Accidentally fell asleep.

1:30 a.m. I woke up with an erection and the remnants of a long dream fading in my mind. The radio with a blue dial. A low metallic throb near the window with a tower in the distance. A lunar crescent hanging over the town. All quiet on the futuristic front. When I turned off the lights the night was coming through the windows. The room was one with the night, and joined to the city like another cell.

Friday, Oct. 8, 1993

9 a.m. Coffee and typing for hours.

11 a.m. A wake-up call from Ming, except I was awake already. Some discussion as to who got up first. I said I felt narcoleptic (too much sleep). She was skeptical and brought up the subject of our going to the desert. I said I thought it was off. She said, "No, let's go." I said if she wasn't a mass of paradoxes I wouldn't recognize her. She said, "Yes you would." Apparently she is getting stressed out again, having been so relaxed in the hot tub the other day. She needs to level out and thought that lying around a swimming pool an hour from the Mexican border would be therapeutic. It looks like Monday morning we will take off for a few days.

[65] The Professor's daughter is a nurse. This is the one who went to a club for some live music not long ago, and was standing in the crowd when she felt someone's hand on her butt. She turned around to object and was slugged in the face by a black man who didn't like her attitude. While lying on the floor, half-unconscious, she was robbed.

Her weekend: abalone diving and the Reverend Horton Heat (a practitioner of rockabilly).

She is knee-deep in some messy unresolved emotional situations. My addiction to the typographic is floating me above a lot of that, but at the cost of being semi-remote from human contact. You're less prone to wallow in it when you have something else on your mind. Unfortunately there are women who sense if you're distracted. Some part of you is anchored in a realm they're not in touch with. You are not all there and neither are they, but the man is supposed to be a known quantity. The woman can remain more veiled, keeping her options open. The man should be well defined so she can know what handles to pull and buttons to push in order for the manipulations to occur which make her feel effective and secure.[66]

The torque and turbulence of her love life are all the more reason for my detachment. However, I was not so remote at the hot tub place when she was lying naked on her back. I held her legs straight out, more or less spreading her legs, and felt like a plane coming in for a landing. I wouldn't want to get so mental that my radar can't handle those landings.

I spoke later with Jon in the wine country. He said the mood he projects is either pulling women in or repelling them. For example, he has done Ecstasy ten or fifteen times and almost invariably he will end up with someone. The downside is when it wears off and there is not much to go on. Another chemically-induced one-night stand.

Also, when he is with a woman it attracts other women. When he isn't, it doesn't. He has had women "hit on" him (awful phrase) when he was out with another woman.

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[66] I was talking about women who are opportunistic with their ambiguities, and she apologized for all women.

There are women who are so shortsighted they can only tell if a man is worth it by who is with him. If they want to lure him away, testing their feminine wiles, they might lose interest when the man is theirs. He said he will go six months with nothing much in the way of female companionship. I was thinking he's twenty-nine, good looking, a bit eccentric (a heavy drinker on occasion), and the women are a transitory experience, something like the weather.

I wonder if there is a lifelong plan or blueprint working itself out which I am barely aware of. If you have weathered some intense love affairs, from those which go on for years to those which evaporate in weeks, and you have been doing it since you were sixteen and now you're forty-one, have you outlived it? That sounded stupid the minute it hit the page, but I'm thinking of the old days when the life expectancy was in the forties. It is growing longer like the shadows, but there is some reason to look at forty as a great divide. It can break the back of juvenile habits (or does that occur at twenty-seven), and you're not in the mood for love affairs which are dumb or confusing. "Fools rush in…" But I have not outgrown it. It's one in the morning and there is a Dylan song on the radio about careless love. Men go on forever with their love songs, but some never tried.

The curious thing is how the love I used to get from one woman now occurs in an expanded form with scattered characteristics and capacities involving half a dozen women. Maybe it's evolving on a spiritual plane, and nothing wrong with that, except when it comes to sleeping alone. How far do I want to evolve, and what's the next significant thing? I don't know if it's wedding bells or prostitutes or what (maybe a divorcee in the country).

When you consider the experimentation going on, the alienation and the broken homes, you remember that other people gravitate through 57 varieties of love and sex (or maybe I am doing that). If I feel like Ulysses tied to a typewriter with some female sirens in the distance, I should not untie myself. I know what those sirens can do - turn men into pigs, for one thing.

Where was I? Off the phone and typing in the afternoon. Staring out the window while the sky is moving to another part of town. In the dirt lot a businessman is standing with a mobile phone. The other morning the junkie derelicts were sitting behind a piece of cardboard that said FRAGILE.

The fighter jets are heard and not seen. They're moving to another part of town in screaming seconds. Then I saw one.

2:30 p.m. I was on the way to work with the Blue Angels overhead, tearing the air. I had a fighter jet escort. Two of them went by. I turned and saw a sign for DOUBLE EAGLE HARDWARE.

The Attorney was on a court where he can wield a guilty backhand. I worked for a couple of hours, during which V. came by with another complaint and the police report. Could I help her figure out who's who in the collision and how to phrase it? Her replacement was acting like a young vamp. My typewriter faces her swivel chair a few feet away. I was trying to type while she was on her knees in tight jeans and turning in circles with a big smile.

V. was casual, wearing an over-size men's shirt, light blue, with white flats which she got "cheap" somewhere. When walking through the room she will pause, glancing in

my direction. We seem to have a telepathic coordination when it comes to doing things and getting along.

5 p.m. I walked her to the underground, then headed for the pool. One mile in 33 minutes. That seems to be my limit. I swam underwater for 1¾ lengths. When I surfaced there was a woman staring at me.

"If I didn't see it with my own eyes."
"I ran out of air."
"I'll say."

Hot shower and walked home.

8 p.m. The Phantom of the sound-room called. He sounded a little different (but then he usually does), having vowed to stop drinking while Ming was here. He wanted to impress her with his self-control. To compensate he's been smoking pot and cigarettes like there's no tomorrow, so he was stoned. There was something about the sound-room tonight. Unfortunately, he doesn't want to encourage the fellow who lives downstairs, a good drummer who was there a couple of weeks ago and who might want to share the sound-room. I thought that was discouraging, the music on the verge of coming together and he figures out a way to make sure it doesn't.

I got off the phone and read an article in the paper about "histrionic personality disorder," which sounds like a symptom of the zeitgeist. "Dramatic scenes of despair and violent swings of mood. Blessed with enormous vitality, courage and joie de vivre, she had, he says, a bottomless capacity for self-deception and a compulsion to be unfaithful…."

The Nobel Prize in literature went to Toni Morrison, the first American woman since 1938 (Pearl Buck). Only eight women have won it since the prize was founded in 1901. American writers and poets who have won it include: O'Neil, Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Bellow, Singer,[67] and Brodsky.[68] There was some mention of her "visionary force and poetic import." I think she is a good voice to have around and is okay as a novelist, an erudite and positive force for black people, but something doesn't compute. One reviewer said she deserved it "for sheer stubbornness of purpose." What novelist wouldn't have that, wrestling with a 300-page manuscript? She's had editing and teaching jobs for most of her life and went to good schools. There's a quote from *Beloved* about a woman with "iron eyes and backbone to match."

The reviewer doesn't help with her gushing. "*Beloved* alone might have earned Morrison a Nobel Prize." Give me a break. Who gets there on one book unless it's on the level of *Moby Dick* or *Don Quixote*? There is a vague suggestion of her illuminating some realities not familiar to prize-bearing Norwegians, while having "a unique narrative technique which varies from book to book." Phillip Roth should try that, he might win something.

In 1987 *Beloved* was a finalist for the National Book Award and lost to *Paco's Story* by Larry Heinemann. That was intolerable and forty-eight black writers "issued a statement of protest to the *New York Times*, noting that Morrison had never won either the NBA or a Pulitzer. *Beloved* promptly proceeded to capture the Pulitzer, sparking more controversy." No kidding. Have your eyes on the prize, and if it eludes your grasp you pull it down to your level. Other standards have been accused of discriminating

[67] Born and raised in Poland; arrived in the U.S. in his thirties.
[68] Born and raised in the Soviet Union; arrived in the U.S. in his thirties.

against black people when not enough of them qualified. It meant there was something wrong with the tests, whether entrance requirements for the fire department, police lieutenant tests, teaching credentials, etc.

Using the same logic, you would think another NBA would be affected. They should lower the hoop so others are included and there is more diversity on the court - which is always a good thing, except when it isn't.

Is there something rotten in Norway? The article mentioned that her winning the prize had raised a few eyebrows. A man who wrote a novel about slavery said Morrison "has been the beneficiary of goodwill." The critic Stanley Crouch (*Notes of a Hanging Judge: Essays and Reviews, 1979-1989*) said, "I hope this prize inspires her to write better books." There was a curious comment from a "most under-appreciated black novelist," John A. Williams. "I'd guess…all the guys are pissed, and the ladies like it."

There was some mention of *Song of Solomon*, "[T]his mystical novel with its returned dead and characters who fly…." Are the previous winners rolling over in their graves? "My great granddaddy could flyyyy… he left everybody down on the ground and he sailed off like a black eagle… he didn't need no airplane. He just took off, got fed up." My grandfather could fly, but he had to build his own plane to do it, finding spare parts in the wreckage of planes that crashed. So down to earth of him.

The article quoted Morrison: "The flying motif (was) integral to the black experience… I always heard that we could fly in Africa." A superstitious folk tale turns into a novel. What if black people can't actually fly? It would imply that lying, not flying, is "integral to the black experience." What to make of the duplicity of people thinking they are something because they can fly (which isn't true), while giving little credit to

those who can fly (by mechanical means). It isn't just a myth in other words, but a nuts-and-bolts approach invented by (currently) dead white males.

If Africans can fly (does that include North Africans?), why didn't they float into the air when they were being rounded up by their neighbors and sold to some pale foreigners in their rickety wooden boats? For that matter, what are these phony chauvinistic claims, like a flying motif isn't "integral" to the white experience - and not just for knowing how to build a 747 or go to the moon. I think there are myths of flying in other races or cultures. It even occurs in my dreams, imagine that.

A letter in the *Bay Guardian* referring to an article a week or two ago by Chloe Levy. I remember reading it and thinking how disturbing the subject matter was and how polite and evasive she was about it. She was parked with a man under the Golden Gate Bridge (on the Marin side), having a romantic evening. Two black men with guns suddenly made their presence felt. The couple in the car were humiliated, threatened with rape and murder, and robbed. Something similar was inflicted on a couple in a car parked nearby. She was in the position of being grateful that a black man didn't shoot her in the head, showing such poise and humanistic restraint.

It struck me that the article referred to a common event which hardly ever gets into the *Guardian* of political correctness, and it showed black men in a negative light. It only made it into the *Guardian* because her main slant wasn't the robbers, who she referred to politely as "African Americans." She had nothing bad to say about them, as if she was threatened and robbed by the weather or some birds, the kind of things you wouldn't find fault with. Her emphasis was on gun control and whether it would have

helped if she had a gun. Considering how edgy and sadistic the robbers were, she figured if she pulled a gun it would have been disastrous (especially if she didn't fire it).

The letter to the editor had a more socio-economic angle, saying this is the sort of thing we can expect when the "private enterprise" system has "run amok." "The question… is whether we should struggle or submit politically." I wonder what black men with guns have to do to get attention and be recognized. No wonder they're so careless and condescending. It's like they're operating in a politically correct vacuum where if conservatives have a hard time seeing them as worthy citizens (and the aforementioned actions don't help), the liberals have a hard time seeing them as responsible entities beyond the level of children or the insane who don't know any better. They're socio-economic puppets at best. I think there is more to this than gun control or the unemployment rate, with the latter a rationale for armed robbery.

An article by a woman in the *SF Weekly* about the Annie Sprinkle show (the woman who had sex with 3500 people). During the show she "posed with her considerable breasts over audience members' heads for a mere $5." She also urinates and masturbates and douches, spreads her legs, and so forth, but does it "good naturedly." However, a "white shoe-wearing sleazoid… requested that he be allowed to rest his dick on her head. Obviously he didn't know there were reviewers in the audience or he wouldn't have bared that nothing-to-write-home-about appendage." He is sleazy and she isn't? I don't care about him, but it sounds like some duplicity here. It would be sleazy or worse if he went up to an actress after a play and suggested this, but posing with his organ on Annie Sprinkle's head is not an unreasonable request, all things considered, her

having posed with dicks in her mouth. Maybe the reviewer didn't get it. The message of Ms. Sprinkle's show is that all genital matters are shameless and okay and should be accommodated. His suggestion is downright lyrical compared to the rest of her show.

Annie Sprinkle didn't seem to mind, but one of the reviewers did, who managed to offend Ms. Sprinkle's principles. Appendages and orifices are not to be judged on a "nothing to write home about basis," especially if he doesn't make a living with it. It begs the question if the reviewer has some body parts which are worthy of note. Odd that she would be offended by this man, while a woman spreading her legs onstage with a speculum and a flashlight is okay.

Maybe it was his comment on the presumption of someone calling herself a "post-post porn modernist." He did manage to penetrate the sensitive membranes of one reviewer's mind. The men in the audience showed considerable restraint for not jacking off around the star of the show, who was practically inviting it and did it herself. How does the reviewer know this wasn't one of her customers, with her having invited her old johns to the show?

It reminds me of a certain fallacy (no pun extended), regarding a woman who summons erotic urges in men. She must be a goddess to have such power, but most men are capable of being horny on their own. They don't need a woman in front of them to put the idea in their head. They have a self-generated sex-drive which is a foreign concept to many women (some of whom take classes in how to masturbate). The women get tired of men sexualizing their every move or look. The woman as a temptress who is responsible for sex is a myth, and it lets men off the hook for being pussy hounds. They can't blame women for luring them if the urge is there to begin with.

Where was I? Friday night.

9:30 p.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena. He sent a fax to the office this afternoon. His facial features were computer crystalized with a short message in "San Francisco" script which for some reason involves a disjointed mixture of letter types.

There was some mention of the Korean woman who lost her virginity a couple of weeks ago. He is worried that she might turn out to be neurotic and demanding of his time. He wouldn't be alone, but that would be a mixed blessing in his opinion. She is rebounding from her parents who are trying to sell her off to any rich Korean who will have her. What's the use of having a daughter if there's no material benefit? She sounds a little strange, and brought a young Japanese woman over to his place. They ended up spending the night, but he said it was one of the most confusing evenings he ever had. It didn't sound like much went on, sex-wise. His friend was being a cock-tease, while telling the other woman to keep her distance from him. There were ambiguous erotic currents between the two women, but it seemed like they didn't know what to do about it.

He keeps inviting me to visit him in the wine country, and I still haven't gone.

11 p.m. Typing for a few hours. Coffee, one beer. During the week I average one beer a night.

Saturday, Oct. 9, 1993

NOTES

> "A woman too much in love has no power."[69] The line was spoken by an old woman in a Caribbean rendition of the Medea myth. I keep running into this

[69] This is very close to how Ming looks at things.

sentiment and not only in books. It's a subtitle for the zeitgeist, but it's been around for a long time. It's about women who're preoccupied with power for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death and it is over and for some not even that. They want immortality, the goddess, and choosing their own parents.

Some of them are empty vessels who reflect their surroundings. This being the most powerful country on earth it is not surprising if power is an overriding concern for many people. Power a la mode. Some women want it out of a sense of survival and self-determination. They are sick of overbearing men. Some of them have equalized themselves with the worst characteristics of men, being all ego, appetite, and bank account.

Whatever the angle or excuse, the obsession with power is pushing love into the corner, if not into the closet. Those capacities exist at the expense of each other. That might explain why relations between men and women are more of a power struggle than a love struggle. A competition and comparison, rather than a constant companion. There is a tension leading to the built-in obsolescence of a romance, and the suspense of who will be the first to walk out. When you walk out first you are assured of no one walking out on you. Hence, you're in the more "powerful" position. Hopefully there is some poetic justice down the road for a woman who has cut and run or let it wither on the vine a few too many times, until it is a reflex and she can't help it anymore. It's like her middle name is "Abort." She might be letting connections expire which were a life-support system and she ends up in a cold orbit like one of those inert satellites which aren't sending and receiving signals anymore.

She is "frozen at the heights of ego." Throw in some Botox and you have an ice queen who will exist for a long time.

How to reconcile the goddess with those goofy broads who're metaphysical as the laundry, and whose spirituality has the substance of spun sugar?

Inspired by the precedent
of Thelma and Louise,
a lot of women drove off cliffs
and left the men at ease.

The other day I was leaning forward, resting on the typewriter, with some heavy equipment operating across the street. I realized my finger was vibrating slightly from the impact of the equipment.

I was typing and suddenly a tree outside the window was shaking. It was hit by a salami truck (Columbus Distribution – there's a loaded concept).

A man and woman in a canoe
of their connection, a fine who's who.
Another woman gets into it,
tipping the balance, they're all through.

The chaos of the scholar system (the original phrase was "solar system").

In the morning I called V. at the office. While waiting for her to get on the phone I saw a flock of birds outside the window fly up to a roof and land in line.

Literary living conditions
where you're out on a limb
for months on end, and people wonder
what's the matter with him.

'SPACE ALIEN' SENTENCED FOR SEDUCING GIRL. The man is fifty-seven. He convinced a fourteen-year-old girl he was from outer space. He is looking at ten years in prison (which is inner space), though he is eligible for parole in three years. There was a plea agreement dismissing "a marijuana charge that carried a possible life sentence." Since when?

What if he smoked so much pot he became spaced out and thought he was from another planet? He existed in an alienated moral vacuum. There is some question as to who is more gullible, him or the girl. It would be interesting if he believed it more than she did. Not implausible if he is a little disturbed. If she had an average intelligence a man who tells her he's from outer space would be met with some doubt.

He is looking at other charges. There were thirteen-year-old girls in North Hollywood, and he was able to "lure them into bed" by promising "rides in his spacecraft." They had to be immunized from viruses in outer space by having sex with him (an injection). He is looking at years in prison, but what if this whole episode was no big deal to the girls who did it willingly? They might have been dumb and loose or just amused. When I was fourteen the girls in the eighth grade had a pretty good idea what fornication was all about, and a few of them were well on their way to making it happen. Others had no problem putting it off, and they knew a spaceman when they saw one. I went out with a girl who dared me to put my hand up her blouse (after we had been making out for a while).

The law can't take into account if the girls were virgins or not.[70] It's possible the trauma (if any) wasn't the actual sex, which seemed to be consensual, but rather

[70] Someone should interview a group of fourteen-year-old girls and put the question to them. A man says he's from outer space and will take you there if you go to bed with him. Do you believe him or not? Was he speaking metaphorically? I think there would be a withering scorn for any

the disappointment that they didn't make it into orbit. Talk about post-coital let-down.[71]

WEIGHT-LOSS EXPERT ADMITS SEX WITH PATIENTS. This one is harder to fathom. Dr. Solomon (the wisdom of?) is sixty-one. "Three former patients have sued Solomon for a total of $140,000,000, claiming that he used his authority to induce them into having sex." The compensation they're demanding is so monumental it makes them look like they're not wound too tight or are just plain greedy. We're talking about full-grown women, maybe overgrown if they were in a weight-loss program. These are not mentally tenuous patients being taken advantage of by their psychoanalyst. How did he "use his authority" to induce them into having sex? Was it an act they entered into willingly, but later redefined as being led astray because they didn't lose weight?

Why should it cost him over $45,000,000 per woman? The sex was that good? Did he say, "Give me a blow-job and you'll lose ten pounds"? In which case it would be their fault if they went ahead with it. Have their cake and eat it too (no wonder they were in a weight-loss program). They fucked him while maintaining a kind of innocence (with dollar signs attached). The proof of how unreasonable they are is when they sued for $140,000,000. Also, sex can lead to a weight gain for a woman if her waistline is expanding over the next nine months.

Meanwhile, he lost his medical license and is looking at a massive lawsuit. How do they expect him to pay it? Why should he? These events go back over the last twenty years. He "enticed at least eight female patients…" If it was so traumatic why would some of them not say anything for ten or fifteen years, or were they embarrassed that they fell for it? They were impressed with his authority as a "weight loss expert and syndicated columnist." (I hear him saying, "Want to see my column?") It seemed okay at the time since they weren't forced into it. What made it wrong afterwards?

Do some women's minds shut off when there is a possibility of sex? It's been known to occur with men. If it occurs with women, then what? Maybe they feel guilty on the morning after and project their guilt on the man since women are not responsible for their actions,[72] including sex (and yet they can vote). The guilt drives them to the refrigerator while they give him the cold shoulder.

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girl who fell for that routine. What if she wanted to get laid, and this provided a smoke screen that would get her off the hook if they were caught? "He promised me the moon… he played Stella by Starlight and the Ventures in Space."

[71] Reminds me of the Israeli woman who went to bed with a Palestinian man. When she found out he wasn't Jewish she sued him for rape. The whole event was redefined in retrospect.

[72] If they're not doing well, it's because of men. If they are doing well, it's not because of men.

> Women who sit in judgment of other women – banging heads and egos and ulterior motives. I see it socially and in the office, big and little power struggles. The legend of a warm and nurturing female bonding has its limits. It's not uncommon to hear a woman say she would prefer her boss or supervisor (or even doctor) was a man. Other women are harder to fool or get along with. It is more like dealing with their mothers or older sisters or Nurse Ratched. When I hear the word "bitch," it is often a woman saying it.[73]
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> B. is having an affair with a woman and has never run into so much difficulty, romance-wise. She can't get away with her usual subterfuge or female prerogatives. She used to find an anchor in a man's trust and gullibility, along with his stability. With a woman she has found the demands and doubts are endless, along with the behavioral engineering.
>
> A woman prosecutor tried to get the maximum sentence against a woman who shot her daughter and left the body in the woods. The daughter was seventeen, a "high school track star." The woman "told police she killed her daughter in a drunken rage." Shot five times, third degree murder. It is curious that our client got second degree for mortally stabbing his girlfriend in a drunken rage, and he never tried to hide the fact. Before the body was found, the woman "wept as she asked a city for help finding her 17-year-old daughter." The prosecutor didn't believe her. She also wept in court on hearing the sentence.

10:30 a.m. I woke up with the phone ringing. My father wanted to verify the plans for flying there on Monday. He said the weather is in the 80's.

11:30 a.m. I walked about two miles to the north end of town where it ends in a cliff overlooking the bay. I was ready for some fighter jets, but they weren't ready for me. The small planes were in the air with their motor drone routines, a bi-plane doing stunts. I thought of my father's father who built a plane in the 1920's. He was a natural mechanic who was preoccupied with planes and barnstorming. The Great Depression and my grandmother cramped his style, however. When a friend of his died in a crash she told him it was the planes or her. He eventually opted for the latter, otherwise I wouldn't be here (my father was born in 1928).

[73] A year or two later I heard the word "psycho-bitch" for the first time. It was in the office, and a young secretary (from the Middle East) was talking about the sister of her black boyfriend.

A small plane executed a dying swan maneuver, going straight up and pausing in midair, then turning around to fall in a lifeless spiral like a leaf, cutting the motor or stalling. The motor came back on and it pulled out of a dive at the last second. The death-defying whimsy of some men.

1:30 p.m. The heavy equipment showed up. I was sitting on the edge of someone's porch with a view. The smaller planes were like insects compared to turbo jets in formation. They made one or two low passes over the neighborhood with a shriek that made some people duck. It was a "rolling thunder revue" of another sort, expanding the dimensions of sound and distance. The fighter jets inhabit a space-time warp of their own. I could hear them a mile or two away, peering into the distance and expecting a Blue Angel, but looking at a bird.

I was talking a few years ago with a friend from Switzerland (Jacques) who could barely see the point of this. He was put off by a loud display of authoritarian metal which is meant to be intimidating. He didn't want to see it executing near misses at government expense. I want to see it because it gives you a perspective on what sort of power is out there. You get a passing idea of what it might be like if those were enemy jets and you're on the ground, say a village near Hanoi.

I want to see what the military is capable of. It is hard to do that without an aura of glorification, but I would rather have it out in the open for everyone to see the weapons being developed and used at taxpayers' expense. It borders on the breathtaking at times, with downright whimsical maneuvers. Two jets flew at each other upside-down and low to the ground while rolling over. Five jets flew straight up in a tight formation and then

curved outwards in separate falling arcs like they were tracing the outline of an atmospheric lily.

I was on Russian Hill, and glancing to the west I saw the roof of the building where I lived six months ago (before the fire). A year ago I was on that roof watching the airshow, a déjà vu of fighter jets.

When it was over the small crowd of people dispersed. There was a Chinese man, a macho type in his late twenties. His son (who was four or five) was disturbed by the jets and was crying, much to the concern of his father. "Stop crying!" I walked down the hill towards North Beach. I passed someone's window full of wooden African statues and masks. They were turned away from the fighter jets, as if to say the white man has gone too far.

I dropped in on the Art Institute with a mural by Diego Rivera ("The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City" (1931)). The place was quiet as a painting. I walked around the hill and back to where I used to live. I'm still trying to figure out if I can live there anymore (it's in the process of being rebuilt). Not sure I want to.

I walked back to the Tenderloin, about two miles, and read old manuscripts, the journal entries and exits.

Forgot to mention, on the way to see the fighter jets I passed a homeless black woman who has been around for years. She has the look of a ragged nomad, a street Bedouin. I often see her sitting in a doorway wearing a blanket, her feet wrapped in paper bags and staring into the void. This time she lifted her arms and the dirty blanket moved, revealing her sagging breasts.[74]

[74] When walking home yesterday I saw a thin black hooker crossing the street. She was pushing forty with her head half-shaved and half-roped. She wore a see-through black lace blouse with her

7 p.m. I called Simone. She spoke in a low dramatic whisper, recovering from influenza.

I left a message on the phone machine of Sophie. Our two-week hit and run affair was over a month ago. I haven't called since then. At this point I'm just testing the waters. Is there any substance to this woman or not? I dropped a message down a well to see if it's empty.

8 p.m. An opera by Puccini (*Manon Lescaut*).

9 p.m. I walked to the Cambodian restaurant. The waitress, Ciport, hasn't been very conversational lately. When she brought a plate she dropped the knife. I picked it up and she smiled, a little embarrassed. It makes for a curious atmosphere, like a polite standoff with a subtle undercurrent while I'm having spicy prawns.

She has full lips and tends to look chic with red lipstick. For all I know she is a woman of the world. I have the feeling she may have dropped out of high school and is living with her boyfriend, while working here and using boredom as a kind of eyeliner. During the meal which was spicy but tolerable I bit into a chili. It was almost comical the effect with my mouth burning and my eyes watering. It took a few minutes to calm down, using water and rice, and it lingered. She walked by and said, "Don't like spices?"

I headed home, picking up a bottle of wine. A Latina prostitute who used to be a man was walking with a serious swivel. I went from her to Puccini and regretted having missed so much of the opera.

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breasts hanging down. The buoyancy is hard to come by when the gravity is out in force, but being flamboyant is a survival mechanism.

11 p.m. On the typewriter for a long and wine-drenched session. Maybe once a week I go through most of a bottle, along with coffee and cigarettes, typing until three in the morning. Then I turned the lights out, staring out the window. A hooker and a friend were walking on the sidewalk. One of them ducked behind a parked car, pulling her panty hose down and going into a crouch. She stood up quickly when some people walked by.

I lay down with the radio on - "Buried Alive" by Venom. There were a few lines coming to the surface. It happens when I'm horizontal and relaxed. More thoughts are drifting up, if not materializing like a cloud along the coast. There was something about the interracial being demoralizing for a lot of people, black or white.

> 3 a.m. and all is not well,
> a mirror mortal, time will tell
> on you. A fallen angel fell
> into the subconscious, it's an ink well.

Sunday, Oct. 10, 1993

11:30 a.m. Sunday morning and the birth of consciousness. Yesterday was a gradual time span with an undercurrent of creative tension. It felt like an impasse, but in retrospect I realized what points were touched on during that phase. The day was a suspension bridge of consciousness slung between two nights. And there were archetypal coordinates: my father, walking, fighter jets, the rich and poor, Puccini, wine, a lot of writing.

I made coffee and called the Actress. I got her provisional fiancé, Michael the deft chef. He was speaking in a slow dry manner. Things are not okay. He hasn't seen her

since Thursday and is moving out. They reached an impasse where they couldn't live together.

When coming home at night from work he never knew what sort of mood she would be in. She is temperamental, and the contradictions were undermining their connection. He felt she was playing both sides of the fence, with him as the traditional man supporting the woman, while insisting on living her own life and not holding up her end of that arrangement. She wasn't working in other words, but would still be angry if he didn't make dinner (?!) or take out the trash. He provided the sole income for the two of them. She is an emotional woman, an actress who requires constant attention, and though his long hours on the job were for both of them she took it personally as time away from her.

He wondered what sort of knee-jerk emotional baggage she was bringing to the affair. There were volatile situations (he is thirty-three and she is forty) where she couldn't bring him into focus (blurred by the past and other men), while she was feeling out of focus (blurred by the job).

Where do they go from here? He's moving out and has to find a room. She insisted he cover the rent for this month, although her mother is loaded and their landlord. He mentioned something I know too well - women who compensate for an amorphous flux of feelings and impressions with a cut and dry approach. The road is strewn with friends and lovers she has cut off and discarded. He thinks he might be added to the list and put in the Out Box. He said he loves her, but they just can't live together.

Meanwhile, I should come around for a drink where he works. Don't worry about the cover charge ($15 - $20). Apparently, I had some explaining to do (according to the

Actress) for having gone there, like it was non-feminist of me. That was news to me (she went there). He said that Stormy asked about me and he put in a good word, saying I'm a poet. I said that could be why she hasn't called (I need an answering machine). The number of women who equate poetry with something boring and irrelevant, if not disturbing, is enormous.

There was some mention of the present I got for Maya (the daughter of the Actress). It went over well. He said it was an "*objet d'art*," although Maya thought she saw it in my apartment before, like I'm unloading old objects on her. Some females are hard to impress, but the rolling eyeball was a hit with her friends.

Michael said if it was over he doesn't want another close connection for a year or more. He was single for a year before he met her, and it wasn't long enough. Curious how you get familiar echoes of your own predicaments. It's good to know I'm not only one who is in and out of relationships. I said the isolation gets to me sometimes, but there is a curious side-effect. The time goes by with a relatively smooth momentum. It makes you wonder if a man needs a woman like a bicycle needs an octopus.

Typing in the afternoon.

9:00 p.m. I took a bus to the flat near the Haight. I was standing at the door with a large shoulder bag when Ming walked up, having gone out for cigarettes. The flight is tomorrow morning. She was exhausted from a weekend of abalone diving a few hours north of here. She went with her older brothers and sisters, snorkeling in ten feet of water. They brought up eleven abalone.

A roommate and a friend were getting stoned in the kitchen, smoking a bong. Then they left. She cleaned a couple of abalone with a knife. I wouldn't eat it, but I like

the shells. She was hitting the meat with a left-handed hammer while I picked up an old acoustic guitar which was out of tune and played something. I was not exactly serenading when she scaled a perch.

Eventually we were in her room on the bed. I read her copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* while she took a shower. She returned to the room with her hair in a towel and was throwing her clothes into a bag, whatever she needed for the trip.

1 a.m. Went to sleep.

Monday, Oct. 11, 1993

7 a.m. We woke up, bought some coffee and breakfast rolls, and were in a cab to the airport by eight (over $30).

We were on the plane by 9:15 a.m., and I let her have the window. She was tense and nervous, making her a little jumpy while waiting to take off. Ming doesn't like to fly. We accelerated down the runway with the front of the plane lifting into the air. There was a momentary sinking feeling as the tail seemed to drop and then we levitated, going into a wide turn and breaking through the overcast and cruising in a higher clarity above the clouds.

Most of the coast of California was covered with clouds. We tried to figure out the geography. There were velvet wrinkled hills and mountains and the outline of rectangles on the ground. There was some turbulence over Los Angeles. I told her it was from the tension of those tortured souls in L.A. She wasn't sure about that.

Coming into San Diego the plane described a wide arc, with her noting all the swimming pools down below. The airport is near downtown, so you float past the towers

with the runway coming up. The landing wasn't very smooth, bumping and skidding. I could imagine the pilot slamming on the brakes at a hundred miles per hour and skidding sideways with a parachute unfolding from the tail.

11 a.m. We emerged from a tunnel into the terminal and there was my father. He drove us for half an hour to the outskirts of El Cajon where the desert hills begin.

It was warm, a little humid, just how she likes it, with a few clouds overhead. We sat by the pool talking with my father for a couple of hours. The two of them were getting acquainted, while my mother was at work (he is semi-retired). He takes groups of people to Tijuana, supervising the building of houses in a shanty town. They built a hundred houses last year. She sounded interested. He brings in student groups from middle class backgrounds who haven't been exposed to poverty and a lack of running water. Sometimes he will conduct a tour of the local prison, bringing food for the inmates. The prison doesn't provide it for short-term incarcerations. He warns the students that they'd better have a strong stomach.

Ming and I walked up the hill in back, looking at the clumps of pear cactus and the lush plant growth at the foot of a dry and rocky hill (it has a couple of antennae on top). She was relaxing by the minute, looking at an orange bougainvillea half-devouring a small shack. There were palm trees, pepper trees, and fruit trees (apple, orange, peach, and plum), along with succulents and geraniums.

We were on the barren part of the hill but still on their property (nearly an acre) with a useless wire fence which was falling apart. I was diverted by a black ant colony. It felt like we had flown down here to look at ants, or to get close to the earth and ants are pretty close to it. The frenetic activity around a cleared area of the main hole. There were

smooth piles of sand grains nearby – it was their dumping grounds. I started dropping little things around the entrance – a twig, a cigarette butt, seeing how the ants would remove it with the pincers on their heads. One ant managed to pull the cigarette butt away and wouldn't give up. In a few minutes it had dragged it more than six feet (no smoking).

Ming dropped a whole cigarette on them, which took a little longer to dispose of. Then she scattered some particles of sage which were immediately removed and dumped on the periphery.

We walked over to the next property on the side of the hill, going down a ravine and climbing past another pear cactus. The air was getting more humid and the clouds were getting darker. I felt a few drops of rain and didn't think much of it. Then the clouds let go with a heavy downpour. We were in thin shirts and were soaked by the time we got back to the wooden patio roof. It shelters a few chairs next to the black-bottom pool. It was a warm rain and she didn't mind.

She is a good woman to have around when things are elemental, if not lush or even deserted. A good woman to have around in most circumstances, I would imagine. Ming admits she isn't much of a cook, but is good at travelling. It's something we haven't done much of together, though it fits in with her way of doing things. Something about her is synonymous with travel. I don't mean her life is a journey and she's in forward motion, but how she gets off on the liberating mobility, if not the power of it, relishing a refutation of the line, "A woman's place is in the home." She leaves home whenever she can, being restless and energetic with an endless curiosity. This is a woman who gives the impression of being outgoing and friendly, not to say extroverted. I say, "gives the impression" because, as she noted in one of our discussions which were more

or less nonstop for the next few days, that is not necessarily how she feels inside. I sometimes appear to be indifferent or detached from others, which she said is not the case.

That reminds me, on another occasion I referred to her as a woman of action. She said, “No.” I said, “Like you’re so contemplative.” She said, “I am.” I said, “Contemplating your next move.” She said, “Don’t you think I’m contemplating life?” Maybe as it coincides with her strategies and schedules, but I sounded skeptical. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN I’M NOT CONTEMPLATIVE DAMN IT!”

3:30 p.m. We borrowed my father’s car and drove to San Diego. It was her idea, having told her about the roller coaster and La Jolla cove. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be on the road, but it turned into a good excursion and the clouds were breaking up along the coast. She managed to run a red light in La Jolla (it was in the wrong place), and we made it to the cove.

We had our swimsuits on and walked over to the massive eroded sandstone cliffs. It was late afternoon and the sun was hitting them directly with their wind-sculpted contours at the water’s edge. A million years of wind and storms and waves went into forming and deforming this terrain.

We stood on the edge of the cliff with a straight drop to the water, over twenty feet. A couple of guys were running and jumping off. I thought about diving, but figured I should jump first to get the feel of the drop. There was something holding me back, a vague sense of self-preservation I suppose. I was here a few years ago and dove off the cliff. I had a ringing in my ear for a couple of days. It’s possible I’m getting more careful

these days, like my occasional self-destructive whims are giving way to something more constructive.

I stepped off the cliff and had a sinking feeling of the ground giving way and I had done something impulsive which I should have thought about. It's like diving into unknown waters where you're not sure about the hidden or submerged rocks. What holds you back is that it's a bad habit, even if you're sure it's safe.

The drop was not as long as it is taking me to describe it, and I lived to tell about it, but there was an extra second or so of dimensional fall-time which was more than I'm used to. Instinctively I had my arms out to maintain my balance for a feet-first entry into the water, an oceanic splashdown. When I hit it was effortless. The water in the southern latitudes is softer.

I swam to the rocks on the side, but how to get back up the cliff? You don't want to underestimate the power of swells and the slippery footing on the rocks, but it wasn't hard. I caught a swell which lifted me over a submerged shelf of rock to the base of the cliff. I had to hold on so the wave didn't take me back with it, and there were footholds all the way up.

I walked back to Ming who was getting excited. "How was it?!" She was struggling with herself, and said she didn't used to be so "chicken-shit." We walked over to the side where the rocks went down to a narrow cove. There were more swells coming in and crashing on the rocks at the end of the cove. I jumped in, checked the area for rocks, found it okay, and she jumped in. We swam out of the cove around the point, just a couple of happy floating heads. It felt like we were in the tropics, swimming around the

point to where the footholds were. I caught a surge over the submerged rocks with her washing up behind me and both of us climbed out.

We were thinking of jumping and she was ready to try it. I went off again, no problem, though I may have slammed my forearm when I hit the water. It was a little sore the next day. I floated in the water, waiting for her jump. She went off the edge and dropped straight down with her hands at her side – because she was scared stiff, she said later. She went rather deep, but came to the surface pretty exhilarated.

We swam back to the rocks. This time I rode a swell which lifted me to my feet and left me clinging to the rock. We climbed up the cliff and walked back around the point where we were hidden from the view of others. She said, "I have to pee," and crouching under an overhang of sandstone she pulled the lower part of her swimsuit to the side and released a heavy stream. Then we were back to the cove and I dove off a rock, maybe six or eight feet high. I hit something underwater while my feet were trailing through the softest seaweed. Later I noticed a long bruise on my left forearm, but it went away in a couple of days.

She jumped in and we swam back around the point again. The sun was getting lower with a stunning cloud formation on the horizon. There were sunlit cliffs a mile or two to the south, and few hot air balloons floating over the sea. We got out of the water and walked over to some 100-foot-high cliffs with caves at sea level and black cormorants perched on the rocky ledges. A sea lion was rolling over in the water and yawning.

When we left she was so stoked she couldn't stand it, walking along the road past a small beach. There were expensive buildings on the other side of the road away from

the waterfront erosion. We found a park and a small wooden structure overlooking the ocean. The sun was going down and long lines of waves were coming in. Ming and I sat there having a beer and cigarettes. It seemed like her tension and concerns had lifted off her shoulders and left her feeling like a girl. She said she was here when she was sixteen with a neo-lesbian friend. They were stoned and never realized the beautiful cove that we were swimming in was lurking around the bend (which is to say some drugs do not expand awareness).

We returned to the car. She was driving since I don't have a license (DUI) or California ID (stolen). No credit cards either, so I'm practically a non-person. Can a non-person be arrested? We drove south, more or less along the coast, and were headed for a roller coaster with a sunset going on. I had a vague idea where the roller coaster was. My brother took me there a year or two ago. I was right off the plane, and he said it wasn't that intense. I found out otherwise.

It was a few miles away and near the beach, with a renovated wooden structure lined with white lights. It was built in 1925 and is the oldest roller coaster on the West Coast. I asked her if she wanted a merry-go-round, but she wouldn't be denied.

There were not many people there and we found ourselves getting into a small compartment in the front. We were on track, so to speak. An iron bar came down across our legs and waist, and we nearly had the whole thing to ourselves. It started moving into a dark and curving tunnel and then went up a long slow incline to a view of the city spreading to the horizon. There was a pause to reflect and then a howling descent where you lean into the curves. I was more familiar with the layout this time around, but it was

still a tense rush with a white-knuckle centrifuge. You hurtle through the errant figure eights of a sadistic roller coaster and you weather the velocity.

Rolling to a stop we got out, legs a little wobbly. She loved it, saying it made her night. Adrenaline is so amusing.

We drove off looking for the freeway. I said, "Imagine the roller coaster after a line or two of coke," and she liked the idea. Now and then she's in the mood for a savage thrill. We found an unfamiliar freeway and rode to the other side of El Cajon (I almost said the dark side), arriving around 8:30 p.m.

My brother was there with my parents. He is thirty-one, a physical therapist who is taking more classes on the subject. He got his second black belt and has his own place in Ocean Beach, two blocks from the water, but things aren't working out too well with women. The connections are elusive for a man who's focused on the physical facts of life.

Later we were in the hot tub – my father, brother, Ming, and myself. There is a small spotlight attached to the house. The beam of light bounces off the pool and is reflected on the pine trees further up the hill. The trees were covered with an undulating ghostly light. Earlier I showed her how it works. I kneeled beside the pool and passed my hand through the water. It set some wavy parallels in motion along the bottom of the pool, like sound waves bouncing back and overlapping on themselves. There were shifting patterns of reflected light running up and down the trees on the hill.

I said the wavelengths on the retaining wall were like an electrocardiogram, where a smooth line has the connotation of death. The erratic is a sign of intelligence. My solid-state brother said I am erratic.

I never realized her capacity for sitting in hot water. She likes the turbulence of the jets, the warm turmoil of immersion. I have a limited interest in it, finding it too passive or amoeba-like. I prefer the pool, and was the only one using it that night, swimming laps in a black-bottom pool under the stars.

Meanwhile, Ming was getting along with my father and brother. My mother went to bed early.

11 p.m. We were out there alone, sitting at a wooden table under a long trellis near the pool and having a glass of wine. There was a heavy peach tree within arm's reach. The stillness and the smell of the earth. It's so hypnotic it leaves me staring. I suggested walking partway up the hill and she was willing. There are girls and women who wouldn't do a fraction of the things she does, being spontaneous and open to jumping off cliffs and climbing rocks or getting stoned and going to a loud nightclub. On the other hand, she tends to shut down when it comes to romance.

We walked up aways (it's called Rattlesnake Hill), and lay on the ground with a rock for a pillow, looking at the stars. She lay with her head on the same rock.[75] There

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[75] A NIGHT IN AUGUST

You can feel the heat, it's almost human,
emanating from a heavy boulder,
one too big to carry on my shoulder.
Soaking up the solar I assume,
the temperature was hitting 97
in the afternoon and then at night
there is an afterglow of heat and light
and that includes the hydrogen in heaven
when it's forming into constellations.
So the ground is good for concentration,
lying on my back on Rattlesnake Hill
behind my parent's house. I think I will
embrace a rock, I hope it's not effete.
A full moon, you can almost feel the heat.

was a comment on what a long day it was. We woke up this morning in San Francisco, took a plane, and now were lying on the ground an hour's drive from Mexico.

At some point I was trying to figure out the principle of cloud formations at night and whether it's beyond our comprehension. One minute it is cloudy and the next there are gaping holes in the cloud cover with a black void coming through. It's loaded with stars. The entire sky is going through these subtle shifts in unison. The clouds aren't necessarily drifting like you might expect - they are generated in thin air, the vapors becoming visible. I had brought the binoculars and we took turns looking at the stars.

Eventually we went back down. The back door opens on a half-sunken den with windows around two sides. There were two narrow beds, along with a black piano and a wooden grandfather clock from Denmark (my grandmother was born there).

1 a.m. Went to sleep.

Tuesday, Oct. 12, 1993

9 a.m. Woke up with the sun hitting us while we're lying down. The clouds were gone. We went for a swim. She was working on her dive for a while, a bit unclear on the concept. I swam three lengths underwater, and she did one. Last night my brother did one and a half, but he's a better skier.

More conversations with my father. He likes the opportunity to talk about philosophy or history, and does so at the drop of a hat. We had some interesting exchanges, with her having grown up outside of Christianity, and him with the skepticism of someone who is not a true believer. We talked about early translations of the Bible and what the softer more feminine language of Jesus (Aramaic) was conveying compared to

Greek, what was lost in translation, and how much patriarchal baggage (wrote garbage) was inherited from the Hebrews.

11 a.m. Ming and I left for the desert on a warm morning. We drove east on Highway 8, with her going 85 miles per hour, but she's a good driver. It was an exception when she ran a red light yesterday. It left her muttering to herself, "Asian driver… and a woman too."

In less than an hour we were approaching a terrain where the hills are covered with boulders. I was looking for the place I've climbed before, and realized we just passed it. We found a turnaround and drove back.

There was a rocky ravine with boulders piled on each other – each one could fill a room. I had a torn leather shoulder bag with a camera and two beers. I wore grey jeans and a loose open shirt with heavy shoes. She was in hiking boots and black bicycle shorts with a pink halter top. Her legs are strong and it was no problem climbing and hiking. Now and then she would accept a hand to get up and over a rock. We got it down to a smooth maneuver.

We climbed for a while until we were sweating and stopped. Negotiating a way through the rocks is like dealing with a maze. You're on a random route with obstacles and cacti to contend with, not to mention optical illusions - how something from a distance looks climbable and when you get there it is bigger than you are. Or you're on a boulder, stretching for a hold and realize there isn't one. It isn't worth risking broken bones. Bouldering is a drop-dead lesson in the non-anthropocentric. We're used to city living where everything is laid out according to human proportions - the handles, steps,

and sidewalks. In the desert nothing is. You make the adjustment with no assumptions, and a few vultures overhead.

On a rocky slant covered with soft dark lichen were some dried out branches and dead yucca plants. Some of the rocks looked like wind-eroded granite. We headed for a high promontory which took some doing, climbing through a shaft underneath a rock and emerging, crossing one boulder and leaping to another. We found ourselves on a level overlooking everything with a few shallow depressions where water would collect. We lay down and I took off my shirt. There was no one around, no sign of civilization except for a glimpse of the road and the occasional stratospheric white jet. There would have been some erotic potential if I was with another woman. With her it was more like two hikers having a rest. She lay on her back in her halter top, rolling down her tight shorts and complaining about her waistline.

We had a beer and a cigarette. I tried a few pictures, but my father's camera wasn't working and she left hers in the car.

I could have lingered longer in that area, but she wanted to visit a border town in Mexico that afternoon. We made our way down. Going through some underbrush I had a momentary slide, the ground wasn't as solid as I thought. By the time we made it to the highway she had some scratches on her thigh and there were cuts on my right forearm.

The elevation was 4,000 feet, and it was a long descent to the flat desert. We were cruising through rock-covered hills which had been dynamited for a road to go through. When we arrived at the low desert it was pretty barren with cacti here and there. The heat felt good, and there were lunar-looking mountains on the horizon.

We got off the freeway and drove back along a side road to the ruins of a "Minor Repairs" shop. I've been here a few times. It's like an apocalyptic junkyard which was left to disintegrate in the heat. There were piles of bedsprings and headlights half buried in the sand. There was a flash flood from the nearby hills about ten years ago (a storm from Mexico). We walked around using her cheap camera and tried out different shots (she had been clumsy and hurried when loading the film). There was a shot of me sitting on a pile of headlights, and her on an old washing machine with a headlight on her head and the mountains in the background. A shot of her behind the wheel of a broken-down dune buggy with plants growing through the chassis.

We were there for an hour, and then drove further into the desert and what appeared to be an empty wasteland. I was not uninterested in some culture shock across the border, but wasn't sure it was worth the effort. After a while there was a striking transformation in the land. You assume it would continue as a desert, but it turned into irrigated farm land – the Imperial Valley. There was a Spanish station on the radio.

We made it across the border with no problem. I glanced a block away at the returning border traffic and saw a long line and had a sinking feeling (which continued). I was getting fatalistic as we drove through Mexicali on a one-way road which suddenly became two-way and I suggested she move over a lane, having nearly collided with someone in an intersection. ALTO means stop.

Her experience with Mexico has been minimal. For some reason she was expecting white stucco houses with a burro parked in front, what you might find in a remote village. She noted the cement-block homes built close together with not much

room or even windows, but sprouting TV antennae and satellite dishes. A few had a modern car in front.

We kept driving with no idea of where to go and how far we wanted to get off the main road. She was looking for something, but we were not in the mood for getting lost. We finally headed back towards the border. There was a long line of cars moving slowly. It was about five p.m. Poor Mexican men and women walked past the cars selling stuff, and someone washed the windshield.

If it were up to me, we would have stayed longer in the rocks and then driven back. That would have been too smooth. She has an impulsive force which is not always well thought out. There is a tendency to get herself into entanglements – like a traffic jam when trying to cross the border - but she likes to travel. Ming is anchored in the mundane facts of life, but those are transformed when one is in motion, going to places one has never been.

When we approached the customs stop a man in uniform came to the window and started asking questions. He wanted us to pull over to the waiting area. I had my passport and was above suspicion, but she wasn't. It was almost accidental that I had it on me, it being my only ID these days. She had forgotten her passport. She said something about "white privilege," and it slowly dawned on me – her being Chinese and we were at the Mexican-U.S. border. They were suspicious, like she might be one of those illegal Chinese immigrants who were smuggled across the border in recent months.

A black man in uniform in the window gave her the third degree, though polite. "Where are you coming from?" There were armed men in uniform standing around and one guy with a mirror on the end of a rod for peering underneath the cars for smuggled

drugs. There was another man in uniform with an eager dog on a leash. It was sniffing around the cars of other parked suspects. She had brought a little pot. We should have smoked it in that junkyard in the desert, sitting in a pile of old headlights.

I remained calm, hardly moving. No need to attract suspicion while she went to talk to someone in a building. The door on my side was open and a pot-sniffing dog walked up and stuck his head in. It was a hair-raising moment. The pot was wrapped in plastic and shoved down the front of my pants (her idea). I slowly shut the door as the dog backed off while having premonitions of being arrested.

Finally she returned to the car and we were allowed to leave. We made our way slowly to the road, with her talking about feeling stressed. Then she realized it hadn't been the most relaxing situation for me. "Oh right, you had the pot on you."

It was a long drive through the desert and the hills with the sun going down.

7:30 p.m. We arrived at the house and were in the kitchen, throwing something together for a meal and having a beer. We got into a long discussion around the table with my parents.

I went off on an esoteric tangent. My father likes that sort of thing, while my mother has a firm grip on the practical and immediate. We talked about the random genetic odds of my being born. I brought up my old routine about there being a hostile environment inside a woman (which I didn't make up), and if it has anything to do with female skepticism and resistance. The women disagreed.

I mentioned my theory that evolution favors paranoid mutants. My father was not sure, being a die-hard humanist. We talked about the fallacy of anthropomorphizing the

universe. I prefer the scientific to a lame subjective point of view, having lived through a time which amplified a flux of the emotions. My father grew up when the scientific outlook had a strong hold. We finally had a shaky consensus which had something to do with the spirit.

Ming was in and out of this discussion, though we talked about her family at some point. It turns out her and mother were born to women in their early forties (so was mine). Ming's existence was unlikely. Her father was away for eight years while working in England. Her birth was a side-effect of his return. She thought it was an accident and never felt like a blessed event, more like an annoying addition.

We finally went out back, sitting near the pool. The stars were out, and my father was in the Jacuzzi for his back.[76]

10 p.m. We drove to the liquor store for a bottle of wine and returned. Stores close early around here. It is beer and pickup country. We followed one guy with a sign in his window, saying NOT HOMOSEXUAL, or something to that effect. We wondered if it meant he didn't want to be rear-ended.

11 p.m. With everyone asleep we were sitting out back. She changed into her swimsuit, turning to the side so it was more discreet. The one she wore last night in the hot tub was stunning - a black speedo of sheer material for doing laps. Semi-transparent and her breasts move inside it. We were going to make a night of it, having a bottle of merlot. She was in the Jacuzzi and I rolled a small joint while sitting on the edge of that

[76] In 1961 we moved from a small town in Wisconsin to the upper west side of Manhattan. My father was a minister, but wanted to pursue his theological studies for a year at Union Seminary. It was a hard winter with snowdrifts higher than the doors. Later there was an elevator strike (we lived on the edge of Harlem on the 19th floor). Around that time he lifted a dead battery out of his car, and has had back problems ever since.

glow-in-the-dark turmoil. We had a couple of inhalations, and she pulled the front of her swimsuit down to see if her boobs would float.

I was in hot water a minute later, but the smoke had thrown us off a little. It's not uncommon when you're shifting gears to a "higher" plane and catching up to where the smoke is going. The conversation was reconstituted on a more ephemeral level with some off-the-wall tangents and a sense of the absurd. I was distracted by the water jets hitting my back. She found a knob and turned on the turbulence like boiling water. I said that one could form misleading relationships in a hot tub when the alluring force field between two people has more to do with the water than an actual bond between them. She wondered what I was getting at.

I got out and sat next to the tub. There was a ledge for the wine glasses. I was talking to her floating head in the water. The conversation bounced around, then focused on a halfway serious note. I'm a first-born son, and she is a last-born daughter who grew up feeling devalued. Her father was given to impersonal formalities, and hardly ever talked to her about his work with the Six Companies Benevolent Society in Chinatown. Earlier we compared our backgrounds. A self-effacing Protestant work ethic (much of which went over my head) was similar to how she was brought up. I wondered if the Chinese version had a sensory compensation, like indulging in fine meals. She said, "Not necessarily." There is a Chinese proclivity for leading an ascetic life that is focused on the practical. She is not sure what her father did to loosen up, other than playing cards with his buddies.

I was back in the Jacuzzi, stretching out and floating on the water. There was a sublime magnetic field between us. Certain remarks would leave one or both of us

laughing. One of us said, “You look like you’ve missed a lot of opportunities,” which struck us as hilarious. Sometimes we arrive at lines through a stream of consciousness that has an unexpected reverb, hitting a sardonic note.

We were trying to figure out the constellations while looking at Orion on the horizon. I said it was another example of anthropomorphic projection (trying to make the void more human). It’s like looking through a lens with your thumb over part of the view. I don’t think the folk tale explanation of a lunar eclipse is more interesting than the scientific version. It’s like the plaster and cardboard figures in a cheap carnival.

The conversation was going full steam when there was the sudden apparition of my father in his robe, asking if we would keep it down.

When we got out of the tub, talking quietly, I slipped into the cool dark water of the pool. The idea was to swim underwater since it was quiet, and to see what the effects of half a joint and some wine would be. 2½ lengths. It slowed me down by half a length.

1 a.m. Ming was fading for the last half hour and we went inside, lying on our separate beds. She was unconscious in a minute. I stayed up reading the paper, being slightly wired. Give me a hit off a joint and I’m on.

Wednesday, Oct. 13, 1993

7:30 a.m. Woke up early with the light coming through the windows and couldn’t go back to sleep. I lay there for an hour or more.

The morning was overcast, but the clouds broke up around eleven. My mother had the day off so we took it easy, sitting around the pool. Ming and I were swimming and diving. There was a certain discretion since we were at my parents’ house - like

sleeping in separate beds. It was getting to me though, and I attacked her underwater. Later we were lying on towels by the edge of the pool. My parents had gone somewhere and it was warm out. She lowered the top of her black swimsuit, but was discreet about it.

Earlier I was on the end of the diving board facing the hill, about to dive into the view. She was talking with my father. A plane from World War II went by (there is a small airport near here). When a plane is passing as it comes in for a landing it has a restful effect, like something coming home.

3 p.m. We were ready to leave. I paid my respects to the hill, walking partway up, and then we drove to La Jolla. It was fogged in, but the air was warm and the cliffs were still there. We were in good spirits and being so relaxed she let the girl in her come out.

That reminds me, last night in the hot tub after smoking half a joint I thought she was regressing and said as much. Sometimes she likes to make faces and strange sounds, wanting to deconstruct the traits that are usually associated with the pretty and the feminine (she is horrified by the prospect of having a daughter who is femme). It might mean wearing overalls and army boots and swearing like a truck driver and peeing like a man (I mean in the open, more or less), while cultivating some not-so-feminine skills like driving a forklift. She warned me not to fall for any "dainty girls." Given what it's been like with the Amazons I've known, I would like nothing better at this point.

And yet she has some legendary feminine characteristics and dimensions, more than most women I've known, for better or worse and probably both, knowing her proclivity for contradiction. She is curvy, and likes to curl up in a warm bundle with long dark hair giving off a scent of China Musk. She has soft lips and a temper, with emotional fluxes which are big enough to drive a truck through. There is often some

difficulty making up her mind, and a constant struggle of making plans. She will draw up charts and schedules when trying to organize her life and put some order in it. She has a tendency for socializing, and though she might be wearing overalls and boots her lingerie is feminine and fitted (except perhaps the boxer shorts), with a figure which a lot of women wish they had.

I'm not sure if her tomboy tendencies are there to balance her womanly side so she doesn't drown in it, or if she associates the feminine with being weak and passive like her mother. Ming has a similar attitude to falling in love or even letting go in bed, like it's a weakness. She is competing with a man, and whoever comes first is weak. Talk about an empty victory.

We wandered through a shell shop with a mild form of shell shock (I wanted a sea urchin magnet). Nearby there was a woodsy neighborhood, but it was so bourgeois I had to get out of there, returning with some tacos to the cliffs. We climbed down to where we had been diving and jumping. It was warm and cloudy and we sat on the edge of a rock about ten feet above the water. There were seagulls coming around like they wanted a taco. The swells were coming in and the spray of a wave rose up in front of us. I wondered if we would get hit, and the next one did it. We were christened by the sea and semi-drenched.

The erosion of the rock formations made it seem like there were deadly forces wearing away the ground beneath your feet. Beams of sunlight were emerging from the clouds on the horizon and we headed for an open wooden structure on the edge of a cliff. She was caught up in a tour de force of being silly. Apropos of what I don't remember, but I mentioned Chinese opera and it struck a nerve, if not a missing chord in her. She

was brought up on the stuff and hates it. She didn't even think it was music, more like non-melodic voices with jarring sound-effects which she commenced to reproduce. It was a pretty good caricature,[77] and she couldn't stop laughing.

She doesn't have time for Verdi or Puccini either. Most of the time we're on the same wavelength as far as music goes – from Lou Reed to Einsturzen Neubauten – but she doesn't like the Ronettes or Rosie and the Originals, and nearly gagged when I turned up an old Beach Boys tune in the car. And yet "Crystal Blue Persuasion" was okay. I think she's from another planet, and is a little vague on some of the concepts here on earth.

6 p.m. We drove away with a dramatic sunset in progress. The radio had more oldies. They were "whining" girl songs (her word). We drove to the freeway, going past the airport to the waterfront, and found my father with a couple of aircraft carriers in the background. Fish and chips at a table on a pier with my parents, looking at the water and Coronado Island. Behind us was a futuristic skyline. The conversation was holding up, and my mother was in good form. When we left for the airport Ming hugged her and later my father at the terminal.

I had a heavy bag at the airport and a beat-up leather shoulder bag with some beer and homegrown apples in it. When I went through the metal detector the buzzer went off and I was momentarily detained. I forgot I had a bottle opener in my pocket.

8:10 p.m. On the plane. I let her have the window seat and we took off into the night. She was nervous, chewing gum the whole way and maintaining a furious concentration on a crossword puzzle – for which she was enlisting my help. We drifted

[77] I have a theory that the Chinese wouldn't need so many aphrodisiacs, from ground-up seahorses to tiger penis soup, if they listened to singers like Frank Sinatra.

over much of California, not seeing much, and eventually descended over San Jose like a big electric suburb in the void. When we were closer to the airport there was a small plane moving parallel to us in the window (either that or a UFO). She was concerned about it being too close, and didn't trust the pilot.

9:30 p.m. The plane landed with a bump and a skid, if not a prayer. There was a constant refrain over the last few days about what this city in northern California lacked, compared to the southern latitudes. Walking through the terminal it hit us. I asked if it was me or San Francisco or what. How come whenever I land here it feels like a let-down? Is it the airport or the people? The atmosphere is missing something. Down south it is like you are immersed, and here it's like you're washed up.

It turned into a long depressing silence in the back of the wrong shuttle van (her idea). It was driven by an unscrupulous black man, and we got a tour of downtown with numerous stops. He even went through my neighborhood on the way to hers, but I wasn't in the mood for it.

We were sitting in her room and feeling tired, talking to the roommates. The new one is a young black lesbian. While Ming was making phone calls I was on a wooden guitar.

Midnight: her mood was altered. The last few days were a vast relief and she was able to relax. Now she was being slammed into her usual state of affairs which were worse than normal, what with her leaving for China in a week. There were some loose ends to take care of. She let her guard down for a few days, and then by way of a flight was being hurled at 500 miles per hour into a wall.

Among other things: her airplane ticket hadn't arrived. The mother of an old friend (Tanya) said she owed her money ($150). Tanya is not much of a friend at the moment, and Ming figured she would spend it on methamphetamines. The ex-boyfriend is sick. In no time she was getting stressed out and could hardly move. The plans she made in Alaska were seen from a different perspective at home. She doesn't want to be gone for several months in China, Thailand, and Korea.

As for the ex-boyfriend, she was surprised to find he still meant something to her. He mentioned having gone out with a woman and she wasn't sure she liked the sound of that, though she was screwing a couple of other guys over the last few months. One of the disconcerting things about love is when it is "eternal," striking a chord which lingers after the person is gone. It's like when your leg is cut off, but you can still feel it.

All of this was working itself into a massive tangled impasse in her mind, until she couldn't stand it. She rolled the remnants of the pot into a small joint. Did I want some? No. She had a couple of hits along with a vitamin (Lady Pep) and we stayed up for the next few hours. We were tired, but the flight made us wired. She threw together a rudimentary meal for herself in the kitchen. I won't say I lost my appetite, but…

Back in her room we set up a large drawing pad between us. I sat on a low mattress with her on the floor. There was a purple magic-marker in my bag which made her night. She loves to zone out once in a while, making random sketches. Ming has a good graphic sense which often makes no sense and doesn't worry about it. It comes from a source which bypasses her mind. Maybe a lot of things do (ha ha).

We took turns and it turned into a kind of chess game which was semi-abstract, adding to the composition while considering what the other had drawn. There was a sense

of psychologically revealing graphics. Hers reveal a primal force, where mine were realistic or symbolic. Another fine tension for a composition. A spark-gap polarity is generated by our differences, and all the more volatile with someone like her. “I’M NOT A COMPENDIUM OF OPPOSING FORCES!” she said at one point.

She had loosened up, forgetting her worries and concerns, regressing back to childhood almost. I said, “Does the word ‘spasmodic’ mean anything to you?” She said she was a “total spaz” when she was a girl. We were having one or two beers and surprising each other on the page. She got up and walked to the bed (with a lot of clutter in the room). She half-turned and tore off her shirt, removing her bra, and bent over to take her pants off with her breasts hanging for a moment. She put on some violet long johns and a sweatshirt and felt more comfortable. It felt like I was in the lair of a female creature when she lets her hair down. Her clothes were flung around the room and she was kneeling on the floor munching on a raw carrot and making strange sounds and enigmatic expressions.

After a few erratic drawings we tried one using the other hand – the one allegedly connected to the subconscious. When she switched hands there wasn’t much difference, while I was looser and produced a spectral figure.

3:30 a.m. Went to sleep.

Thursday, Oct. 14, 1993

10 a.m. Coming to. We were lying close together, but she wasn’t in the mood for getting thrown around. That usually gets us activated in the morning. She had a lot of things to take care of, but that didn’t mean she wouldn’t ignore it all and hang out with a

few friends. What she says and what she does don't always coincide. I remember her saying she was being careful with alcohol and how awful rockabilly is. Last week she was drinking vodka tonics and went to see the Reverend Horton Heat and liked him.

We got up and put on some clothes, with her in overalls and a T-shirt, and went across the street to an old-style counter. The two of us were like a couple of worn-out manic-depressives having breakfast. She would rather have Tabasco sauce than honey and raisins, much less muesli, and that about sums it up.

Last night, returning to her place and unpacking, she said that was the longest amount of time we ever spent together. She had a look of wonder that we hadn't gotten on each other's nerves.

Returning to the flat she disappeared, then came back into the room fastening the front of her overalls and said, "Carrots are good for when you have to pooh." I had to go to work and got my things together. We went downstairs with her carrying her bike – on the way to visit her sick ex-boyfriend. We met the Phantom outside, still carrying a phantom torch for her. He also carried a classical guitar – my old one actually, and handed it over. I strummed a few chords while they talked.

On the sidewalk there was a quick kiss over a bicycle and we parted ways. I took a bus to the Tenderloin.

At home I found a postcard from B. showing Bryce Canyon in Utah, where "vistas can encompass over 200 miles." Another card with the same subject arrived the next day:

> Bryce Canyon, sometimes called nature's storm drain, was formed when uneven sediment from lake beds hardened then eroded away by heavy rains and melting snow.

It was a small card and managed to carry seven exclamation points. Communicating makes her excited.

> HAVING A VERY GOOD TIME – FINALLY GOT OUT OF LAS VEGAS & ITS INCREDIBLE CASINOS!! (LET ME KNOW IF I. OFFERS YOU ANY SPECIAL TENNIS OPPORTUNITIES!!) HA (IN MY ABSENCE) WHEN I SEE THESE ROCKS ETC I'M THINKING OF YOU AND HOW YOU LIKE THESE SITES! I'M ONE RIGHT NOW! P.S. MISS YOU! LOVE XXXXX

There was heavy equipment in the empty lot under the kitchen window. No weeds anymore. The dirt was being pushed around and flattened by a bulldozer. I wondered if some junkies were buried there.

3:30 p.m. I went to work. When I walked in V. had a big smile. She asked if I would like some cold spaghetti which she made last night.

The Attorney was less appealing to return to. He carried a grudge that I had gone away for a few days. We were supposed to discuss it, he expected me back yesterday, etc. It was legitimate vacation time from last year and nothing to do with any generosity on his part. It wasn't like he hired a temp to do the work while I was gone – it was all there waiting.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the underground and she said, "Are we having lunch tomorrow?" I was going to say, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," but wasn't feeling sorrowful or Shakespearean at the moment. I returned to the office and more work.

7:30 p.m. Walked home. It felt like a good night to catch up on my sleep, avoiding the usual poisons like coffee and cigarettes. There was a workout on a wooden

instrument (it needs new strings), and a phone call from the Phantom. He said we could resume in the sound-room when Ming was gone. He was too nervous or distracted to play when she was around.

Friday, Oct. 15, 1993

Woke up early and typed for a couple of hours. The neighborhood with its "welcome home" of disturbing sound-effects. There was a garbage truck with a waterfall of breaking glass, and a jackhammer on the corner. Last night the sirens were out in force. The white powder brothers with their junk bond in the vacant lot are gone.

Around noon I caught a bus and walked to the back. A woman called my name – an old girlfriend who I haven't seen in several years. She is an opera singer who segued into jazz. She was not really a girlfriend, but one of the few women I have had casual sex with (there could have been more, but I am not that casual). It was mainly her idea, and the encounters occurred in the mid-1980's. She said she is still working at a high-tone department store ("I'm in perfumes") and has been married for a year. She has moved a couple of times and might be pregnant. Her short black hair and red lipstick are the same, but she is heavier now. There was the same erotic spark between us, and she asked with a smile if I was living with anyone at the moment. That seemed to come with a vague innuendo.[78] I mentioned the fire and my lowdown relocation.

[78] She means it though. A few years later I was walking through North Beach and found her singing in a café. I wound up riding in her car to the waterfront where we parked in a discreet location and she went down on me twice in twenty minutes. "I am a passenger, and I ride and I ride… I see the stars come out tonight…." Iggy, "The Passenger."

12:30 p.m. I walked with V. to a place on the edge of Chinatown, and told her about the trip, jumping off cliffs and climbing rocks. I showed her my cuts and bruises. She said I was a kid, then gave me her phone number and address.

When I returned to the office there was some work. The Attorney was in the conference room yesterday with a new client, a woman in a child custody case. She is nice looking, in her late twenties, blonde, from rural northern California. She had a simple country air to her. Unfortunately her case, which is to say her life, was complicated and torn beyond belief. I put the file together. What I'm confronted with in this job, besides dramatic phone calls, angry or confessional clients, and police reports, are the psychological reports. In this case a "Psychological / Custody Evaluation."

If I can blur the details into a more anonymous profile, it went something like this: When she was twenty she married an Islamic man from Malaysia. They had a son, but things weren't working out in the marriage. He was unclear on the concept of women's rights. Her mother-in-law kidnapped her son and took him back to Malaysia. The mother was devastated, taking years of effort to get her son back, but to no avail. She returned to the U.S. and met a man in his twenties. They were married in a few months, had a kid, and then another one (two sons). Unfortunately, the second one wasn't his, her having gone back to Malaysia for a visit and spent some time with the first husband and this was his son. The second husband found out about it. Their marriage was already on the rocks since he was something of a drinker, but this didn't help. For some reason when they separated he got stuck with child support for both boys, though the second one isn't his. On the other hand, he was only paying a fraction of it (his wages are garnished, over $500 a month). He is $15,000 behind on payments. There was a custody and visitation

controversy over him and the two boys involving scheduling problems between Oregon and California.

Meanwhile, she met a third man, got married, and they had a kid (I wanted to ask if she ever heard of birth control). I think a fourth or fifth is on the way. Apparently, this husband is a nice guy, except they're both unemployed and he keeps guns and pot in the house. He also fired a shotgun at her ex-husband during one of his unscheduled visits. The woman lied to the authorities about how many shots were fired. There is an interview in which the two boys talk about how much their mother and estranged father fight and argue.

That's a rough outline. There was some mention of her having had an abusive alcoholic father. Her parents separated when she was a girl. Looking at her you would never guess the mortal turbulence in her life, having a calm and sweet appearance. The evaluation noted there was some denial in the parties involved, including her, as to whether any of this was their fault. It said that her belief in her own inherent goodness was a little overdone.

I wondered what a psychological evaluation of my life would sound like. Not too good, especially if denial and arrested development were mentioned.

V. kept calling on the phone. I walked into the back office where she was sitting at the computer with her glasses on and asking if I could help her write a complaint with a pleading (using an old format and changing the particulars). "Teach me," she said with a look of innocent determination and some impatience with herself and words.

5 p.m. We left, walking to the underground. I noticed a paramedic truck with a man lying on the other side of the street and not moving. We continued walking along

with everyone else on their way home. I thought I saw his hand move. No sign of blood. I said I wasn't sure if there would be urgent sirens if he was dead. She looked worried.

I thought about it on the way back to the office. A man is lying on the street and people walk by, how cold of them. However, it goes with the territory and the circumstances. He was being attended to by paramedics who would prefer that people not interfere or form a crowd around them. They should keep walking. People die all the time (2,000,000 a year in this country). I wondered if he was driving and had a heart attack. There isn't much you can do. What is showing more respect, to stand around for a closer look or to walk on? If a stranger intervenes before the paramedics get there it could do some harm. When a man fell out of the window across the street from my place he was lying on his back. If someone tried to move him and he had a broken neck they could make it worse and run the risk of being sued.

I returned to the office, and had a vague notion of going to the nightclub in North Beach. The head chef said I should drop by for a drink. He wanted to talk about breaking up with his fiancée in an atmosphere of nearly naked writhing women, one of whom I am acquainted with. I ran this by the Professor when he called a while back. His customary cynicism was coming out when I said it isn't her main career, and she's a pre-med student. He said, "They all say that." I wondered how he would know that, and why I tend to believe what a woman tells me, even a stranger.

I found out later that the Actress was looking askance at my consorting with a stripper, like it was beneath me (I don't have to be on top, but that's another story). A woman not willing to give another woman the benefit of the doubt, that she might be more than a dimwit with loose morals. There are a few women who work in offices who

would qualify under those terms. Even more odd, the Actress has been known to go home with a man she met in a bar (including Michael), and all I have is the slim possibility of meeting someone on a tennis court, where I assume she would keep her shirt on.

Maybe the Actress wants to protect me. I've gotten that from women friends who know what sort of spider women are out there, and they say as much. However, would a stripper be a letdown any more than someone who is proper? I wrote a note for Stormy on the off chance I haven't dissolved in her memory over the last week or two. I included an old Xerox of one of my desert photos. This may border on the absurd, but according to Camus and Kierkegaard,[79] absurdity makes the world go round.

7 p.m. I walked to the men's club on Broadway and stood in the luxurious lobby talking to the doorman. I waited for someone to notify the chef. He waved me in and waived the $20 cover charge. The girls came down the stairs and into the employees-only room, one after another. They were fresh off the runway, wearing G-strings and clutching their clothing to their bosoms. One of them was short, and her breasts were so voluminous and heavy she could knock down a brass pole with them.

I sat at the wooden bar with a mirror (a pause to reflect). I was here to talk to a couple of people who work here. However, Stormy was gone and Michael was busy, though he came out for a while. I had a glass of wine and he talked about having rented a room. He doesn't want to assume it's over, but she probably does.

I was thinking how encounters with women that morning, afternoon, and evening corresponded to the past, present, and future. I ran into a woman on the bus who I used to

[79] He also wrote "The Seducer's Diary" in a book called *Either/Or* (1843), but that's another story.

sleep with;[80] I had lunch with a woman I'm a little in love with (who is engaged to someone else); and planned to see a woman who might figure in the future. I should have known that in corresponding to the future she wouldn't be there.

The atmosphere in the club was wearing on me. It's not my crowd. There were glimpses of a torrid torso in the next room, but I kept my distance. The women didn't, though. A few of them walked up and rubbed against my arm (not all at once), purring about a private room. One was pushing my resistance to the limit. I'm not sure what goes on in the backroom, but I didn't feel like laying out tens and twenties while a woman gets more naked and emotional. The place has some of the attributes of a brothel, but it's simulated. I doubt they would run the risk of actual sex, or the place would be shut down.

There was a review in the *SF Weekly* by a condescending lesbian who got off on the women while putting down the men. She insinuated the men were sitting there like awe-struck juveniles who have never seen a naked woman. I thought it was the opposite, especially in the bar where the men were talking about baseball and hardly glancing at a throbbing runway. One girl walked up in a low-cut outfit and a kitten voice and a man who didn't want to be interrupted said, "Baseball is better than sex." She didn't know what to say, having struck out, and went away. It was not the most polite approach, and I don't agree, but he was hardly in awe of strippers.

There was a small-breasted woman in a top hat on the runway, but I was losing interest. A lounge singer came on, working the crowd - the men at their tables. Part of the fantasy is women being open and friendly with men they've never met before. They treat them with respect as if it was the 1950's or a science fiction movie. The science involves

[80] As opposed to, "I ran into a woman who I used to sleep with on the bus."

the chemistry between the sexes, and the fiction has to do with the women caring about these guys. What with other monolithic illusions operating in this country, from justice to eternal life, why not the fiction of a woman showing respect for a man?

There was an over-rated *Penthouse* model who has been in the magazine ten or fifteen times (over-exposed). It sometimes happens that a legend of still photos doesn't move that well in person, and a photogenic pelvis isn't enough in this milieu.

She was followed by a woman who got a leg up on a real dimension. There was no denying her ability and her agility. She could stand on one leg with the other pointing straight up, turning and twisting backwards in a G-string.[81] A woman with nice ribs and jutting tits. More to the point, a natural slinky nervous system, like a horny ballerina and a born contortionist. Her body was a stream of consciousness. She could do anything, pressing up against a brass pole and pushing her breasts around it. They defied gravity as much as she did when standing on one leg or hanging upside down.

When she was finished she collected the local currency, with some of it in her garter belt. Someone else should pick up the bills, maybe with a special broom. It is unseemly for the women to have to do that. When she walked by me at the bar I noticed how delicate she looked. It's possible that she is hard as nails, and a manicure would be a spiritual experience.

I stopped at the window to the kitchen on my way out, saying goodbye to Michael. It was hot, confusing, and busy in there. He came out and shook hands, and then was diverted by an order from a waitress. They talked it over, a slight problem. A

[81] Julia Hayes

cigarette girl was listening with a look of concern. She saw me watching, flashed a quick smile, and then went back to looking concerned.

There was some commotion in the main room. I turned around and saw the girls streaming into the room or onto the runway. There were fifteen or twenty of them in bikinis or lingerie with their bodies in motion, tall and short and multi-ethnic.

I walked to the City Lights bookstore, talk about a change of pace. I was there for an hour, looking at a collection of articles from the *Evergreen Review* (1957 – 1966), something by Toni Morrison, and a review of a German industrial band in *Sin* magazine (Einsturzen Neubauten). I also found an autobiographical book called *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (1987) by V.S. Naipaul. The woman behind the counter was in her late twenties with dark red lipstick, smooth features, and a five o'clock shadow on her shaved head. The music in the background was "Unchained Melody" as sung by a female impersonator.

I walked home, foregoing the pool. This week already had a lot of water in it.

Typing with oblivion for a margin release.

Saturday, Oct. 16, 1993

Typing in the morning.

Through the window I saw a one-man operation that was so smooth and efficient with no wasted movements it bordered on the poetic (Ezra Pound was staring over my shoulder, along with the man who wrote "Tractor," Ted Hughes): a man guided a bulldozer onto a flatbed truck and drove away.

The Czech woman arrived with her ten-year-old son, having phoned earlier. He is hyperactive and a bit annoying. When they walked in the phone rang. It was B. in Salt Lake City. She is having serious doubts about continuing the trip to Canada. Her male companion is getting on her nerves, and after a week and a half of this she wants to jump on a plane to San Francisco. She couldn't decide. "What do you think?" There was some mention of her current paramour who said some enigmatic things on the phone.

I sat around with the Czech woman and her son, who has no concept of not being the center of attention. Time and again he was diverting the conversation, throwing in something completely arbitrary. She kept asking him not to. He walked over to the amplifier in the kitchen and asked if he could turn it on. I said, "No, it doesn't work." He turned it on anyway and strummed the Stratocaster leaning against it, getting a sound. "It works," he said.

She talked me into walking with her to the café where she works for some coffee. Part of the motivation was that he would be dropped off at the bus. We walked by a huge hole in the ground near the Civic Center and he wanted to know what it's for.

"They're building a new library."
"Why?"

We put him on a bus to the Haight and then walked to Mission Street for the Vision Gallery. It's where a finer stillness has been brought into focus.

It was a long walk to her café at 7th and Townsend in a renovated old brick building. She went into the garage and a metal gate began descending. I ducked under it, and for a few minutes we were locked in an underground garage. This is what a spontaneous excursion can lead to.

The security guard sent down an elevator and soon we were in an ultra-modern lobby where the windows were three or four stories high. In the windblown patio there was a mobile with eight or nine dark silhouettes slowly turning like ghosts. I had some apple juice and an energy bar. She had two double espressos and admitted she is addicted, downing them in a few minutes. It would have taken me hours (especially if I was using it to fuel the writing).

She was there to pick up her bicycle and we went outside, walking past the train yards. The two of us were walking the rails with a long shadow of the derailed. It was a lovely afternoon following a light rain. We were in the midst of a long trek and would cover about five miles, passing the "train station" at 4th and Townsend. It is the architectural equivalent of a placebo, and a pathetic excuse for a station.

Our route took us up 4th Street to the new Moscone Center with a half-constructed building across the street. There were opening ceremonies recently. Yerba Buena Center has a reverb going back for thirty years – it displaced a slum with a lot of "old drunks" who fought back in the courts. The waterfall is there for them to stick their heads in to sober up, it's ten feet high over rough-hewn granite. At the top there is a long reflecting pool in the form of a crescent from which the water pours and wooden benches which are contoured with the human body in mind, what a concept. Where did they get that idea? Probably Europe. There is a modern-looking theater, but the building next to it is a clunker with corrugated aluminum sides. It seems to be unfinished, looking like a warehouse made of tin (for what it's worth, a Japanese architect was paid millions for it). It was functional inside. There were some open-minded political messages, and drag queen propaganda.

Across the street an old church made of brick was surrounded with futuristic towers, and gracefully holding its own. It comes from an era when space and time meant something else and you can tell the difference.

The waterfall is a monument to Martin Luther King, Jr., and nothing wrong with that. It is hard to imagine the courage it took to stand up for civil rights in an uncivil country, and to do it in such a way that alienated many black people (who found him too respectful of whites). Not only was he surrounded with rancid white sociopaths who hated him, there were forces in the government which wanted him dead and he knew it.[82]

A walkway goes behind the falling water and is lined with quotes (in several languages) from Dr. King which are cut in thick glass. There is a juxtaposition of his sayings with the sound and fury of a waterfall. I wonder if all of this is a form of behavioral modification for blacks. White people have ennobling monuments which project the notion of being civilized. The concept is elusive, and given to historical erosion, especially when the main behavioral modification comes from television (talk about an "abysmal biopathy"[83]).

I'm not sure about his line, "The bass note of blacks" combining with "the treble note of whites." That would explain a few things if true, and not necessarily to the credit of either race. Bass notes are known for having a stick-in-the-mud repetition, while treble notes are known for being less substantial and above it all.

Across the street was an empty lot with a sign saying it was the future site of THE MEXICAN MUSEUM. There was a row of portable toilets. (I would like to see the

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[82] Flash forward to the "Statement on the Release of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Assassination Files" (July 21, 2025) at www.thekingcenter.org

[83] Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933). I would also recommend "Some Mechanisms of the Emotional Plague," *International Journal of Sex-Economy and Orgone Research* (1945).

Museo Nacional de Antropologia in Mexico City someday.) We walked a block to the Cadillac Bar and sat at the counter. I had a Dos Equis and her a Negra Modelo. The bartender kept slamming one-shot poppers onto the bar (tequila and 7-Up) until it was getting on her nerves.

7 p.m. With the evening up in the air I was open to suggestions, like a party or a film at Artist's Television Access. We finally settled on a hot tub, something she has recently developed a liking for. As we walked to Grand Central Hot Tubs on a windblown night it sounded more and more like a good idea.

We got a room with a redwood tub and sauna. I lay on the side of the tub with a cigarette in my fingers, a small bottle of rum, and an opera on the radio. There was a pale and naked woman standing waist deep in the turbulent water. She got out of the tub and walked over to the radio and changed the station (she didn't like the soprano).

This is a woman with no automatic high regard for other women, and during the walk I listened to her quandaries about elusive men and self-deluding or duplicitous women, including herself. She mentioned how easily her interest in a man will evaporate, as if compensating for a tendency to magnify his aura and potential with a knee-jerk willingness to cut him dead at the first wrong word.

In this case, the fellow she met at Brainwash with her girlfriend two weeks ago. I had to hear about the mystical experience of her sensing a bond with him while trying to control herself because her girlfriend met him first. The girlfriend got his phone number, went out with him, and the next week went to bed with him. He is already being evasive. The Czech woman told her girlfriend, "What did you expect?" and she gave her a blank

look. The Czech woman's interest dissolved when she heard what he said about her and her girlfriend, that he could "go either way" or maybe both.

Later she had to build up her confidence vis-a-vis a good-looking "ethnic" man in a nice suit. He worked in her coffee shop and seemed friendly and interested. She was so nervous it was shutting down her reactions. She liked him, but felt he wouldn't like her (low income, average looks). I said, "He knows you serve coffee and you probably don't make $100,000 a year. He's not blind and if he's still coming around and saying things like, 'What are you doing on the weekend?' it probably means he is interested." She was more concerned about being rejected, or of seeing through her surface impression of him. Her opinion of a man can alter 180 degrees within days or weeks of getting to know him. I said, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," (I'm full of old platitudes when it comes to this sort of thing) but where does she get off being concerned about rejection when she cut off several men in the past? She said some women prefer a situation they are more in control of and less in love with than the other way around. Maybe they love control (another reason for having a dog or a baby). It would seem to be poetic justice if they're disillusioned controllers and when it comes to love, not to mention the big O, they choke. It's hard to let go when you have a death-grip on the ego.

This is from our earlier conversations, most of which were dissolving in the current watery mood. She was being friendly and turned the lights down, saying it was "more romantic." She relaxed in the tub like it was just what she needed, moving her neck and shoulders with some reference to the tension in her. I said, "Want a backrub?" She replied, "You read my mind," and floated over in a second, turning around. It made for a sublime position sitting in a wooden tub with her ensconced between my legs, her

firm behind touching me lightly. I had a semi-erection, and can usually control it in a hot tub, but it was getting hard. We made an adjustment where she slid back a little for a closer contact. Having been rubbing her shoulders, my arms were now around her in front with her head thrown back in a gentle and luxuriating interlude, like she was giving in to the pose for a few minutes and exploring the potential of it, or maybe she doesn't mind someone caressing her ribs and pink-tipped breasts.

Normally we have our boundaries, being mainly friends, but the circumstances constituted a margin release. I'm familiar with the capacity of a woman to float into an ambiguous situation without assuming it will lead to something, and to easily float out of it. Which she did, with some comment as to how hot she was getting. She had to sit on the side for a minute and take a cold shower. I was left with the memory of her soft pale body. It had such a lyrical effect I didn't mind her having turned off the opera.

A few minutes later we were back in the tub and she returned the gesture as I turned my back and floated into her arms and legs. I leaned on her while she rubbed my neck and shoulders with a firm grip which she got from moving the mail at UPS.[84]

Earlier a jet of water was coming from the side. When I turned around it hit me in the genitals and she said, "Don't have an orgasm."

We went into the sauna with her on the lower bench, lying on her back. I sat in a full lotus position on the upper bench. She was striking some lovely poses with her head thrown back and her back arched, then apologizing when she accidentally spread her legs. She went on about wanting to lose a few pounds, and asked for my opinion while

[84] One of my old professors, a Greek poet, referred to the zipper in his pants as a "zip code." I replied, "And the zip code moves the male." He liked that.

lifting a breast, showing how it could be firmer, and then apologized for sounding self-centered.

I was a hot head at the moment. It felt like I was being X-rayed by the heat, a purifying sweat. We got out of the sauna and took a cold shower. I had another shot of rum which wasn't having much effect – it may have been sweated out. We were lounging half in and half out of the hot tub with the phallus behaving itself, more or less. Another five minutes in the sauna (we had ten minutes left).

We took turns with the shower, dried off, put our clothes on and left, walking in the cool night air to the corner where we finished the bottle of rum. As we stood there talking we were hit up several times for a cigarette and once for change (by a polite black man). The conversation turned into one of those pointblank moods of hers where she sees right through me, half-apologizing for being so direct or testing my resilience since I listened and was still standing a few minutes later.

It had to do with the ongoing presence of a certain woman in my life - Ming - and how it was apparent to the Czech woman that I was in love with her, not realizing that I was under her influence. A year or two ago the Czech woman was on the verge of drifting into something with me, but noticed that when Ming came over (we were at my place) I brightened up. It deflected her romantic interest in me. In other words, did I realize I was preoccupied with Ming and that it was eclipsing other possible connections?

She has alluded to this before, "You're secretly in love with her," and it is not exactly news to me. I'm not sure what's the problem. We say we love each other and act accordingly. If it is stopping short of a full-blown affair there's not much I can do about it. There is probably a reason for it and she knows herself better than I do, having had

some problematic affairs. For several years I've seen the turbulent trail she leaves behind, the storm and stress of her sex life. That makes it easier to have a certain detachment with no strings attached. She has told me that is when she's at her best.

The Czech woman said, maybe with some vague resentment, "If she gave you the go-ahead signal you would respond." I said I might, but that's often the case with women. They're the ones with a psychological traffic light conveying STOP and GO, if not PROCEED WITH CAUTION. I read the signs and act accordingly.[85] It took me a while to realize a signal conveying "no" could mean no for now, being provisional and shifting, a mercurial no. A yes could turn into a no in no time. What do you do when you're getting all the lights at once – jump the curb and run into a telephone pole and call her on it?

There was some verisimilitude to what she was saying, even with the possibility of a presence in my life deflecting other women. A couple of possible connections may have withered on the vine when they encountered the magnetic field we generate. And yet we have a certain distance, like the spark requires a gap.

Meanwhile, the Czech woman wanted a hug and a kiss, with a bicycle between us, and we parted on friendly terms.

I walked past the opera house with people standing outside, and Max's Opera Café was crowded. I was hungry, not having eaten for a while, but I went into a bookstore where the arc of an intensely interesting Saturday continued with a book on the

[85] I wouldn't run a red light, especially if it meant the woman wanted nothing more to do with me. I have hesitated for a green light a few times, with the woman left to wonder what was wrong with her or me. I have encountered a caution light where anything can happen if you take it slow.

paintings of Lucien Freud. He is a reality check if I ever saw one, from London with an approach-avoidance of his own.

Hot pastrami on sourdough, beer and bean soup. Walked home.

Sunday, Oct. 17, 1993

Hard-on morning. Typing for a couple of hours. Phone call, two hours. A wooden stringed instrument, two hours.

12:30 p.m. The phone call from Ming. We were riffing off each other's comments with rim shots galore, and there was some mention of the fellow in Alaska. She was sleeping with him and doesn't want to anymore, especially if that's what holds the partnership together. "Disgusting," in her opinion. She wants to establish some integrity, his and hers. Meanwhile he called from Seattle and said he can't wait to see her naked. "That's corny," I said. "No shit."

She has sunk into a quandary with the ex-boyfriend which she didn't expect. They have resumed their negotiations about whether he should wait for her and if they have a future. She isn't sure. Ming doesn't want to put him through any more suffering. He said that was his choice, having had a fairly miserable year. One should consider, to use her expression, "the cost benefit ratio" of being close to her. She has a benign presence, but the costs are similar to those of a serious drug.

It's no big deal if women toy with men, but it is a crime against nature if it is done to them. At any rate, she is done with casual therapeutic sex. It may look simple on the surface, but there are often complications since we're not (entirely) surface beings.

The subject came up last night in her room with the ex-boyfriend. We were sitting around talking and then slipped into a more serious vein with the subject of rape. She had the calm assumption that she would kill a man who raped her. Or hire someone to kill him and wouldn't think twice about it, whether or not she was physically injured. I said he would be looking at years in prison, but how is it worth a man's life? It's like the old notion of a woman on a pedestal. If she is violated by a man, he should die. Meanwhile Ming is glomming onto the liberated woman routine. In the latter worldview, men and women are equal before the law. There isn't anything particularly precious about a woman, and you can't rationalize it being a worth a man's life if he has sex with a woman against her will and she is still alive.

"Anyhow, I thought you were against capital punishment."
"Well yes. What are you saying, I have discrepancies up the butt?"

By which point we were laughing. There was some further discussion of how she would go about knocking off a rapist. What sort of danger and/or liability would that entail? What is the current rate of unsolved homicides in San Francisco? (About 50 percent, one of the worst rates in the country.) What are the odds of her getting away with it – especially if she brings someone else into the conspiracy? She mentioned someone she had a short affair with, a married black man in Oakland. He is stylish with some spiritual presumptions and reads the *Koran*, but he insinuated that he could provide her with a hit man if she needed one. I said, "That doesn't sound very spiritual." The *Koran* should apply in Oakland, as well as in North Africa.

Where was I, talking on the phone on a Sunday afternoon. At one point, apropos of something or other, I said:

"I land on my feet."

"What?"
"It's a euphemism."
"I don't like euphemisms."
"That's because you don't know any."

I told her what the Czech woman said about my being secretly in love with Ming. She sounded surprised, and wanted to know if I had heard this sort of thing before. Ming found it strange how other people view us from the outside, sometimes drawing the worst conclusions. She wondered why it was hard to imagine the two of us "filling deep empty spaces without being sexual."

While talking she was messing around with the clutter of her room and packing some clothes. She told me what she is taking to China. She hung her laundry on a line that runs outside the house, but it got stuck. She needed someone to climb up on the other end of the clothesline and fix it. I said it's better if a man should break his leg than her. Well of course. That left her blouses, pants, and bras in the breeze.

"Your stuff is flapping in the wind."
"Excuse me?"

Ming said something about her figure, putting it down in no uncertain terms. She feels "flabby." Some women inhabit a realm of brutal honesty. They are likely to extend those sentiments to anyone around them, including men, using an X-ray vision that they have used on themselves for so long. Generating a romantic atmosphere with soft lights and music might be necessary when dealing with a woman like that.

Corollary: the allure of her. I read something by a woman about the gestures and the stage presence of Tina Turner. It's a classic case of how mechanical and unromantic it can be inside a woman, whether or not she knows it. Something Tina Turner does with her face is actually an effort to clear her sinuses, and pushing her hands through her hair

was a way of drying her hands. I'm not sure what the reason was for her appearing to blow a microphone.

I think Ming is psychologically near-sighted, and it requires her to get close to someone in order to figure him out and see if he is of any use to her. It has connotations of the intimate, and sooner or later he might think she likes him, but that isn't necessarily the case. Adding to the allure is that she grew up without religion. I am talking about a near-sighted pagan with a magnified sense of herself.

Where was I? Getting way too philosophical about an old friend, maybe because she is leaving the country and will be gone for months. Our relations for a couple of years have mirrored my approach-avoidance of women. Not that many are nice to be around, while having a capacity for heartbreak with an occasional side-effect of the disastrous.

While we were on the phone she admitted she had "green mud" on her face for the last half hour and was washing it off.

I got off the phone, and picked up a wooden instrument with the tube on, some commotion on a gridiron.

5 p.m. Program on the radio (KUSF) about the musician and composer, John Zorn - in case I'm under the impression I'm a musician. It began with a severe instrumental called Leng Chi - a throbbing, waning, swelling, metallic noise with some long and drawn-out howling. I turned it up. The title has something to do with "Chinese torture," where you remove the skin slowly. So refined of them. What did you think, they put a delicate vase on your head? Ming would say they put you in a room and make you listen to Chinese opera. It was followed by "Step Across the Border" with Fred Frith, and a band called News for Lulu with Bill Frizzell playing Ornette Coleman tunes.

6:30 p.m. I lay down for an hour or two, passing out along the way.

8:30 p.m. Ming called again. I was in a slightly altered state and it was a shorter conversation. Her life has a tendency to become problematic. When we were shooting the breeze in the Jacuzzi at my parents', a little stoned, I mentioned something about the art of living. She was more than a little interested and wondered how to do it. I said something about having a symphonic dimension which involves a greater sense of balance and proportion. She was skeptical at first, as if I told her my life is a grand symphony, while admitting that hers felt like bumper cars. Oddly enough, she has brought it up several times since then.[86]

If I write about her so much it is because we talk so much - occasionally in depth, though a typical exchange might go like this:

> "You're a multiple vitamin."
> "I'm not a multiple vitamin."
> "Okay… you're a placebo."
> "What?!"

I won't be writing about her over the next month or two. Part of the creative tension here is either one of us could go off in another direction. We got off the phone, having made plans for tomorrow night.

I called the Actress whose fiancé moved out. The minute I heard her voice I suspected the worst and had to downshift so I didn't sound like I was in a good mood, her being at a low ebb and not in the mood for someone who isn't. She nearly directed some of her resentment at me. "Are you still going to be friends with him?" – implying that I shouldn't I suppose, though he's a good tennis player. I think this occurs more often with

[86] She thinks I have a relatively smooth existence, in spite of where I live. If I do is it because I'm older and I live alone? Some women think that men have it easy (even though the vast majority of those in prison or on the streets are men), and take it upon themselves to correct this imbalance by making them a little miserable.

women. They form these unarmed camps of allies vs. friends of the enemy. Even worse, she was under the impression that I took one of the dancers into a private room at the men's club. There goes my reputation.

She handed the phone to her daughter Maya who was not in a bad mood and thanked me for the present. I told her about jumping off cliffs in La Jolla and she was impressed. She told me about a harrowing experience of her own, a spelling contest. Maya had to do it in front of the whole school, and ran a few words by me. She won with "liability," but will have to learn "reconcile and "annulment," among others. She didn't know what they meant, so I told her. It occurred to me that those were three little words which carried some weight in her mother's life.

She talked about one of her teachers, a man with hairy eyebrows. One of her girlfriends likes him, and told Maya that if he was her age (ten) she would go out with him, something to that effect. It didn't register on me and she had to run it by me again, being patient. I'm kind of dense and still not clear on the concept of ten-year-old girls thinking in those terms.

When she had to go to bed and we were getting off the phone she said,

"My mother wants me to tell you she still loves you."
"Tell her I love her too."
[Speaking away from the phone]: "He says he loves you too."

We said goodnight.

I went out on the not-so-lovely streets of the Tenderloin, looking for a meal. I read in the *Tenderloin Times* (it comes in English, Vietnamese, and Cambodian) that of the fifteen worst crime blocks in the city, twelve are in the Tenderloin. The article mentioned four of the worst drug corners. One is right up the block, another a block

further. I walk by there all the time. Ming read the article as well, and suggested I "re-evaluate" the situation, or move in other words. I returned after a while to the apartment with a wooden instrument and an electric typewriter.

3 a.m. I was falling asleep to the sound of a black man and woman having an argument on the street. I lifted my head and looked out the window. He was angry and demanding while she walked on the other side of the street being uncooperative. It's the lullaby of Ellis Street, and it was followed by the low spark of high-heeled whores.

Monday, Oct. 18, 1993

In the morning I looked out at the vacant lot. It was transformed into fresh dirt which was packed down by heavy equipment. There was an enigmatic orange rectangle near the chain-link fence. Maybe it's a landing area for UFO's. A truck brought a trailer and backed it into place - the headquarters of the construction effort. WIDE LOAD. On the sidewalk a few feet away a man and woman huddled in the shade of a van and smoked a crack-pipe. The grown-ups are being displaced by a children's playground. It is construction vs. self-destruction, while an old man in a wheelchair moves between them.

This Monday had a preternatural intensity. The day was raging from one end to the other. Maybe it was the vitamins I took.

2:30 p.m. I went downtown, and looked like a clumsy suicide attempt with the cuts and scratches on my wrist and inner forearm (from the rock climbing) (is rock climbing a clumsy suicide attempt?). While having something to eat in a café I read an article with women talking about weight loss. They talk about their weight a thousand times more often than men talk about the weight of women. Maybe they should emulate a

Greek statue, the one without a head. Not only would they lighten up about the situation, they wouldn't talk about it. I was in a mood. It's Monday and the vitamins were kicking in. I walked around downtown thinking about a skyline of granite tombstones. The towers are inhabited by paper ghosts.

In the office there was not much to do with the Attorney gone. V. was at the next desk with a mischievous air. She told me in whispers that her attorney is looking for a paralegal to replace her (he is a white man around forty). He would prefer someone Asian instead of white, with the latter being lazy or unethical, and they complain too much. She thought that was funny and went on with a list of Asian stereotypes – they're industrious… conscientious… hard-working. She said this while giving me that smile of hers and bending over the papers on her desk.

5 p.m. We walked outside and she said, "When we have lunch tomorrow…" She assumes it now. I returned to the office and found a message from Ming. I called her and she said to come over.

6 p.m. I caught a bus to the flat near the Haight. Ming was sitting in her room with the ex-boyfriend (the x-y boyfriend, the e-z boyfriend, the 3-D X-rated boyfriend). Everyone looked casual, while I was from the office with a loosened tie. We talked about a case or two. The horror of child custody fights, just in case Ming thought her life was difficult. The ex-boyfriend with hair down to his shoulders looks like a roadie for the Red Hot Chili Peppers, though he is an intelligent college drop-out.[87] According to Ming he has weathered a lot of condescension from his mother and sister, and so much heartbreak from her. He was very quiet during the rape discussion.

[87] Another band was mentioned, Shonen Knife. She thinks of them as "whiney" Japanese girls.

The Phantom drifted in and out of the room. He is wary and nervous when we are around, and made the observation that I am more sarcastic when she is there. The two of us get into a rapid give and take like we are splashing in sardonic waters, and he gets splashed and doesn't like it. He sensed her ex-boyfriend was moving back into the picture, at least spiritually (her word), with the Phantom having blown it by masturbating in the same bed when she first returned. She won't let him into her bed anymore and wonders why she ever did. He was showing her that he can control his drinking, but it means being perpetually stoned and that makes him edgy.

Eventually he mentioned a small amplifier in the kitchen and asked if I wanted to buy it. We went out there and had a look. I hooked up an electric guitar which was sitting next to the refrigerator and we fooled around while a male roommate and a friend were passing a bong back and forth. There was football on the tube in the living room which is open to the kitchen – it's one big room actually.

A young and slender black woman walked in and said, "Do I know you?" and extended her hand. There was some comment while holding on tighter that my hands are warm and hers aren't. She is a friendly lesbian with an African-sounding name, the latest roommate. She was eventually smoking a bong with the other roommate and the Phantom, but I wasn't having any.

Ming and the ex-boyfriend joined us and we had some wine. I was still on the electric guitar, not too loud, while the Phantom picked up the acoustic and we went off on a tangent. It continued in swelling phases for an hour or so, where I would drop into a walking bass routine while he was strumming away, or I would be all over the neck with

sound-effects. Ming jumped into the fray, picking up some chopsticks while banging away on anything she could find, including the glasses on the counter.

Later we were spitting raspberries back and forth. One landed between my legs. She reached for it, but realized the ex-boyfriend was there and pulled back.

She decided to run out the film in the camera, taking flash pictures of us. For a while I had a glowing blue hole in my optic nerve.

10 p.m. We went out, the Phantom, Ming, her ex, and me, walking a few blocks to a Moroccan place on Haight Street. It's called Kan Zaman. There were pillows for sitting on the floor (we had a short table), and hookahs with Arab tobacco. "Ambient ethereal music... coffee cup readings." Falafel and hummus. Red wine. Unfortunately, we missed the belly dancer.

I was sitting across the table from her and next to the Phantom. He was going on for a while in his slow and halting manner and we were being difficult. He was free associating and went from Israel to chloride. There were the usual off-the-wall conversations with facetious friends. She said something about having had a baby. I said, "You don't have any stretch marks." She said, "Maybe I do." I said, "You have stretch marks in your head," and forgot to add, "…from expanding your awareness."

It was a nice meal with an ambiguous warm blonde waitress who seemed like an unlisted dessert.

11:30 p.m. We left and walked through the Panhandle. The conversation resumed a previous theme: if Ming was a "fornicating fool" when she was fourteen. She was making it up, saying she got pregnant from a toilet seat. We're developing a two-person

act when it comes to teasing each other. She wasn't sure why we were walking through the park. I said,

> "It's because I'm close to the earth."
> "I'm closer to the earth."
> "That's because you're shorter."

She wanted to liberate some flowers from their current circumstances.

We were about to leave the Panhandle when we ran into a couple of white stoner girls with dreadlocks. They were offering "kind buds." I said, "What kind?" The Phantom liked that. They talked with him for a few minutes. When he caught up with us he said, "Fifteen dollars." I said, "For both of them?" No, they would pay him that much for a room for the night. He turned it down, I think on principle.

Near midnight we were lying around in Ming's room. I was within a few minutes of leaving. She was fooling around with the camera and the roll which had the pictures from our trip to La Jolla and the desert (along with the kitchen tonight). I had a premonition about it, there having been some problem with rewinding the film when it was done. She had fumbled around when trying to load it in the desert. I shouldn't have trusted her with it, and said maybe the film was never on the sprockets and it didn't revolve. The ex-boyfriend opened it and said it never went. That was depressing and I left with a perfunctory goodnight. The Phantom walked me to the bus, drifting along slowly.

Things were uneventful at home, except for "Drug Raid at 4 A.M." coming on at 2 a.m.

Tuesday, Oct. 19, 1993

12:30 pm. I walked with V. to Old St. Mary's Church. The program featured "Russian émigré musicians of San Francisco." When we walked in and sat on the side a bass vocalist was singing with a piano accompaniment (Boris Vitkun). "Twilight Descends on Earth," by Tchaikovsky. V. turned to me a minute later and said, "Boring." She stuck it out for a while, looking at her watch. We missed an aria from Rachmaninoff and an aria by Borodin. I was absorbing some beautiful Russian music, the heavy emotion of it. There were Russian folk songs with translations in the program. "You are the star of my love. You shine brightly if I live or even if I die." There was a "song of a drunken man who wanders along the road, looking for a companion." I got them mixed up in the program and wondered why the drunk song sounded so soft and lyrical. We walked out during a song called "Dark Eyes."

> Dark eyes, eyes of mystery, ever haunting me like a melody. Do you secretly hold romance for me, or a tragedy? Dark eyes, speak to me!

I was trying to imagine it as a Dylan song. It's on the sentimental side, but I know some women who it might apply to.

While walking with V. I asked her if she said her prayers. She said, "I can't concentrate." We were in a crowd of suits downtown, but they parted for the apparition of a black man pulling a large and dirty load on a cart. It was so incongruous it reminded me of a scene in *Un Chien Andalou* (by Dali and Bunuel, 1929). You see a normal-looking room and then a man appears. He is pulling a heavy rope over his shoulder and struggling. Slowly you see what he is pulling – a strange conglomeration of objects, including a dead horse on a piano, a couple of monks, and Dali himself.

We picked up some tacos and sat on a granite slab (wooden benches are too old-fashioned for this town). She can be as serious talking about love or the law as she is about why she doesn't like pantyhose – her legs get cold.

In the office the Attorney was slow in generating some work. I was sitting at my desk and staring off into space. She walked by, glanced at me, and said, "Reminiscing?" V. has been involving me in her work lately, and thinks that language is her weakness (even though she is bi-lingual). We commune with a police report. She is supposed to figure out what happened, who collided with whom, and put it into the framework of a complaint for personal injuries.

The presumptions of her young assistant (Maria), who has been here a month, have left her scornful. Maria wants to dictate the terms of her employment with her boss with a time frame as to when she will be office manager with a hefty raise. V. can't believe it. Other women get on her nerves more than men do (except for her boss), and she referred to some Filipina women in the office as "the three bitches." She was relieved when the older sarcastic New Age woman was gone for a couple of days. She didn't have to listen to her complaining or her dirty jokes which V. finds dumb and rude. For that matter, she has been reeling and ready to respond to the Jewish paralegal woman (in her thirties) who cultivates a sloppy look, like jeans and a T-shirt, which V. can't understand. The woman is plainspoken, swears a lot, and V. doesn't like how she talks to her.

Apropos of something we were talking about last week, the conversation drifting to her past in the Philippines, she said she would bring photos of herself. She is genuine and discreet, and it was near the end of the afternoon. I picked up the envelope of her pictures, went out on the balcony, and looked through her previous incarnations when she

was seven, sixteen, nineteen, twenty, and a few others. Her looks run the gamut from a shy devout Catholic student to a dark-eyed glamorous woman in long earrings and white lace (prom). There was one from when she used to go to clubs. She is too old for that now (according to her). There was often a stunning pretty smile in the photos (her lips are luxurious). It was an array of different looks, which I had the feeling were carefully chosen.

I walked back into the office with the intention of Xeroxing them. I told her that I wanted to and she said no, but it was a provisional no. I think she was secretly pleased, and said it was up to me if I wanted to do it. Her attorney was using the Xerox, however, and it nearly eclipsed the effort.

I walked her to the underground and then walked home, having done some work this afternoon.

8 p.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena. I'm going there this weekend. He has a lot of musical equipment and I can get out of town for a couple of days. He mentioned the Korean woman whose virginity is now a thing of the past, and who he thinks is unclear on the concept of a romance. That is okay with him, he doesn't want to be tied down, or maybe he does but only in the literal sense. He exists in an ambiguous poly-sexual atmosphere which doesn't have a lot of results. The girlfriend of his roommate (a sound technician and an old friend from the Midwest) has been taking liberties with him in the roommate's absence (according to her he's absent even when he's there). He suspects that her and the Korean woman are more than friendly.

He skinned his knees and elbows after a night with the Korean woman. Both of them were crawling around on the floor. Not my style, but he is preoccupied with being an animal. He likes to run naked through the woods on hallucinogenic mushrooms. He has had one or two encounters with men which keep that possibility in the back of his mind. His older brother in Minnesota is homosexual.[88] I told him that B.'s girlfriend had an affair with a married couple and he liked the idea, warming to it in a St. Helena second. I need the ambiguities and complications of bi-sexuality like a hole in the head. He has been in sexual situations with ruinous results (from jealous friends to broken homes), and it has left him sleeping alone most of the time. His preference is for women though. There is a Chinese woman who works down the street from where he lives. He watches her with binoculars when she's outside, but it's a way of keeping someone at a distance.

On subjects which require some intelligence, whether scientific or aesthetic, he is right there with a certain caliber and character of thought. When talking about drug-soaked orgies, or sex in general, his IQ drops, sounding like a horny puppy who would screw his own shadow.

10 p.m. On a wooden instrument for an hour or two. I tore it up and then was typing for a while.

Wednesday, Oct. 20, 1993 (Rimbaud was born in 1854.)

9:30 a.m. I'm half asleep and the phone rings. It's Ming. We're supposed to get together, but we're not sure what we want to do. She had to walk her shoes to a repair

[88] Jon's brother lived in Minneapolis in the 1970's and remembers seeing a young black musician sitting alone at a club. It was Prince when he was not well known.

shop on Haight Street. I suggested the Mexican show at the de Young Museum. “Want to go?” “Kind of.” She was thinking about a matinee of *The Joy Luck Club*. I thought that was a boring thing to do in the afternoon, especially when it’s nice out. You sit in a dark room without moving. I said she could just as well invite a paralyzed feminist. “What?!”

As it turned out we went to the beach. I took a bus to the flat, arriving around eleven and sat on her warm disheveled bed with flannel sheets. She wore a white cotton blouse with shorts and sandals. She said it was her period, and what about the movie. I thought it meant she had to sit in the dark and not say anything.

We walked to Haight Street on one of our excursions. Ming looked at clothes and earrings. There was an interlude in a shop full of odd percussion instruments. We were banging away on homemade bongos and reverberating wooden boxes.

On the sidewalk there were a couple of scruffy twenty-something guys in a skiffle-group (washboard and acoustic guitar). We bought a couple of ice cream cones. “Mine is better.” “No, mine is.”

We decided on the beach, though we didn’t have a towel and were not prepared. Not even sure what beach. I said let’s take a cab, but she thought that was decadent. We walked through the park, warm with no wind, and waited for the bus in a neighborhood where she grew up more or less. I don’t mean she more or less grew up, but lived there until she was seventeen. I didn’t know that. We’re still learning things about each other – that I like to take cabs and that she grew up (ha ha).

There was no mention of the blown roll of film, though it left a bitter aftertaste. I suppose neither one of us wanted to see it as an omen. I don’t want to be in the position

of thinking photos are a proof of something substantial between two people, and she's not one to apologize anyhow.

The bus took us to 25th Avenue. We walked a couple of blocks and caught another bus which took us to the cliffs. There was a trail through the trees to the beach, and we went to the far end where the heat accumulates at the foot of a cliff.

She had a one-piece body suit under her clothes and pulled the top down to her waist. I took off my clothes and things were looking pretty comfortable. There were not many people there. Two or three women lay nearby and seemed to be out of the norm. The one in front of us was pale and luscious, smooth and ample, reclining with nothing on. She got up and walked over to someone and was talking while putting on lotion, a woman in her twenties. After a while I realized why her breasts were jutting out with erect nipples. There was a baby lying next to her, half-hidden under an umbrella. It was only a few months old and something you hardly ever see out here. She leaned on her arm and guided her left breast into the tiny mouth of the infant.

I was thinking of Titian, Ingres, maybe Rubens, though the effect was qualified when she talked about being pulled over by the police like she was a criminal and getting a ticket. Ming admitted her maternal instincts were kicking in. She said she wanted a couple of babies, maybe four, and was considering the possibility of involving a man in the process. There was some mention of her being more careful with who she goes to bed with. Some casual situations start out smooth and end up so twisted you can barely recognize the person you were attracted to.

The conversation wandered in the hot sun while we were barely moving. She said as much as she hates to generalize about men and women, she is beginning to think that

men have real emotions more often than women do, including herself. They are more trusting and less calculating. I suppose they can afford to be if they're dealing with women, and women can't afford to be if they are dealing with men. There is more to it though. I mentioned my sister, the sociologist, who is over-socialized – as well as an academic – and somewhat compromised when it comes to emotions. When she was married she had to read a book on how to show anger with your mate, being unclear on the concept. I had to remind her that the instincts still exist, whether or not they can be legislated.

With Ming it was more complicated. She stayed up most of the night with the ex-boyfriend. They were negotiating their tenuous connection (which is platonic at the moment), and whether or not they have a future. She admitted she was stammering, caught up in a tangle of her own contradictions, and wondering why she can't inhabit a real emotion - like being in love with someone and that would be enough. How come one isn't enough, compared to two or three? How come the men around her are in touch with their feelings, while the women need a road map to figure out where they are in a relationship? At least she does.[89]

Women tend to be more socialized than men, but it comes with a double whammy. There is some repression and a hypocritical façade, along with an awareness of how every move should be to their benefit. My sister said that mothers can mislead if not

[89] Some women burden (wrote burn) their feelings with ulterior motives. Men are known for an ulterior motive of wanting to get laid, which is not irrelevant in a love affair or marriage, and which I've heard some women are not opposed to. Women can lose track of what a real feeling is when they burden it with other considerations. They are playing with fire when they want a man to give them something in exchange for sex.

corrupt their daughters when they tell them, "You can fall in love with a rich man as easily as a poor one."[90] Sooner or later one is more contrived than alive.

Meanwhile, another Asian woman arrived at the beach, walking to the foot of the cliff on the other side of Ming. She took off her clothes, a slender woman with long black hair, maybe thirty. Small-breasted with slim hips and dark pubic hair like a soft bristled brush which followed the contour of her pubis. I would say too lovely for words, but I've just thrown a few in her direction.

I brought an apple and trail mix (Ming hates raisins and won't touch it). She peeled an orange with the juice dripping on her stomach. Water, pineapple coconut juice, and French bread. I was thinking of going in the water, but some vapors were drifting overhead. She predicted their direction and thought it was hopeless. I thought they were moving in a different direction and that opening in the clouds would let more sunlight through. Half an hour later it did. I wondered if this sort of thing had any effect on her life, putting the cart before the horse, or her confidence before the fact. I don't know how many times she has stated something with complete confidence, and which proved to be way off. You don't want to fall for a woman's façade of confidence. It could be a conjectural shell, something she puts on like a leather jacket when she leaves the house, but it can be misleading. You might think she knows how to load a camera or fall in love.

On the phone this morning:

"You're not turning femme on me, are you?"
"What do you mean?
"I thought you wanted to be a man."
"Who told you that?"
"You did."
"You always believe what a woman tells you?"

[90] My other sister has an MBA and is well-situated.

"Yes."

She wasn't sure if that was pathetic, or something she should encourage.

The sun was coming out again and she wanted to move closer to the water, next to a rock formation. We moved our stuff and sat in the sand next to some rocks with long veins of quartz running through them.

I walked down to the water and went in up to my knees. Cold, but not impossible. It took me a while before I dove into a wave and walked out numb. I thought about it and went in and dove into a wave, swimming along the coast. I had to get out when it felt like hypothermia was setting in. Walking back along the beach I couldn't resist. I went back in and dove through a wave. The ocean didn't want me to leave. There is a drop-off near the shore and I could feel the undertow.

I returned to where Ming was lying with her body suit around her waist. I sprinkled a few drops of icy water on her, then lay a cold forearm on her leg and stomach so she got the idea. I didn't have a towel so I sat on a rock and was sun-dried. She was sitting up at that point and said her stomach is too soft. She is pushing twenty-four and thinks her figure is losing some of its original definition. This is a full-breasted woman who dreads what can happen to an hourglass figure. It has a tendency to broaden out, with the waistline getting thicker and the bosom not so buoyant.

She has a long way to go in that respect, and I mention these things a lot less often than she does. In fact, there is a whole list of complaints. Her stomach is too big, her bladder too small, her back and shoulders tense, her legs too short, her muscle tone dissolving, her breasts too low, etc. Given all those problems one might be surprised to see how lovely she is.

We talked about it on the bus - if women have a magnifying optic nerve. It leaves them with a critical eye for detail, but you live or die by such a magnification. A flower is all the more intensified, but so is dirt or bugs. She was ambivalent on this point, and said that some men have a detailed outlook. That is true, they're called professionals and it comes with the job.

She announced that she had to pee and would I stand next to her to block the view in case someone walked by. It was not a good location though. We were on the verge of leaving and I was out of my swimsuit and into some slacks and a shirt. She was getting jumpy and it's a long walk back. I suggested a sand-filled ravine. We walked around a rocky point, dodging a wave, and went up to the dry sand where the cliff begins. I stood nearby blocking the view (there was a man on the rocks with his back to us) while she tore off her shorts, bent down, pulled her body suit aside, and let go with a stream as profuse as it was short-lived. It hit the sand at a 45-degree angle.

She stood up, getting her things together. I had my back turned most of the time and she had a big smile. "Wasn't that fast?" She was in one of her girlish moods, which lasted all the way down the beach. We walked close together, bumping into each other, and stopped for a while in the airy woods. I was thinking how late I was for work.

As we walked on the road she complained about her feet. I put a tie on. We caught a bus with her getting out near the Haight. A soft kiss and she was gone.

I rode downtown, got out, and walked against a stream of people leaving work at 5 p.m. I was on the street that V. walks to the train on and wondered if I would run into her. A block from the office I saw her coming and stood there leaning on a parking meter. I whistled when she walked by, and then accompanied her to the train. "Where were

you?" she asked. She was wearing a skirt, which doesn't happen very often. We talked about it yesterday, but maybe it was a coincidence. She said we're having lunch tomorrow.

V. can be a little bossy. She is not concerned with things that are beyond her sphere of influence. In her own world she is in command, and the closer I come to that the more she doesn't mind giving orders with a slightly impatient manner. It implies a familiarity that she would only have with someone she cares about. A while back we went into Snookies Cookies with a short line. She said, pointing down, "Stand there." I made the observation that that is how one talks to a dog, and she blushed.

5:30 p.m. In the office with the Attorney gone, having left a lot of work. Nearly three hours, more or less non-stop.

8:30 p.m. I walked home a little tired, being worn out by the beach as well as the office.

10 p.m. Phone call from B. in Canada. She was speaking in a low voice in some hotel in Banff and didn't sound happy to be there. She likes the mountains but is sick of her traveling companion, a hypochondriac in his forties. He is spoiled, supported by his family, and has a PhD in psychology. It took them forever to get out of Utah. She is tired of rocks, and will fly back Sunday from Seattle.

There was some mention of her girlfriend. She doesn't trust her and wondered what she has been up to while B. was gone. That's typical – she is traveling with a man while having ambiguous thoughts about a woman and wants to tell me about it.

11 p.m. I lay down for a few minutes and that's all he wrote.

Thursday, Oct. 21, 1993

Typing in the morning. I felt rejuvenated after a night that corresponded to clean living. I called V. in the office. When she answered, I said,

> "It's me."
> "I know."
> "How did you know?"
> "I just knew."
> "You're telepathic."
> "I'm busy."

I went out, walking past the Diamond Haircutting Shop. It often happens when I interrupt the morning writing and go outside my mind won't stop. It is generating lines and ideas like it's been trained and knows when to jump. 10:30 in the morning and 10:30 at night.[91]

While waiting for the bus I thought about a "coffee cup reading," and what that would amount to:

> Things look dark, but you're active and alert. You have grounds for a divorce. Warm milk would help your situation, not to mention sugar. There's a dark Italian in your future. You have a handle on your life. You're wired and you're over-read. You're out of tea leaves.[92]

12:30 p.m. I walked with V. to the Hunan place. She wore black slacks and a pink top and insisted we have something else this time. She ended up with her ubiquitous beef and I had rock cod. V. pulled the black strands of her hair down and asked if she should cut her bangs. I said no. I won't say she was being coy, it just appears like that when she lets her hair down and relaxes, kicking her feet a little under the table and touching my

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[91] I come alive at those hours. No matter how tired I am at night, if I make it to 10:30 I can go to 2 a.m. I was born at 10:30 in the morning, and maybe there's a connection with the time I was born and daily biorhythms.

[92] There was also this bit of doggerel: Lotte Lenya went to Kenya / for a café latte, / and she later asked the waiter, / "Can ya tell me where's the potte?"

leg. She might be testing her flirtation reflex, making sure it still works. With respect to the menu I said something original like, “Variety is the spice of life.” She agreed and said maybe she needs another boyfriend. I said sometimes they lose their flavor, and she nodded.

Sometimes I will hit her with a question or remark which opens her eyes, like no one ever asked her that before, and she responds from a deeper part of herself. I asked if she ever worries about the future. She said she used to, but doesn’t anymore. There is a conservative side to her, an insularity which for all I know preserves her personality. It is a vain delight, tempered with a devout upbringing. I think she gravitates between those poles. One minute she will say that materialism drags the spirit down, and the next minute that she maxed out her credit cards.

Also, her fiancé better be clear about when the wedding is next year. She doesn’t plan to get him anything for his birthday (a dull Scorpio, for what it’s worth). I said he bought her something for hers. She said, “So what, I’m a woman.”

We returned to the office. Five feet tall and she walks faster than I do. She said she went back to Old St. Mary’s yesterday (when I was at the beach) to say her prayers, and found another concert in progress with, what do you call them - making a motion of a violin - and liked it. Even the organ – and here she made sounds to convey the opening notes of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. I said “Beethoven.” She said it was very nice, and made the sounds again.

The Attorney having blown a hearing and settled a long personal injury case was getting almost nothing for himself. He is fortunate the client didn’t sue him, and he left early for the World Series.

5 p.m. I left with V., walking her to the underground station, and then continued to a bookstore. I found an interview with Joel-Peter Witkin. There were insights into a photographer who turns the decadent-cadaverous into art. It is disturbing and historical. He is a perfectionist who often works with the rotting. He goes to a morgue in Mexico and finds what he needs, sometimes entire bodies. A headless man propped up in a chair wearing only socks. A fatal photo op.

He is Italian/Jewish from New York and is preoccupied with transsexuals. He has a wife and son, and there is a live-in woman "companion" for his wife. He leads a clean and orderly life in New Mexico while photographing "freaks." Just because a woman is a bit heavy and missing half her leg doesn't mean she won't take her clothes off and pose in the surreal squalor of whatever tableau he has arranged with a demented and satirical eye on art history. He has a point of view if not the metaphysics of St. Julian Le Pauvre, who embraced a leper and was pulled into heaven in a transcendental burst of light (or was it a camera flash).

He believes in God and the after-life and can't wait to die. I think that's how he put it. That doesn't mean he's suicidal, he just wants to meet a higher life-form which is waiting for some of us after we kick the bucket. I wondered to what extent his metaphysics have a hand in his photography.

When he was a young boy he was walking on the sidewalk when a car crashed nearby. The head of a girl about his age came rolling towards him. In some versions of the story he picks it up ("Alas poor Alice, I knew her well…."), but it's possible it never happened. He acts like it did because it embodies his imagination.

I was in a less extreme situation, one which actually occurred, and it had an effect on me. My father was a minister in a small town in Wisconsin. Part of his duties was to visit the dying. For some reason he took me with him to visit a girl about my age who I was informed and believe and thereon allege had a terminal illness. I have a vague memory of a darkened room and her lying in a bed. It is hard to imagine when you're six or seven and getting started in life that it is ending for someone.

Having a metaphysical father I was brought up at some distance from the facts of life, financially speaking. On the other hand, he was exposed to the facts of life when members of his congregation would come to him with their problems - infidelity, drinking, loneliness, etc. He also handled marriages and funerals.

Meanwhile, I was looking at a photo of a human skeleton fused onto the neck of an ostrich skeleton as if it was a satyr. A gorilla skeleton was riding it (like Cupid). I wanted to put it on the wall in my apartment.

On a whim I went to the pool. I called Ming from the lobby to see if anything was going on. Sort of, but it sounded like a continuation of the male entourage, so count me out. In the pool it felt like I had the wind at my back, having had a lot of sleep last night. It pushed me through the water with an added force. One mile, followed by a hundred feet underwater.

I walked home, and got absorbed in an article in the *New York Review of Books*, a review of *Only Words* by Catherine MacKinnon.

10 p.m. Phone call from Ming. She sounded more reserved. We're already disengaging, what with her leaving on Saturday. The distancing was set in motion after three strikes: a blown roll of film, too many men around her, and a twenty-hour flight.

Her friend Tanya thinks she uses men.[93] I would say she leans on them for whatever they can offer. A man might be instrumental in a situation, like the fellow who provided a job and housing and someone to sleep with (himself) in Alaska, but she could see it as having done it on her own (subjectivity is a wonderful thing). She did it on her own to the extent that she inspired him to do things for her. Her Being equals his Doing, which was running a poor second from the sounds of it.

Ming is good at shifting gears from one man to another. She can spend a whole afternoon with someone I wouldn't spend half an hour with. It's like she gets into the slipstream of a man and adapts herself, however desultory the conversation. That might explain a few things, like her confusion when it comes to keeping herself in focus. That is a constant theme with her, and she admits that women's lives are sometimes more disorganized when men are coming at them out of the blue. What's this guy doing in my life all of a sudden? (It happens less with men because the women aren't as forward.)

It was not a long conversation,[94] followed by a workout on a wooden instrument.

1 a.m. Blue lights were revolving underneath my window. I thought it was someone getting busted. Two police cars pulled over a fastback sedan. Looking through the windshield I saw a couple of white hands on the steering wheel. It seems they had the wrong guy and let him go.

2:30 a.m. I lay down and rearranged the letters in a common phrase:

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[93] Tanya is a multiracial misfit who was adopted by a well-off black woman with political connections. She stands off to the side as it were, observing her peers while sleeping alone and communing with the reality of beer.

[94] You know someone by the trail they leave, and how they say goodbye. There was a college woman I used to talk with. She could be romantic and effusive on the phone (we had an affair). Getting off the phone however there would be a perfunctory sign-off like she was momentarily letting her guard down, and her psychological slip was showing. There was a colder mechanism operating behind the pose.

c l o s e b u t n o c i g a r

bone tragic soul… stun coil race… cognac turbo lies… con lube riots
cunt oil graces… conga loser… solo tube cigar… cool rain guest
tool burn cages… slut noir age… nite club cargo… goat ruins
brain closet… gun boat circle… blur on stage… rag tub noise

Friday, Oct. 22, 1993

Typing in the morning.

2:30 p.m. I was leaving for work when Ming called with some vague plans for tonight. Her plane leaves tomorrow.

I went to work, where we had to re-file a Petition for Uncontested Dissolution for the Latino man in prison (the Attorney blew the hearing). This is the fellow who was married to a Latina woman who was vicious or irrational or both (according to him) and we were handling the divorce. It took too long in his opinion (he had a point), during which time he moved in with another woman (a paralegal who I met). Two weeks after she gave birth to his child he killed her in a drunken argument (her last words were, "THE BABY ISN'T YOURS!"). He got ten years in prison (Vacaville), during which time he somehow met another woman. They need to be married in order to have conjugal visits, but he can't get married until his divorce is finalized. Life goes on, unless you're dead.

V. was in a curious mood. She called on the office phone, "Are you busy?" She wanted me to help her with a complaint. There was some discrepancy in the police report as to who was going northbound and who was going eastbound when the cars collided, leaving one of them lying on its side in the road. She was a little short-tempered from not enough sleep. V. can worry something to death in her mind until it has a physiological

effect – tension, losing sleep. I wonder if people avoid some level of cognizance, from the academic to the morning news, because they know it will affect them physically. They have a visceral reaction to disturbing information. It might be the downside of having integrated circuits of the body-mind sort.

A couple of women said something about her temper, but I didn't mind. It's like when someone is ill or tired and their polite façade falls away. It reveals something about them. Later, descending on the elevator, I said I was going to the wine country this weekend and I might like it so much I won't be here on Monday. "Good, I'm tired of you." A few minutes later she said, "Will you really not be here Monday?" "No." She waved me off, exasperated, and I returned to the office.

Around six the Phantom called and said I should come over, so I took a bus to his sonic housing near Masonic.

I was sitting on Ming's bed with the ex-boyfriend while she threw things into a backpack. She was trying to keep it light, planning to be gone for two or three months and meet her business partner (fish eggs) (roe vs. her) in an airport in Seoul, Korea. She will visit her parents in Hong Kong and the south of China (they have two homes), and is looking forward to some sort of ethnic revelation when she returns to the land of her birth. She also has a vision of herself on a motorbike alone in the remote northern parts of Thailand.

Ming stuffed some hair products into a handbag. There was a bag of Tampons on the bed. Someone said that macho women roll their own. The Phantom drifted in and asked for a cigarette. She hoisted the backpack onto her back and stood there in shorts with her short strong legs, a T-shirt, no bra, and long black hair, looking more rustic than

usual. This is someone who incorporates the scattered and the tangible in her modus operandi.

A male friend, an ex-roommate, dropped by. It was starting to feel like the male entourage was gathering to see her off, and the domineering sister of the ex-boyfriend was there. Everyone was on the floor while I was on the bed with a Guinness Stout. The conversation bounced around. Ming wanted to relocate in the kitchen-living area and took the wine. She came back and asked why I wasn't joining them, but I wasn't in the mood. The Phantom walked in. I was messing around with an old hollow-body electric (beat up and not plugged in). Some people have an endless capacity for socializing, the warm communion of it all. I would rather balance it with a music session.

The evening drifted, and eventually I was in the kitchen with the others, having more wine or sitting out back with a cigarette and looking through the branches at a constellation. There were vague echoes from a year ago when there was a slightly twisted party here which included my drunken ex-girlfriend.

A couple of people left. There was more talking. The ex-roommate is nearly forty with long hair which is usually tied back. This is the one who burned out on a previous way of life in New Jersey. He was abusing alcohol and barbiturates while looking like a straight man with a job. One night a shady acquaintance dropped by and asked for his help in disposing the body of a dead man. That's when he decided to move to California and become a pot-smoking surfer.

1 a.m. I was leaving and she saw me to the door downstairs. We threw our arms around each other (I lifted her off the ground for a second) and remained like that for a few minutes, kissing and holding on like lovers who are parting. There was not a sudden

flood of tears from her like last time. More like a wave of affection and regret that she was leaving. I said I'll go back to missing her again. She said, "I love you." I said, "I love you too," and followed that with some admonition about being careful as a lone woman, and to stay out of dark alleys.

I walked to the bus, having had a lot of wine, but it was a sobering occasion.

Saturday, Oct. 23, 1003

10 a.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena. He said he would pick me up at the North Berkeley monorail station at 11:30.

11 a.m. I walked past the derelicts to the library and dropped off *Culture of Complaint*, then disappeared underground. I found an ultra-modern monorail with a subterranean shriek. It was smooth enough to read on while gliding underneath the bay in a seated position.

11:50 a.m. North Berkeley. I was late and he was there in shorts and a T-shirt. It was warm out. We drove to a light industrial area with some old warehouses. He was storing an old jeep here and wanted to abandon it. He wondered if he should remove a few things like tires and plates. It was beat up and dilapidated. Jon said he took it to Baja California with a roll-bar and no roof. He let a woman drive it and she rolled it over. It was painted with psychotic camouflage, and there were silhouettes of his hand on the hood. We were looking at it when a policeman drove up and asked a few questions.

When he left we pushed it half a block to a deserted wasteland near the tracks. He tore off the back plate with wire cutters and we left it there.

He drove north. It took an hour and a half to get to the wine country and it was worth it. Vineyards looking lush and cultivated in the vicinity of lovely hills. The land is valuable and the wineries hold their own against developers. I was going from the Tenderloin to autumn in the wine country. I'm not used to having seasons where the road is lined with airy trees like yellow leafy explosions.

It surprises me when people live in quiet and refined surroundings where nothing more violent occurs than a cat walking across the road. Now and then a falling leaf. He lives in an old wooden house and we sat on his porch with a view of the hills. Why do I associate this with being old and retired? It is the sort of atmosphere in which I found my grandparents years ago. There is so much life on the ground and in the air, from one horizon to the other, but it's a slow death in a neighborhood which barely seems inhabited. In the city I am more alive, but in a context of arrested cement.

It was a slow change of pace in the afternoon, except for his being nervous. He had four or five beers and a little pot, while I had some apple juice and cigarettes and coffee.

He works down the road in an office and workshop. One of the products is blue photo-sensitive paper which you lay in the sun with an object on it and it leaves a white silhouette of the object. He is across the street from a wine warehouse and on the edge of the vineyards. I was struck by what he sees in the morning compared to what I see. Vineyards vs. the inner city. A vague sense of stillness like formaldehyde. It's a good place to live if you're a grape vine or retired (or a kid).

The house was in a time-warp with a wrap-around porch and ordinary rooms. He made the living room extraordinary with his stuff: a wooden piano with the front panel

removed, showing the wooden hammers and the wires. A conga drum, amplifiers, a couple of guitars, a synthesizer, and wooden flutes. A collection of bones and rocks, cow skulls and feathers. Old wooden pieces of furniture. A large photo of the countryside in North Dakota where he's from.

The kitchen was roomy and rebuilt and full of plants. I met his roommates, whose room is off the kitchen. Elmo is an old friend of his from a college in the Midwest. He's about thirty and studied sound engineering. He has a lot of his own compositions on tape. The two of them are known for staying up all night on acid making sound effects and maybe even music. He has short hair, plain clothes, and distinctive features like a French mime. A nice boy from Nebraska with a "potty mouth," as the Phantom puts it.

He has a girlfriend, Rima, who might be more than he can handle (or wants to). He works in Berkeley four days a week, leaving her alone with Jon who is a bit of an animal. I'm not sure if he knows how close she and Jon have come to rolling around on the floor together. Jon said he was restraining himself, which he isn't used to. She is twenty-four and pretty with dark-hair (part Syrian) and rather forward – or intelligent and alert, talking a mile a minute, a photographer at Sonoma State. She has been with Elmo for a few years, but told Jon she is not getting enough from him. He is away a lot, which forces her to masturbate (she reads a book with her hand between her legs). Rima told him this when they were alone, having had a few drinks. There were other suggestive lines and exploratory comments which made him wonder.

The Korean woman (also at Sonoma State) is a friend of hers, and so ambiguous and repressed he isn't sure what to do. She lives an hour away, and isn't breathing down his neck. He left me with an image of her shyly "dry-humping" him.

I tried out the nylon-string guitar and the piano.

6 p.m. The shadows were growing longer and we went out for a walk. In two minutes we were on a dirt road in a vineyard surrounded with hills. The sunlight from behind us hit the vines and the leaves were glowing. There were small clusters of grapes, although the main harvest is over. He thought some of this was left on the vine for another kind of wine. We tried a few. The grapes were dark and not much bigger than blueberries. I walked on ahead while he was on the side of the road by a tree. I turned around and saw him with the glittering arc of a *Manneken Pis*.

We walked by some fine estates which were half-hidden by trees. A couple had iron gates in a dry exquisite setting. Some of this resembles the south of France. There is a curious phenomenon when people migrate to another land and bring their architecture with them, whether or not it fits the climate, and it's odd in this rugged terrain to see old lady houses.

The end of the road. A small creek with trees, and the hills beginning on the other side. We sat under a huge oak tree. I was leaning on it and looking west with the sun having gone down behind the hills. The overhead branches were spreading out and framing the view while vapors in the sky turned orange and pink. I had a beer and wondered why it wasn't wine.

We talked for a while, then walked back in the fading light. A half-moon overhead with everything so quiet. I'm not sure I could function in this setting. The triggers I am used to aren't here. I was disengaged, which is a relief once in a while.

7 p.m. Engaging with the musical instruments. Elmo brought out his electric guitar and a small but powerful amp he had rebuilt. He put it on a wooden drawer with

unmarked knobs encased in a lizard-skin box, then left with his girlfriend and an older woman who was visiting (her step-mother). That left it wide open for Jon and me. He was downing the wine and poured me a glass which sat on the piano for a long time. The minute I am under the influence of a musical force field, wine and women - not to mention marijuana - are forgotten.

We were at it for several hours with various phases and a couple of breaks. I finally got into the wine, and all of this with no dinner. It was him on the piano and me on the acoustic. Me on the acoustic and him on the conga drum. Him with the synthesizer, programming a loop of sound effects while I was on the electric guitar. That went on for a long time. There was a second phase – it is hard to remember everything we did when it occurs in a spontaneous and not so mental realm - where he programmed an eerie throbbing sound. I followed on the electric, competing or collaborating with a machine. It was satisfying and exhausting.

Took a break, sitting on the porch. We had been making a lot of noise with the front door open, but there are not many residents in this area.

He put on a flamenco tape and I was on the conga drum until I was about to break a blood vein. If I had a room full of musical instruments I'd be in heaven. Unfortunately, his microphone and drums were in the sound-room in the city so we couldn't tape anything. We hit some interludes that were stretching the limits. The momentum kept hitting its stride, even when I went into a walking bass routine. You find you're walking through the walls of your own limitations.

I found a strap for the electric and stood up and this unleashed a whole other dimension with him on the synthesizer. The amp was turned up loud. It was a long

improvisation with a ghost of chord progressions. Variations on a theme were passing through.

11 p.m. We were winding down, particularly when the others returned from dinner. I was going on momentum, but kept it quiet while they talked. I finally turned it off, completely drained.

Sitting on the porch with Jon and his roommate, Rima. He went inside, fooling around on the equipment with Elmo, though without much effect. I sat there with a glass of wine, completely at ease. She was in fast forward, telling me the story of her life while wearing a semi-formal long black outfit.[95]

She went on talking and the conversation broadened out. I was getting a word in now and then. Rima is plainspoken when it comes to saying someone is fucking someone else, but there is an echo of Connecticut in her voice. I sensed a certain vanity or self-preoccupation which includes a strong libido. There is a photo of her in the kitchen, a half-naked self-portrait.

The stepmother went to a hotel in town and the roommates were in their room. Jon and I were out back with a fire in a concrete grill. The firelight flickered on the fern-like branches of a large flowering tree overhead.[96] He has a garden where he grows peppers, and a small barn that he is turning into a workshop. He is one of the few people I

[95] When her father was sixteen he got a girl pregnant. She had the baby and put it up for adoption. He married someone else at eighteen and had a son and daughter (Rima), who didn't want a sister and had an androgynous upbringing, learning to change the oil in a car. She looks down on girls who can't do it. Four years ago the father, who was divorced by then, married the woman he had gotten pregnant at sixteen. This was the woman who was visiting, her current stepmother. The baby girl who was given up for adoption had grown up and found out who her real parents were and they all met. Rima's half-sister is now twenty-six. She had some reservations about meeting her, and was feeling territorial when it came to another woman having claims on her father (and who resembles him more than Rima does). There is more. Her mother, stepmother, and half-sister were all born on November 7.

[96] A Mimosa tree, also known as a Persian silk tree. The Persian name means "night sleeper."

know with a mechanical aptitude combined with an aesthetic orientation. His preoccupation with machines is similar to my preoccupation with language. Jon knows how to put in the wires, phone lines, and computer for his office, and how to take an engine out of a car – something I couldn't do without the aid of a hand grenade (exploded view).

We were having more wine and he was on his way to being stumbling-down drunk. I don't like what the pot does when I play guitar, messing up the timing for one thing, so I wasn't smoking. He kept running into the barn and adjusting the sound on the flamenco tape, which he kept playing over and over. It was turned up loud and I got tired of it after a while.

Jon was brought up to be self-sufficient. His father was a game warden and would take him hunting. The son turned out somewhat different. He has good foundations and a rifle on the wall, but he has a crazy streak. He has shivered in hallucinogenic dimensions, and can't hold onto a woman or doesn't want to. He drinks himself into a stupor on a regular basis and he just turned thirty. He used to have long hair, but now he cuts it short with a receding hairline. He is good looking and often needs a shave, but sometimes has a nervous twitch.

1 a.m. The flames were dying down and we didn't know what else to do. It wasn't that late, but we called it a night. He had a small bed in a side room and I had a mattress on the floor. It was harder than I'm used to, but it worked.

Sunday, Oct. 24, 1993

The morning felt like I had a lobotomy, although there was enough sleep. It lasted into the afternoon. My timing was a little off. I couldn't figure it out. A low ebb bordering on the lethargic. Maybe I was getting acclimated to the slow pace of country living. I brought the timing of the city with me yesterday, but the local conditions were taking over my mind. Not to mention it was hot out, no wind, and maybe the last two nights of drinking wine were having an effect.

A grape vine is not something you can engage like a typewriter or guitar. We had no plans for the afternoon and it didn't look like there would be any more music. I was on unfamiliar territory, with both of us feeling aimless and a bit hung over.

We managed to walk into town a few blocks away and have breakfast in a leather booth with an old waitress. The town of St. Helena has some quaint shops, but I have a limited capacity for that sort of thing. He said it was so uptight there is a city ordinance against the sale of ice cream. They don't want it on the sidewalk. We took a side street past a small church and dropped in on a garage sale. An older woman talked to us like a neighbor whose children have grown up. I looked over some awful records from the 1970's.

Later we found an abandoned wooden house with a porch, and a dilapidated barn next to a vineyard which had been neglected. There was a sense of grape vines growing everywhere, including in your own backyard - like the oil pumps in south central Los Angeles. I prefer the vines.

We wandered back to the house where Rima was showing her stepmother her photos. They were not bad, black and white. A shot of her crouching on the floor with a

picture of Madonna on her head. On the porch I heard her saying, “AND HERE THE BATHROOM DOOR IS OPEN AND I’M NAKED!”

Eventually we drove to Calistoga. It’s less than twenty miles north of here, and we passed more of those tall and narrow trees like apparitions (Italian cypress trees). We went to an outdoor café and wanted a root beer float but they were out of root beer. There was a breeze for a while and a steady downpour of small yellow leaves. They floated through the air, adding to the impression of an airy lightweight town.

I would have preferred some open country or the woods, even a river, but any water was too far to drive. We took a road outside of town near the hills, the Silverado Trail, which was stunning. He pulled over at a narrow stone bridge over a creek – the Napa River at a low ebb. We climbed down and sat underneath the bridge. The sunlight reflected off the shallow current and onto the bridge, while his mindless dog was swimming after a thrown branch.

Written under the stone bridge were messages like “I love Kirsty,” and “Sara is a bitch.”

4 p.m. We drove back to the house and had a beer. Our wandering and the conversation covered a lot of ground, more than I realized at the time. Having spent the night I felt at home in St. Helena.

Jon and I talked about the Phantom and the dearly departed Ming and the fact that the former tried to get the latter pregnant. This is a touchy feminist woman, but she weathered that with less anger than when I called her a name several years ago. I was leaving the Paradise Lounge with her and Nora. Having been bitten by one and slugged

by the other (who meant no harm), I suggested they were cunts. It was not one of our finest moments. One deserved it, the other not so much.

We talked about racial problems. He said the small company he works for had some miserable experiences with black workers, and his boss won't hire them anymore. He felt like a sitting target for anyone who wants to bring allegations of discrimination. The black woman was given six months of pregnancy leave but took nine, then had her boyfriend call and threaten him, demanding that she get her job back at a higher rate of pay. Jon said there are laws which encourage the hiring of minorities, but they undermine the effort when employers find out about the quotas or protected status. The merit of the worker is secondary. The assumption is they can't be fired, and if they are you're looking at a lawsuit.[97]

I mentioned something I read recently (not to drive the narrative off the road into a cross-country editorial). Jesse Jackson gave a speech to some black high school students. He said that black people are killing more blacks every year than were ever lynched in this country. I thought that was pretty honest of him, trying to instill some shock in case they didn't know how ruinous black-on-black crime is, and who they have to worry about statistically. In Washington, D.C. the crime is so bad the black woman mayor is ready to call out the National Guard (nearly 400 homicides so far this year).

Where was I? Wondering out how to get back to the city, and not just by editorializing my way out of the wine country.

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[97] Black people are as good as anyone, but they generate more toxic encounters than they should. That includes the yelling and swearing high school students on the bus, who are like bad P.R. as they ride around town. Almost everyone I know has had encounters where being threatened is the least of it. Jon pulled into a parking place in Oakland and a black man walked up with a beer can. He was angry, said something negative about the "white boy," and threw his beer can at the window. It bounced off the car. Jon slammed it into reverse and drove away.

5 p.m. We drove on a country road with some gorgeous terrain. An hour later we were in Vallejo with no idea where the ferry was. All I knew was that it would leave in half an hour. We figured it was on the waterfront, which made sense. Not sure how to get to it, but assumed it was southwest of where we were. After a momentary diversion we drove over a bridge to the naval base on Mare Island (the funding was cut off and it will soon be dead in the water). We found the ferry landing across a channel from the naval shipyards.

6:30 p.m. I was on a bench on the upper deck, one of those double hull boats that fly across the water. There was a warning from the captain about it being windy up there. We drifted slowly out of the channel. It was a straight shot back to the city, taking about an hour. The sun had gone down but there was some light left, dimming along the way. The smooth waters of the northern bay with an orange glow on the horizon.

We passed a couple of oil refineries lit up in the gloom, like fairyland structures giving off clouds of steam (I used to live near the refineries in south central Los Angeles). A half-moon overhead. The wind and power, the forward motion of the ride. I remained on the upper deck the whole way, getting blown around a bit, but it was worth it. I must be power hungry.

I went towards the bow along the starboard side and stood near the door to the pilot's wheelhouse with its wide windows. I watched the radar screen redefine itself every couple of seconds with revolving overhead equipment scanning the waters. I got an idea of what the waters are like between Vallejo and San Francisco. Any dry land or

structures like bridges or docks or boats were orange. Submerged rocks were green dots. The boat was steered accordingly.

It was beautiful approaching the San Rafael Bridge at night with the wavering parallels of shadow and reflection. On the radar screen was a long streak of orange. After cruising under the illuminated bridge I looked back at the wake. The upper deck was deserted. I had a sense of empty benches being transported in the night. They were being taken from one town to another, along with one small amplifier.

Approaching Angel Island with a view of a suspension bridge on the horizon. A high voltage city was connected to the mainland with strands of tiny light bulbs. We were in rougher waters by then with more wind. I sat on a lifeboat behind the wheelhouse which blocked the wind. We passed an empty prison on an island and it didn't show up on the radar. It was like a ghost, but I think we weren't close enough. The electric skyline of the city loomed ahead, with Coit Tower providing a touch of class from the 1930's.

I think in getting older you have more on your mind and therefore time is passing more quickly, or you're more observant and less bored, but it was disconcerting how an hour went by so fast. I left the boat carrying a small amplifier with a handle and a leather bag over my shoulder. It was not light, but I wanted to get out of the area of Pier 41. I walked eight or ten blocks and caught a bus to the Tenderloin.

8 p.m. Relaxing at home. I had a Heineken on the boat, and a beer in the afternoon and that was enough. I lose interest in beer after one or two.

I made coffee. Some follow-ups of the trip to St. Helena:

1. I live in a neighborhood with the highest crime rate in the city. St. Helena has one of the lowest in the country. Jon said he would read the police reports in the local paper. A man reported having been in the bath for an hour. When he got out he found someone had messed with his speaker wires and changed the radio station,

and he wanted an investigation. There was an old woman who went away for a few days. She returned home and reported that someone planted weeds in her garden.

2. It's curious how you imagine a place you've never been to compared to what it's like when you go there. The image I formed in my mind of where he lived, going by what he had told me over the last few months, was different from the reality. I conjured up a more rural setting with a larger house, and the countryside was different. I projected a classic California landscape of dry rolling hills with a few oak trees, rather than a valley full of vineyards. The soil is rich from the volcanic ash of an extinct volcano to the north (Mt. St. Helena). A volcanic explosion knocked down some trees which are now petrified. Before that it was submerged beneath an inland sea.

3. He has a medium-sized dog with black curly hair which would cover its eyes if Jon didn't trim it. He is a nervous fellow, with the dog a constant diversion and companion. He finds some release in an endless routine of sounding angry or condescending, saying, "YOU DUMB DOG!" even when he is amused, or growling at it when it knocked over his coffee in the car. He takes out a lot of emotions on it, and given his own occasional anger he would like nothing more than to tear an old shoe to pieces with his mouth, shaking it back and forth. That's a bit unseemly for a grown man so he lets his dog do it.

4. We were sitting in the living room and I noticed one of his books on the shelf. I pulled it out and we flipped through it, with him acting like he had never seen it before. Maybe he hadn't for a long time. It was titled, *FEMINA LIBIDO (LIMINA) SEXUALIS*. A promising title and it followed through, except it was more humorous than I would have thought or was intended, being a pseudo-scientific classification of body types of all races. There were different ages and persuasions, with headings like: THE FEMALE PELVIS, ANTHROPOLOGICALLY CONSIDERED, and classifications of the morphological variations of the breast, even in anticipated development. The different nipple shapes and sizes. Other classifications like "German woman, urban dweller." Or English people who happen to be naked when relaxing in their natural habitat.

   There were photos and diagrams concerning variations of the vulva. The dry descriptions seemed to rationalize the showing of a ten-year-old girl from North Africa, or an adolescent girl from Java, or even "European types."

   You could make the case that it was valid and informative, whether or not you approved of the approach. You could say there was an "objectification" of women, but a medical book on both genders could be accused of the same thing. This one had a near-encyclopedic approach and it wasn't all pretty. There were photos of smiling women in a nudist colony with different body types. It was more about variation than conformity to a standard of beauty. A few were hard to

look at, the women with pendulous breasts or odd-looking behinds. There was even a chapter on the female circumcision of African women, showing before and after shots. Most of the orifice is closed, except for the "urinary meatus."

There were a few pictures of men, including a "homosexual" with "virile development," and hermaphroditic transvestites. It seemed to be an old book from before World War II, if not the turn of the century, but it came out in 1965 (when censorship was easing up), using old photos gathered from around the world.

5. The afternoon was like a summer day with nothing to do, and the two of us would slip into situations like a throwback to when we were boys. Wandering through a small town looking for a root beer float. Sitting under a stone bridge in the country throwing rocks into a stream. Looking at old photos of naked women belonging to someone's father or older brother. Having a collection of bones and rocks or fossils with a microscope on the side (I had petrified clams and sharks' teeth which I dug up in the San Joaquin Valley). A messy room, dumb jokes, a wary interest in girls.

Monday, Oct. 25, 1993 (Picasso was born in 1881.)

NOTES

I was unwinding with the *New York Review of Books*, an article on Jean Genet. In 1965 he was refused a visa to enter the U.S. A corrupt Vietnamese dictator is okay, but not a French novelist with left-wing sympathies.

Some radical movements may not want Genet as a spokesman or a sympathizer. It might be helpful lending his name to a cause, but he is too honest. "He had an Orwellian instinct for the ease with which the powerless can acquire power and become like their oppressors… he would be the first to abandon the Palestinians should they ever get their land back."

This is someone who praised the Chicago police "for the erotic appeal of their thighs." He and I see things differently.

On the Black Panthers:

> The movement overshot the goal it had set itself… it grew weak through its rainbow fringe, its fund-raising methods, the quantity and inevitable evanescence of its TV images, its use of a rough yet moving rhetoric not backed up by rigorous thought, its empty theatricality – or theatricality tout court! – and its rapidly exhausted symbolism.

(Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love* (1986))

Genet had a "cultivated vagabond asceticism – he caged from friends and acquaintances…" (Reminds me of Gregory Corso in the 1970's.) He declined a big bouquet (it was not a miracle of the rose) from Sartre in the form of his book, *Saint Genet.* It included Sartre's notion that Genet "chose" to become a thief and "chose" to become a homosexual in order to "shape his life and work as an inversion and rejection of all normal values." Genet preferred to believe he was a "product of his fate." It seems more middle-class to think that one could chose whatever one wants to be and act accordingly with the appropriate life-style. Genet is closer to Beckett when it comes to the unmade man who is compelled to go on living no matter what.

It reminds me of intellectuals and critics who encounter someone's self-expression on the level of a stunted dementia. They assume it was a stylistic choice,[98] like putting on a certain shirt, rather than all that person was capable of. It's possible that he or she has no other voice. That is something an intellectual might find hard to understand if he or she has a multiple-choice existence where nothing is final. Genet sees himself as a tragic figure.

Some people do things with a pathological over-drive, like writing. It generates what it takes to follow through. They're compelled to do it, whether or not it is financially rewarding (it usually isn't), or makes them more attractive to the opposite sex (forget it).

Genet said, "If to write means that you feel emotions or feelings so strong that your whole life is shaped by them, if they're so strong that only by describing them or evoking or analyzing them can you understand them…"

He was said to have "a striking combination of adolescent emotional drives and a sophisticated nihilist aesthetic."[99]

"Celine lost interest in Genet once he was taken up by Sartre."

Footnote from the article on Genet:

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[98] When Sartre was old he was asked if he had ever felt the despair he was known for in his younger days. He said no, it was an intellectual fashion of the post-war era. It probably didn't hurt that he lived in Paris where he was well-known, being wined and dined while enjoying the company of Simone de Beauvoir and the occasional young woman in his bed. Meanwhile, Camus was stuck in a bleak style of writing that wouldn't allow him to lighten up, though he tried. Then he died in a car crash.

[99] There was a letter to the editor from someone working in an abuse center. It said we need to put into perspective this business of gays and lesbians being hurt or threatened by straight people. In the Bay Area nearly all of the lesbians who were killed last year were killed by other lesbians. Two-thirds of the gay men who were killed were killed by their lovers or roommates.

"Noting that complex constellations of friendship are 'more familiar in love affairs amongst men than in those between men and women,' White (Edmund) surmises that this is because "male homosexuality is based primarily on the model of friendship (mutual esteem, friendly competition but only intermittent envy or jealousy, few demands, loose but enduring bonds) and only secondarily and temporarily on the model of marriage (in which roles are reciprocal, not identical, and in which jealousy safeguards a legalized union designed primarily to raise children and guarantee sexual availability and economic security)."

I wonder if my relationships with women are based on a homosexual method. I'm used to having "complex constellations of friendship." It sounds promiscuous, but it isn't necessarily. Male homosexuals can rely on each other's libido – something which is less overt in most women. What I have are loose but enduring (not to say endearing) bonds.

There was an article on Joyce in the same issue (I wrote Freud, which I suppose was a Freudian slip). "… Yeats was right in saying that an artist is never the bundle of accident and heterogeneity that sits down to breakfast."

Consider the cross-fertilizing subjects in the *New York Review of Books*: Genet. *The Lives of the Saints.* James Joyce. *Only Words*. Dreams of a Final Theory. Clement Greenberg (or dreams of a final Greenberg).

BONDAGE A-GO-GO

Her mother hadn't planned for this development,
in which the devil
got into her closet with its leather
skirts and latex and accessories,
it means you never have to say you're sorry
when you have that look. Her lousy-weather
friends can smell a trend, is it a send-up,
writhing in a dead-end

time-warp of subjective atmospheres,
a sound-track with "no tears
for the creatures of the night." The shady
characters are out in force, they missed out
on a normal life, and when you're twisting
in the wind – no way to treat a lady –
why not do it in a windless club?
A skinny girl in rubber

who's a walking psycho-drama poses,
there are pregnant pauses

when her legs are tied with silken ropes,
a ritual, and lifted on a meat-hook
with a pulley, managing to look
quite lovely though, and things are not so hopeless
if you look good in a corset, upside-
down, nowhere to hide,

her legs askew, they're long and pale, a thong
and heels and she belongs
to the music, with an amplified
existence and her morals are in slo-mo,
blurring the distinctions with a homo
who is spinning records. Men have died
in order that the show go on, we're paying
our respects and staying

until it's closing time, a sonic frontier
evaporating fear.
A woman is on stage relieving tension
in another woman who is bound
and gagged, the masochistic stand their ground,
and the theatrical is a dimension.
An aesthetically regurgitated
Boy George with a date

walks by, the girl is in a black brassiere,
it puts her in the here
and now. In order to externalize
the isometric pressure of existence
where the psyche puts up a resistance
she is handcuffed, helpless, and all eyes
are on her. She's in need of some restraint
and then she nearly faints.

(excerpt)

I woke up in the morning and thought of rewriting an old song, "Good Morning Heartache." I'll change it to "Good Morning Hard-On" (but not with Esther Phillips singing it).

Typing for hours.

Went to work in the afternoon, and walked home in the evening.

One of those odd nights with the tube on. I'll go for weeks without it and then zone out for the hell of it and the occasional information. Not to say the odd juxtaposition, going from the Great Depression to the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or from the New Deal to "a sweet transvestite." "I don't want no dissension, just dynamic tension…." I turned it off and turned on the typewriter.

A few minutes later the phone rang. The Czech woman. She had had a few drinks and was speaking in a whisper. She tends to do that, but after half an hour she will sober up, especially if I'm making comments about women and she wants to counter them as a reality Czech. She is a good influence in that respect.

She told me her and a woman friend were out the other night at the Kennel Club. They were drinking, having a good time, and there was a small man they found amusing. He was coming on to both of them and said they should all go to bed together. They led him on somewhat, and allowed him to go with them to her girlfriend's house. They were still teasing him, but the joke was wearing thin and she finally had her girlfriend kick him out. In the morning they woke up and were laughing about it. They had a large-size condom which they wanted to take to the club like Cinderella's glass slipper.

She told me how much she likes to get drunk and we should get together soon. The conversation went off into a more sexual dimension. She also said if women are as cold or superficial as men it's only because it has been done to them. They're not inherently like that (men are?). They're just a reflection of the warped reactionaries out there.

1:30 a.m. Typing for an hour or two.

Tuesday, Oct. 26, 1993

10 a.m. I was jerked into consciousness by the jackhammers of happiness (instead of bluebirds). I walked over to the kitchen window and stood there in my bathrobe, half asleep. A surveyor in the empty lot was aiming his instrument right at me, but I'm not a fixed coordinate.

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office and we walked to Old St. Mary's Church. One of the more refined half-hours I know is her and a string quartet inside some otherworldly architecture. Russian émigré musicians. Two violins, viola, cello, and piano. "The Piano Quintet, Opus 57" by Shostakovich (1906-1975). I was thinking how mental the music was when I looked at her and she whispered, "Boring." I said, "It's pretty." She said, "It's boring," and glanced at her watch. We left before the finale and went to get some Mexican food, a taco Shostakovich.

We sat on a granite ledge (not fit for pigeons) with a heat wave in progress (it was breaking records). I'm getting used to a curious dynamic of hers. She will remind me that we're going to lunch the next day or call me in the office and in general fan the flames of our rapport. Once they're going she will turn her back, figuratively speaking, as if she wants to warm her backside with those flames. Once she has the attention of a man, she likes to act disinterested.

V. loves to tell me what's going on in the office, gossip-wise. I think her life is so restrained that other women – what they're doing, how they look and sound - are a source of amusement, along with an occasional horrified recoil. She is still emerging into her own and gaining confidence. A couple of the older women in the office were surprised at

some of the remarks coming out of her mouth, while she stood there with a look of wry satisfaction. “I’m learning,” she said.

There is still a certain formality and discretion though, and she is put off by women who are swearing or vulgar. She doesn’t like how they talk to her. “Shut up.” “Move your butt.” (That’s Maria talking.) 98 percent of what she has to weather in terms of innuendos, disrespectful comments, or power struggles come from other women. They tell her the most intimate things, not realizing she isn’t sympathetic or might tell others. “What they don’t know is I have a big mouth.”

I was working on something and there were files and papers, court documents, and pleadings all over my desk. The phone rang. A Latina woman was yelling, crying, and swearing, having worked herself into such a state that it didn’t matter that I wasn’t the Attorney (he was on the phone). She couldn’t hold back, having gotten through to someone and the dam burst.

She is the ex-wife of the man who is in prison for killing his girlfriend (who he was living with after he and this woman separated). We sent her the papers for an uncontested dissolution and I think suspension of child support (since he is in prison for the next 7 to 10 years). She was beside herself with anger. They’re not officially divorced and she is fighting for a larger settlement. I wasn’t sure how legitimate her grievance was at this point. It’s a matter of record that the woman is no angel, but she probably had a point about our client not coming through with sufficient child support. Half of the pick-up truck belongs to her. He is in prison, and any remaining funds or assets went into the legal costs of his murder case (he was convicted of second-degree homicide). So here she is with one or two kids and no child support.

I was finally able to transfer the call to the Attorney who was sympathetic, but there is not much he can do at this point. He isn't comfortable with hysterical women and maybe they know that - the furies with ulterior motives. I have been through this before at work, talking to a furious client on the phone. He is often busy, talking to someone else, or gone. The clients build up a resentment against him and the legal system, and they let me know about it.

I walked home.

8 p.m. I called the Actress and her daughter answered. We talked for a while, as if the call was meant for her. She told me about her classes, from calligraphy to gymnastics. She said the latter is easy, and she's writing a story.

"You know what I'm doing right now?"
"Standing on your head."
"No. I'm playing with my eyeball," (the one I gave her last month).

Her mother was talking loudly with another woman in the background and we finally got off the phone.

10 p.m. The Actress called back, sounding okay. Neither one of us made any mention of the ex-fiance. She was resigned to going back to work. We talked about plays and movies and she asked about my life, sounding worried that I may have been in the backroom of a club with one of the strippers. I don't know where she got that idea, or why it would be worse than a woman picking up a man in a bar and going home with him. I'm not in a position to be throwing twenties away, but she still thought I did it, so I said, "Cross my heart on my mother's head," or something to that effect. She said she would check with her daughter to see if that was valid.

I went from the *New York Review of Books* to the typewriter, which is to say there was a drop in the caliber of sentences in front of me.

Wednesday, Oct. 27, 1993

Typing in the morning.

1 p.m. B. came over, having returned from her three-week journey. She blew over a thousand on it, but won't take a cab to the beach. We had the ocean in the back of our minds, but she got here late so we were talking for a couple of hours. When she walked in she looked around the place like she had never seen it before. "Is this a new lamp?" It was an old deco lamp on the desk which I've had for a year or two. She glanced at something in the typewriter. "Oh, a poem. Who's Clement Greenberg?"[100]

Much of the conversation involved her questions and confusion about her affair with a woman. There was a bouquet of roses when she got back, but she still doesn't trust her. B. feels out of her element since she can't use the same ruses on a woman as she does with men. Apparently it's harder to fool another woman. There is an element of duplicity which her girlfriend senses. B. wants to keep her circle of straight friends while having an affair with Ilsa. She is half out of her mind with worries and concerns about how to combine them socially. Ilsa feels left out, and B. won't let her straight friends know what she's doing. Her girlfriend feels like she is being hidden or forced to pretend and doesn't like it, being extremely out there with her sexuality and preferences. She went through a formal wedding ten years ago to another woman, and is not impressed with this sort of subterfuge.

[100] An art critic who pushed abstract expressionism as far as he could, until it dissolved in a shallow puddle known as color field painting.

I told B. that she worries too much about her straight friends. Does she really care if they know who she's sleeping with? Wouldn't it test the worth of those connections? She was going on and on, feeling duplicitous or dishonest. I said, "What else is new?" and mentioned her habit of misleading men, not telling one about another. She looked at me like maybe I know too much.

I said she should be treating her affair with Ilsa as the main event. I've known some women who give the same importance to their friends and social connections as they do to a love affair - sometimes more when love affairs are problematic and/or transitory and not as useful as a friend might be. It's no surprise if those affairs are problematic when they're compromised by having to operate in a super-social dimension. One person is never enough, especially when you can't pull them into focus in the midst of a social whirl.

Her paramour is grounded in the practical, including sex, which is one reason B. fell for her. She admits that sex has been elusive, especially when her feelings for men have been ambiguous. Now there is a woman who is very direct. It is not like her platonic preoccupation with Phoebe, who is unreliable and self-preoccupied (in her opinion). "I love her dearly, but…." She called the minute B. got home from her trip and got her bogged down in one of her neurotic monologues, complaining about her dead-end career and problems with a certain man. There were leading questions about B.'s new friend. B. intimated she was more than a friend.

Meanwhile, I had to go to work. I put on slacks and a shirt and was looking for a tie. I brought out a couple and asked her opinion. I realized a second later I shouldn't

have done that. She didn't like either one, and went through my closet looking for something more suitable.

I walked her to her place, and she told me about a party on Friday night at the Law Offices of Tony Serra.

Went to work, and walked home a few hours later.

9 p.m. I caught a bus part way to 4th and Bryant and walked the rest of the way. It is near the freeway off-ramp where I was arrested last year. I was headed to the nightclub where I saw the German industrial band, EINSTURZEN NEUBAUTEN, a few months ago (when it was called The Bridge). On the way to the club I walked past a blowtorch in a garage and a Coca-Cola sign. It's the real thing – like the show tonight. You start to wonder what you're in for when you're asked to sign a waiver at the door. The Phantom told me about a controversial band which played in Berkeley last week, but he was a little vague.

The club is known for its BONDAGE-A-GO-GO nights, but the crowd was mostly disaffected people in their twenties, maybe a fourth of them in their thirties, and very few over forty. The main room was nearly empty with a loud pounding soundtrack and tiny spheres of light moving across the floor. I sat at a table having a beer.

The club never did get more than half or two-thirds full, with the upper level closed off for a private party which could view the proceedings through the windows. Eventually there were more people in the main room, running the gamut from – I'm speculating – country-fresh girls in cotton dresses to "creatures from the black leather

lagoon" with a whore/bondage look. A thin girl in black latex, head to foot, was shooting pool in front.

I thought I should have come with someone, but was not sure who. Going to a club on a work night is not possible for some, and others would have been a compromising presence, or not interested in seeing something out of the mainstream. It's not like I'm a roving reporter for the *Tenderloin Times*, but it felt like I was there to look around and write about it. There were a couple of women I could have called who're relatively open-minded, but I don't plan ahead very well. If you're spontaneous you sometimes end up on your own.

The first band wasn't much (Super Pussy). One of those opening acts which are so perfunctory, a garage band basically. Knock over a garbage can and scream. It gives girl bands a bad name, and still required two men to back them up on bass and drums. The guy on bass was naked. The girl on rhythm guitar lifted his instrument so everyone could see him. She was a two or three-chord loud guitarist and lifted her own see-through skirt a couple of times (wearing thin briefs). The other girl on guitar was less sure of herself, though a consummate tease and with a look that seems to be going around, wearing a short pleated mini-skirt. The singer was an awful blonde who yelled a lot. Vulgar with pigtails. I had the feeling they were there to make the other two bands sound good.

There was a break. I went into the crowded bar and got a coffee with some whiskey in it. People realized they were going to need some drinks to get through this. By the time I returned THE INSAINTS were setting up. A male power trio who would

provide a throbbing context. They got something going for a few minutes which was not bad, a driving force. Then the star of the show walked on.

She had a purposeful stride, partly because she was wearing a policeman's uniform and hat. Striking angry poses, yelling this or that, acting like she was in control of the situation and no fooling around. She ripped her police shirt off and showed her pale naked breasts. Then she struggled to remove the pants over her boots, lying on her back to do it. She stood up wearing a garter belt with nylons and shoes and nothing else. There seemed to be some silicone in her tits, with a soft-looking stomach and a tuft of blonde pubic hair which didn't hide much.

The singer stood there with the music raging and lifted a carton full of bananas overhead - the crowd cheered – and dumped them on the stage. She would be throwing bananas into the crowd now and then while using one or two on herself. The woman put a banana in her suggestive mouth (unpeeled) and pulled it out. Facing the crowd with her legs firmly planted she inserted it inside herself.

There were variations on a theme of self-assertion and insertion. No inertia. This was no shrinking violet on stage. I read somewhere that the quintessential American is rude and crude and self-preoccupied, and she was keeping with the program, strutting her stuff, working a half-peeled banana inside her pussy and then throwing it to the crowd. Once or twice she walked over to some guy about a foot off the stage and let him remove it. I think she wanted to demystify the female body, like an angry woman who is tired of the objectification of women and thought this was a way to conquer that. It reminded me of Salvador Dali when he tried to "conquer the irrational" by giving full vent to it. Some

would say that's like putting out a fire with gasoline, and it's not like she wasn't an exhibitionist. It was the ritual of a woman with no patience for restraint or ambiguity.

She had a Germanic look and attitude with short blonde hair, fine-boned features, sort of pretty, while being something of a dominatrix. You wonder who is being demeaned here, the woman in control onstage or the crowd, a third of which were women.

There was a short runway from the center of the stage which was two or three feet higher than the floor. I was over to the left, not wanting to get too close to flying bananas (Josephine Baker wore a banana skirt and nothing else in the 1920's). At one point she walked over to the edge of the stage and stood there for a minute with the music going like she was thinking about something. It was close enough to see the veins in her tits. I glanced to the side and the next thing I knew the people in front of me had parted for the water which was coming in a thick stream from between her legs as she stood there in a defiant spread-legged stance. She was urinating off the edge of the stage with her hands holding her vulva open. Another foot or two and my shoes might have gotten wet. I stepped back, and later wondered if it was in response to Camille Paglia's remark about men – that when they urinate it is an "arc of transcendence," while women are resigned to being "earthbound squatters." The singer was bridging the gap between the private and the public.

It was electrifying for the crowd (and would have been more so if she hit an exposed wire on the floor), not to say unexpected. You don't see that very often. She walked away yelling something about it being HOLY WATER![101] Or water at any rate.

[101] It is holy water in the sense of water being an absolute, which sounds like absolution. An obtuse solution from a cute cunt.

She insisted it was ordinary, nothing to be ashamed of, and managed to sing or yell a few songs. There was an interlude where she was using the microphone to better effect, rubbing it between her legs and making it disappear. She walked around with the microphone inside which made for some strange sound effects.

There were a couple of dives off the stage into the crowd which was getting a bit unruly. A couple of guys were in a mosh pit for a while. I backed off further to the side, leaning against an amplifier which was loud. There was a surf tune instrumental. On the second dive I thought she had gotten hurt when the crowd parted and she hit the floor. However, she reappeared with another woman wearing a sheer bodysuit cut high on the hip and leaving her fine-tuned tits exposed. This one looked positively sweet and innocent, but she was giving the singer a hand. She lay on her back with an arm raised up and a thin rubber glove on her hand. The singer stood over her and made the hand disappear inside her while she stood there. It was a moment of triumph, like she had swallowed the extended fist of feminine protest. A minute later it was slowly removed, a delicate female hand. I was thinking, "A hand is born."

During the show there were references to theological and civil libertarian concepts which were spouted like an angry preacher. There was the old routine that God is a she[102] and urine is holy, as well as her having the right to do whatever she wants onstage. To wit: I'll show my twat. Not long ago she was arrested at an underground club in Berkeley (some guy complained to the authorities, hence the waivers tonight). This show might be her second (she's available for private parties), but instead of toning it

[102] I had a girlfriend whose periods made her miserable and because of that she knew that God was not a woman. More to the point: I don't think there is a god, and if there is it would transcend the human race, including our earthbound categories of gender, race, and nationality.

down she went further for the sake of women's lib. I don't think she'll be on television, but could probably make a living doing shows for a discerning clientele.

You could say she's untraditional, but that doesn't mean there isn't a precedent for what she does. There were echoes of performances by other radical transgressive women, and what has Karen Finley wrought? There have been several women recently - a lot of talent in this town – who used a stage to demonstrate the use of phallic objects or to show they had a cervix or to smear sauerkraut on their breasts while putting a yam up their butt. There was social realism in a play about a stripper which included fisting - you've come a long way baby – so this woman is not alone in redefining the physical presence of women in the world.

There was a subtext message to men: keep your hands on your instruments (like her back-up musicians) and off of me. She took it a step further, if not a leg further, finding free pee in the phrase, "free speech." The singer was leaning against something with one leg up and getting more emphatic with a banana in her nether region. I thought it was going to be the climax of the show, with her looking like she might actually feel something down there. It would be interesting if it took all of this to get her off.

There was more. Four or five women walked out on stage and formed a short line on the right. They wore a variety of black leather miniskirts with nothing underneath, and some were topless. The singer lay on the stage while the women took turns standing over her with their legs apart, hiking up their skirts, and peeing in her mouth. She would get up, walk over to the runway, and spray the crowd with the urine in her mouth. She would then walk back and lay on the floor for the next one.

The first woman was heavy with her head shaved and big tits in a small leather bra. There were rings through her pussy. The next was a smaller woman with a dark bush who was only too willing to lift her skirt to her waist and release a stream. I had the feeling they had done this before. Imagine the rehearsals. They were smiling, even before the woman on the floor had buried her head between their legs, pressing her mouth against their private parts. It gave the impression of a group of women who're in love with each other and amused at what they can do with their bodies, though they might not tell their mothers.

Finally, they stood together in a huddle which was sort of touching, literally and otherwise, with their arms around each other, having gone through a cathartic ritual of lesbian water bonding. The singer's body glistened in the lights with sweat and urine and some pie crumbs. For some reason a bald man was sitting in a chair on the side of the stage and she smashed a pie on his head a couple of times. Who knows what psychodrama she was acting out with that maneuver, but it was all fairly harmless, with an existential undercurrent of nothingness and peeing (who said that feminism doesn't have a sense of humor?). Given the daily shock treatment of the news, the inhumanity of man to man, a few women peeing on each other is downright lyrical by comparison. It was another version of "Our Bodies, Ourselves," and not nearly as decadent as mutilating humans with explosives.

They filed offstage and up the stairs to a private lounge. I walked to the back and sat on the floor, leaning against the wall with a few others milling about. I was stunned, but it may have had something to do with the whiskey and the amplifiers revving up the ordinary.

My thoughts weren't organized at the moment. I thought about it later with a typographic recall, and summoned everyone from Aristotle to Artaud as reference points. The former has not been evoked very often in this context, but it wouldn't hurt - something to do with observed realities. Not to get too scientific here, but the bodily functions are not as shocking or disturbing as some might think, even when it comes to a banana below the waist. You're innate, and there are worse things in the world than the princess and the pee.

Anyhow, I've seen it before – a girlfriend who was urinating on the rocks when we were hiking. Ming is not too shy in that respect. These are women who're androgynous and liberated (the marihuana may have helped). They're comfortable with taking off their shirt or peeing in the woods. There was a woman at Red Rock, a clothing optional beach, who walked behind the boulders where I was standing and wasted no time bending over and releasing a stream. In a state of nature there's no privacy or shame. There was another beach where a young woman was lying on a towel and couldn't be bothered to walk somewhere. She rolled over on her side with one leg lifted and glitter-peed into the sand.

Some people go through their whole lives without seeing a dead body or a woman urinating.[103]

There was a long break before the last band. Maybe they were waiting for the stage to dry, and it was probably a hard act to follow. I was on the verge of leaving when the band walked on. They got my attention from another angle, like it was the men's turn

[103] *The Bay Guardian*, a local weekly, has an advice column written by a woman. Someone wrote in with advice for women on how to urinate standing up. She was taking a stand in the struggle for equality (you hear that a woman who wants to be equal to a man lacks ambition). What got me was the assumption that other women would need an advice column on this matter, like they couldn't figure it out for themselves.

to act bizarre - dada-homosexuals who may have taken too much acid. One of them was in a belligerent mood which is hard to pull off when you're a bearded lady/male with white rags around your loins, weird headgear, and shades. It was a screaming burlesque of rock and roll. He had a beat-up electric guitar with the head of a doll on the end and GAME OVER written on the doll's forehead. On the guitar was "Royal Suckass." He was getting angry with the crowd, telling them to fuck off. I think the band was put off by the previous act, like they had been upstaged. Urinating is a weak excuse for a show, and it offended their professional standards.

The singer was a vaudevillian send-up with multiple roles, coming out like a middle-aged woman in a black wig and impersonating Elvis at his worst. There was an anti-go-go girl on the side who was a nice counterpoint to the rest of them. She looked like Nico with a green beret, a miniskirt with fishnet stockings, and a black latex top. When she removed her vest it left her voluminous tits in the open (with two nipple rings). She did a slow version of a go-go dancer looking bored and detached, providing back-up vocals once in a while, and mocking the previous act.

The Diesel Queens. They pulled it off as far as generating a straight-ahead momentum of sheer volume. I was out the door before the sound died with a glass of water which I had to give up at the door. I walked home (covering a good six miles that day). The show was not that disturbing to me. This town is full of surprises, and the women aren't shy.

I was in a semi-industrial area with an elevated freeway and a high voltage skyline in the distance. A guy went by on a customized weird bicycle. "Got a cigarette?"

There are stretches of sidewalk where it feels like you're walking a gauntlet of the gang-affiliated. There are times that I am unaffiliated to a fault. I was close to my apartment when there was a flurry of whores coming around the corner. I think they were eluding the attention of a police car which went by a few seconds later.

At home I took notes for an hour, sitting with some coffee, beer, and cigarettes. On the radio was the Mothers of Invention, "Who are the Brain Police?"

I thought of the "Piss Christ" photo by Serrano (speaking of holy water),[104] and Warhol imitating Pollock when he urinated on a canvas on the floor (he should have urinated on Clement Greenberg). Some artistic expression is nothing more than the warped limits of a person. The woman at the club had some pent-up forces, but how to channel those if you can't act or play an instrument? Her only medium was her body.[105]

Thursday, Oct. 28, 1993

NOTES

> A truck driver turns onto a street with people milling about. In order not to hit anyone he stops. They pull him from his truck and beat him half to death (that was a year ago and he has still not recovered). He is white. Those who beat him were black – kicking, punching, hitting him in the head with a rock. One man was dancing like a savage around the prostrate form on the ground.
>
> The verdicts were pretty weak. "Two black men acquitted of most charges." They have already done some time and might do a little more, but there are related issues and side-effects which don't add up.
>
> For one thing, what were Watson and Williams on trial for? There was a photo on the front page of Henry Watson with his mother and sister on either side of him.

[104] A plastic Jesus immersed in luminous pee, as if to say that urine is more real than religion.
[105] Marian Anderson from Modesto, Calif. She died of a heroin overdose in 2001. She was thirty-three.

Big smiles. They're wearing T-shirts saying JUSTICE FOR THE LA 4 and LET MY PEOPLE GO. Are they unclear on the concept or what? It undermines the legitimate slogans for the black cause if they cop a pose of "justice" and the pseudo-political oppression of the "LA 4" and "Let my people go." How is it relevant to have a Biblical reference? The Jews in ancient Egypt were arrested because they were rioting and beating up innocent people? Watson had six counts of felony assault, felony assault with a deadly weapon, and felony second-degree robbery (he was convicted for one misdemeanor). The people he assaulted included a Latina woman.

Damian Williams had twelve counts, similar charges. He assaulted seven people, including the same Latina woman (she was having a bad day). These are just the charges the authorities thought would stick and had enough evidence for. In addition to the white truck driver, the victims included the Latina woman, two Latino men, an Asian man, and just for the hell of it a couple of firemen.

What does it do to the self-righteous pose of black people who are yelling "Justice" and "Let my people go" if this is what it means, when you find out what they're actually charged with? Those were not spurious charges, considering the witnesses, the victims, and the videotapes.

Even more bizarre is when Williams got off on the final assault charge. The jury decided he wasn't trying to kill the truck driver when he was "hurling a rock into the side of (his) skull." He just didn't like his haircut, or wanted to give him a headache. His mother said, "The power of prayer has led to the verdicts… I'm giving the victory to Jesus." These are non sequiturs which you could drive a truck through. Jesus was thought to be nonviolent, but in fact he was all about throwing rocks at the heads of innocent people. "The theological implications alone are staggering."[106] I don't see how there is anything to be proud of here, speaking about being victorious while dragging religion down to this level. It's pretty gauche, like saying my son is a violent vulture and we're so proud. Something doesn't translate. They are co-opting the aura of a righteous cause, which implies they have the right to beat and rob anyone they feel like, but the system is oppressive if it has the temerity to arrest them for it.

I'm still trying to figure out why there is no mention of a hate crime, unless they beat him nearly to death because they liked him. There is a double standard when it comes to prosecuting hate crimes. It is usually whites who're brought up on those charges, like there is no such thing as black men assaulting white people (it is done far more often than the other way around). Even my politically liberal parents admitted defeat when my two younger brothers went to integrated schools in Los Angeles (elementary and junior high). They were regularly threatened and harassed while the quality of the school declined, and my parents finally moved to San Diego.

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[106] Charles M. Schulz, "Peanuts" (Linus speaking)

"The defense claimed that Watson and Williams were scapegoats for the deadly riots and victims of discriminatory prosecutions."[107] In other words, being pulled from a truck and nearly killed is not as bad as being the victim of a discriminatory prosecution. I'm not sure what that means in this context. There were a few white guys who were also kicking Denny in the head, but the police let them go? It's discriminatory because the police weren't able to get everyone who participated in the riots? The implication is that even if they were caught red-handed on videotape the authorities should let them go because other people who were rioting got away. Wonderful logic. A scapegoat by definition is paying for the sins of others (sounds like Jesus again). How does that apply when the accused were not innocent bystanders? If you think they were, you might also believe that men and women in Africa can fly without the aid of airplanes.

In the office there was some mention of the trial. People wondered how the verdicts were arrived at, being relatively light. I said maybe the videos were blurry and there was a loud response from across the room. One of the legal secretaries, a black woman in her late twenties, objected to what sounded like white liberal excuses, and said, "THEY'RE GUILTY AS HELL!" That is a voice not often heard in these matters. There are many black men and women who feel insulted by the patronizing attitude that black people don't know any better when they assault someone (even when it's other blacks). It's like they're not responsible for their actions, which implies a diminished capacity.

There was an article in the *Chronicle* about Nelson Mandela who was giving a talk to a large gathering of Zulus (the arch enemies of the ANC, the African National Congress). He is doing whatever he can to stop the slaughter between the two groups. Tribal animosities are as old as the hills, and were there before the arrival of any white men on the shores of the African continent.

He showed up in a nice suit, flanked by Zulu chiefs in full regalia, including feathers, skins, and a goat. One had a "goat bladder" on his head. Many black people in this country have pretensions to the Afrocentric, but you hardly ever see them with a goat bladder on their head.

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[107] Recently it was found that $300 million in student aid was illegally channeled into twenty-one Jewish schools in New York. There were grants for students who didn't exist. Moshe Weisberg called it a federal "witch-hunt." "I wouldn't call it willful anti-Semitism, but there is an element of singling out Jewish schools." Maybe that is because those are the ones that stole the money. There are "accusations of prejudice" because the scam has been uncovered. It's a weak defense. The assumption is that the members of a minority can do no wrong (having been purified by their victim status as a minority) and if you suggest otherwise it makes them feel less than perfect. That is an intolerable affront, and they might have to siphon off another $100 million for self-esteem programs (and a trip to Israel to get their megalomaniacal bearings).

> It was mentioned in the article that members of Mandela's delegation, educated black men in suits, were not impressed with the bone-through-the-nose routine. Maybe they think that backward superstitions and/or vicious tribal divisions along with not so democratic customs have been holding their people back as much as the white man or the Arabs ever did - who conducted the lion's share of the slave trade for several centuries before the Portuguese arrived in boats along the west coast of sub-Saharan Africa. They didn't arrive in any real numbers until the 1600's, and were not making inroads into the vast interior of the sub-Saharan African continent until the 1800's (diseases were a problem, for one thing). When Stanley finally found his man ("Dr. Livingston I presume?"), they were in Tanzania in 1871. They were the only white men for hundreds of miles. That is not that long ago.

Typing in the morning.

Went to work in the afternoon.

I walked past Maria's desk and she gave me a big smile, asking if I was going to be her special friend now that V. is leaving. V. was standing nearby. I felt like a pawn in some female intrigue, and was a little surprised that she was being so friendly. A consummate flirt, for one thing, while her sister (nineteen, married) is more serious and intelligent. We don't waste any words on each other. I wasn't giving much attention to Maria either for that matter. Some women are more comfortable establishing connections on their own terms, or even topics of conversation. If she brings up something it's okay to talk along those lines, which might include how long she breastfed her baby (one month). I have to be careful with other topics so I I keep it light. I know what it's like to get a blank expression when I bring up something a woman is not familiar with, or regards as irrelevant to her being-in-the-world.

V. was in tight ironed jeans. Yesterday the above-mentioned sister wore black tights and V. did not approve. They showed the outline of her butt. "Did you see what she was wearing?" Then V. showed up in tight jeans, looking nice. When we were walking

after work I said her concerns about her figure were ill-founded. She said, “I’m fat.” It makes me wonder about her perspective on things if she is twenty-six and weighs 105 pounds, but thinks she is old and fat.

I walked to the pool and swam a mile. I rested in the shallow end for a few minutes, then swam underwater. I usually do 1½ lengths, but reaching the far end I got the mother of all leg cramps. Oxygen depletion in the veins. The muscles in my calf knotted up like a twisted rubber band and it hurt like hell. It wasn’t easy getting out of the pool. I sat on the white tile with my right leg straight out, rubbing the calf. It took a while to ease up. When the pain goes away it’s like you have survived a minor crisis and you’re so relieved that you appreciate the simple things, like being able to walk home.

9:30 p.m. I walked into the apartment and saw something through the window (there are eight of them running along two walls on the third floor so it’s hard not to notice things – all the more so when I hear them). There was a flatbed truck under the window with the motor running. A prostitute walked by, yelled something, and the door of the cab opened. Another hooker climbed down and stood on the sidewalk, arranging her tight miniskirt and looking like a lurid female creature with wild disheveled hair in a blown mane. She wore stockings and a revealing top, but with slender hips and larger shoulders than you might expect. I figured it was a man. Not that the truck driver cared, I suppose. He took his time with the motor idling before he finally drove away.

This neighborhood is so informal and deformed with its romantic interludes. The radio was picking up the slack, too lyrical for words. A “Siberian throat singer,” with someone on a muted saxophone.

The phone rang. It was B. I decided not to mention the Insaints, with her tending to recoil from anything indecent or hardcore. I think her girlfriend would be more sympathetic. The two of them are often at odds. B. is used to being in control (with a man) and this is throwing her off. The other woman has a radar that sees through her ambivalence which a man would not, or might assume it is a woman's prerogative.

She had a provisional working plan for the weekend, still trying to keep her girlfriend away from her straight friends. She is not sure where they will end up on Saturday night, or "which end will be up." I said she could whisper sweet nothings in her ear along with selections from the voter guide (the pros and cons of certain propositions), which B. had been talking about. She has a sense of civic duty.

I'll go to her place tomorrow night, and then to Tony Serra's party.

Reading, writing, and an instrumental sleight of hand.

Friday, Oct. 29, 1993

12:30 p.m. I walked with V. to the Hunan place. Along the way a short black woman went by with a massive bosom bouncing in a low-cut outfit. V. was wide-eyed, being demure and small-breasted. She muttered something about "cantaloupes."

We had a nice lunch. She is psychologically more open when there is less distraction. The office is compromising and when it's time to go she's in a hurry. When we're having lunch there is a close rapport, generating sparks of pure delight at times. There are disparities between us, but we manage to communicate. V. talked about the vanities of her assistant, and who the receptionist slept with over the weekend. She finds it amazing that a woman will go to bed with a man without much hesitation.

I walked home after work.

8 p.m. I wasn't sure what sort of disguise to conjure up. It seemed a little juvenile, although I don't know why it has anything to do with age. You would think that older people have more reason for an occasional bizarre disguise, if only to shake up their conformities and self-importance and hide their looks.

I went into motion on a whim, a sudden inspiration. Maybe it was those high-powered vitamins I took earlier, but half an hour later I had constructed an art object from a metal coil about two feet long and six inches in diameter. It was reminiscent of a scuba tank with vague vertebrae. I planned to sling it over my back on a cord. I put a yellow caution headlight I found in the desert on top, and tied a doll inside as if in a cage. There was a silver candelabra looking tubular and futuristic. I like this business of divorcing form and function. I hung an angel of victory from a broken trophy in the coil, put a glittering necklace in it, and tied a cord with a microphone onto the whole contraption. I put a pinwheel on top which revolved when I walked.

I wore an old trench coat with the immortal art coil slung on my back. The concept was an art contraption as my breathing apparatus, inhaling the aesthetic in order to stay alive. I had a dilapidated thin fur as padding. On my head was a black woven cap with florescent green ski-goggles which looked odd. I didn't want to walk through the Tenderloin looking like that, so I carried the contraption and the goggles. A warm night on a full moon, walking to B.'s place. Her elevator was out of order again (six flights up).

She was in a rush, a bit disorganized, but with a nice-looking outfit. I completed my look with some white face and lipstick.

I left with a cup of wine. A friend of hers was picking us up, a woman in a white slip and a headdress which was vaguely Egyptian. I downed the wine and got in the car. We were in a good mood. The woman was one of those kind-hearted souls – bless their open minds – who don't mind if a costume or disguise is not immediately definable. I sometimes underestimate people, their openness to whatever you want to look like and whatever you want to wear on your back. I got some compliments, although I'm not sure they knew it was an oxygen tank of warped aesthetics for someone who is submerged in the ordinary. It's the air I breathe. I didn't feel like putting a phone cord attachment in my mouth connected to the apparatus like a breathing tube.

10:30 p.m. We walked into the law office at Pier 5.

Four hours later we were leaving in an altered state. I had a vague recollection of standing by a window on the void and passing a joint to Tony Serra. His comment on the contraption on my back when he realized what it was or wasn't: "Oh… aesthetics." His face was covered with war paint and he wore a scarlet robe like someone in the choir or a blood-soaked judge. When he was talking with a few others there was some mention of his having lost a recent case. He tried to get a temporary insanity defense for Ellie Nesler (she shot a man in court who was on trial for molesting her young son). Then B. was pressing him on some point. Having had a hit off a joint she was kind of forward and it may have driven him away.

We were sitting on a leather lounge in the same room. For the party back in August it was an empty shell, an unfinished room. Now it was full of furnishings and polished wood. I recognized a Latina woman who I met twenty years ago in a literary

class (she has an office here). She was talking to another woman who I recognized from a different phase of my life and wondered how they knew each other - a Jewish woman from London who lived down the street from my friend Jacques. Her life was grounded with an office job, but her heart is in the theater. There were some half-knowing glances back and forth but I didn't move. I wondered if the woman I met at the party in August would be here, that connection having gone through an erotic close encounter and evaporated. You know a woman by the trail she leaves, the caliber of her wake. I know that things don't always work out in a loose society of easy come, easy go relationships, but they are sometimes hard to come by, and breaking up is hard to do. There was a slow drop of poison whenever I thought of her - not so much that it didn't work out, but how she handled or mishandled it. I'm not sure what was worse, that she let it slowly die in a sophomoric silence - this is how they do it in Modesto? – or the fact that she never returned the book I loaned her (*Maldoror* by Lautreamont).

It would have been odd running into her, especially if both of us were in disguise (I saw her roommate here). That brings up another point. It's usually more men than women who alter their appearance on All Saint's Eve, especially in the Castro district. The implication is that men have more imagination or they're weirder, and women find it redundant since they're in some sort of disguise every day, inhabiting an artificial role with make-up and props. In that respect the feminine becomes synonymous with phony, and some of them know it. They look down on men who fall for it as they are tricked by the illusion of a treat and are mistreated by some miss in female camouflage.

We wandered through the crowded rooms on the upper level and into Serra's office. The walls were covered with photos, memorabilia, and posters relating to the long

career of a leftwing attorney. He specializes in defending drug users and minority activists. There was a poster of Malcolm X on the wall.

Unfortunately, I was losing all sense of proportion. I hardly ever smoke pot these days, and when I do I lose track of what I'm drinking. There were more joints around than I felt like refusing, but the alcohol was limited for a while. I had a few beers (and a glass of wine earlier). At some point B. or someone in her entourage found a half-full bottle of Jack Daniels (a pessimist would say it was half-empty). It seemed fortuitous at the time, although it would have helped if I had had some dinner.

There was a band on the main floor where we ended up dancing later on.

A couple of long walks on a wooden pier which was built for that purpose. It was lined with old lamps from the turn of the century and there were the special effects of its reflection on the water and a full moon. A phosphorescent bridge hung suspended a couple of hundred feet above the water. The Bay Bridge is so long it reaches all the way to 1937. I realized the advantage of a trench coat when it comes to pissing off a pier (I was under pressure).

Standing around outside with a group of people, half of them in disguise. B.'s woman friend, the loud novelist with a coke connection, was there as a troubadour poet from a few hundred years ago, and she had some verses. Another friend came as someone in ZZ Top with a hairy guitar. I talked with a slinky vampire woman for a while and then went up to a woman I didn't know, a French maid who was leaning against the building with a feather duster and she dusted me off.

It was an older crowd than I am used to, and I was more or less the average age. It had nothing to do with who was getting down and how eccentric their appearances were.

Now and then I realize what I've missed by spending time with people from a younger generation. Whatever intense improvisation that involves (along with déjà vu), I was losing track of functional bohemians who have had a lot of practice and are good at it.

We were dropped off at B.'s place at four in the morning. I was ready to walk home, but she said I should come up for a glass of water. I sat around for an hour or so, having a glass of wine. She wanted to show me her outfits for tomorrow night (going out with the other woman), and walked out of the bathroom in a revealing white corset with stockings. She said she didn't fill it out as required, although she has a lovely figure. Back into the bathroom. She emerged a few minutes later in a black body stocking with a lamp on her head.

I have no idea what we talked about and don't remember the conversation. This reporter was around the bend.

5 or 5:30 a.m. I went home in a cab.

Saturday, Oct. 30, 1993

11 a.m. Coming to. I lay there for another hour feeling approximately wrecked.

I went out for a typewriter ribbon, though I never got around to using it. It was the usual thing, where the hung-over wreckage of your former self can be a relief, a change of pace. Not so much a shadow, as existing in a realm which is simple and concrete. You're semi-brain-dead and the ordinary has a heightened significance because there is not much else on your mind. A short vacation on the hung-over isle of Morning After, with some empty brainwaves washing up on shore. You're at peace with the world, or

yourself in the world, if only because you don't have the wherewithal to imagine otherwise. Feeling dumb as wood, you commune with the solidity of being there.

However, that requires a condition where you're mentally not all there. I went into a foreign language magazine shop, and it felt like I left the country. I was looking at idealized humans on another continent.

I got the typewriter ribbon on Polk Street, and wandered across the street into Headlines. There was a wide selection of morbid silhouettes to choose from. People trivialize the horror, not to say the either/or of life. An older man at the counter was laying down a strap-on double phallus. It was larger than life and the girl behind the counter smiled, but she handled it well.

Breakfast on Geary, with a sense of how scrambled eggs and hash browns, sausage and toast with orange marmalade, can save your life (along with a glass of water).

I drifted along the sidewalk staring into store windows as if I was interested or distracted by the objects, being something tangible outside myself, and gave me something to look at. You see what those commodities have going for them. You can purchase solidity, a form of ballast, not to say diversion.

6 or 7 p.m. Not in the mood for going out. I tried to get some sleep and couldn't, maybe half an hour.

8 p.m. I had the opera on and read someone else's mind as rendered in a self-corrected prose.

10 p.m. I plugged in the little amp and tried it out, using a beat-up Fender guitar with a blue satin strap. It was just what the doctor ordered. It made for some interesting

simultaneities as I stood there with an audio momentum (with distortion) while looking out the window. There was a drop-dead whorelet coming down the sidewalk like a fresh wind that was channeled through the amplifier. I accompanied the neighborhood while working out my own demented blues.

Nearly midnight, reading the *New York Review of Books* about a writer in the 1700's who was associated with the Counter-Enlightenment. He was a "minor figure in the German literary movement known as *Sturm und Drang* [Storm and Stress]…."[108] The article quotes him:

> "The true image of the practical man is that of a sleepwalker, a man who, with infinite sagacity, reflection, coherence, talks, acts, executes perilous enterprises, and does this with greater sureness of touch then he would – or could – do it if his eyes were even a little open." This paradox is echoed by nearly every Romantic writer – the confidence of the sleepwalker which comes from his blindness: reality is disturbing, but must be faced.

For better or worse I made an early and completely sober night of it, not going near a beer. There were a couple of phone calls earlier, and possible parties.

Sunday, Oct. 31, 1993

I was rejuvenated with a lot of sleep.

Typing for hours. The existential reporter bounces back from a dead end.

In the afternoon there was a long workout on a wooden instrument with the game on the tube.

8 p.m. I walked to B.'s apartment, having tired of the trench coat at the last minute. I wore basic black with slacks, a nice coat, and had a few things in a bag. When I got there I changed my mind. Tying a flying saucer on top of my head was less

[108] Johann Georg Hamann

interesting than I thought. B. has a lot of stuff, and on other occasions I have emerged from her closet with a feminine appearance.[109] She nearly got me into it again, but I put my foot down. I found a white skull mask which looked good in the mirror. Black clothes and a skull.

I then found a tube of fake blood which made my night. I put on white face and dripped the blood on my face and forehead. It ran down a bit and dried in a realistic manner.

We were running late. The plan was to go to the Castro district where 200,000 people were converging with the streets blocked off. I would have simply gone there, but that is too direct. She has a tendency to complicate a social occasion with other destinations and parties. Sometimes more is less. There have been times when this approach diverted or diluted the night (like when she tried to squeeze in too many appearances on New Year's Eve and ended up in a car when the midnight hour struck). She was worn-out from the night before, having been with the other woman. They had several parties in mind, but ended up at a semi-boring event for bisexuals.

She was nearly beside herself, having doubts and tensions about the affair with Ilsa. "I can't take this anymore." It was getting on her nerves, more or less admitting that her emotional state can interfere with her metabolism. She can't "let go" with the woman and doesn't trust her. Ilsa has a wandering eye (a Brazilian woman is interested) and is

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[109] There was a costume party in a converted firehouse in the Haight, and a woman friend (Camera Zie, who did photos for City Lights Bookstore) found some things in her closet for me to wear – black silk pants, a Chinese jacket, an androgynous hat, which along with heavy makeup was enough to fool the cab driver on the way to the party (it was 1977). It helped that I kept my mouth shut. When I got there a woman turned around and said, "How dare you look so lovely?" (It was Ainslie Pryor, the actress.) I understood why women don't mind being complimented when they have worked on their appearance. We were on the dance floor and remained friends for a few months but it didn't go any further. Apparently looks aren't everything.

over-sexed (in B.'s opinion), not to say discouraged that B. can't have an orgasm with her. B. thought she handled herself rather well the first time, so Ilsa wouldn't know it was her first time with a woman. She managed to figure it out.

B. showed me some cards from Ilsa. "So nice to have you in my life…." Some people live and breathe the sentimental. It's like a bubble which is easily broken. Their emotions don't guarantee anything in the way of a mutual trust, as if the high-flown could evaporate in a minute. It makes you wonder how pretended it is. I have encountered it with several women in recent years, and here is a situation where two women are involved and the connection is so tenuous it's like a mirage. It shimmers over the ground of what they have in common as women, but that is like shifting sands with no sure footing.

She talked about it while I was bleeding from my eyes, a man with an Oedipal look.

We went out with a cup of wine and walked down Powell Street to the underground monorail. She wanted to rendezvous at some place on the edge of town. Going directly to the Castro would have been too easy. We stood in a subway station. It's lifeless down there, cut off from the sunlight and the stars. She told me she likes it, a New Yorker who loves to slide beneath a crowded city with a power glide.

There was a momentary situation when the police arrived. They walked slowly to the other end of the station. Someone said a Latino pulled a gun on a "Caucasian." Trick or treat? The train pulled up and waited for a while, listening for shots. Then it pulled away.

We rode about three or four stops and got out in an unfamiliar quiet neighborhood. We were picked up by her friend and a few minutes later walked into a small wooden house. Those are common around here, but the inside was completely redone. It was like stepping through a door into the dreamy world of a refined homosexual who seemed to exist in a feminine-hermetic layout with white rugs, white walls, and pale or pastel tones. It was antiseptic, no smoking, with expensive objects of glass and crystal, and some art deco prints by Erte on the wall. Having arrived late there were just a few people left from a dinner party.

I was out of my element, what with no music and the atmosphere of a morgue with precious side-effects. It was vegetarian on top of that. A decadent and luscious-looking cake was made without the usual ingredients with a frosting of "whipped tofu." Not a comment on the host, necessarily. I didn't go near it. He was having a sensitive conversation with a woman reclining on the sofa. He wore a turban with pearls and white loose clothing - the attire of a Pakistani male bride.

I ended up on the balcony looking at the moon through the vapors (this town has the vapors), having a cigarette and a Dubonnet on the rocks (the only alcohol in evidence) and counting the minutes. He talked about driving through Germany with a male companion who was constantly shopping, so he couldn't see the sights.

We left with an old friend of hers from New York. There was an immediate antipathy between the two of us. He was in his early thirties and she said he turned homosexual over the last few years. At the moment he didn't have a costume and looked ordinary. He said a couple of times that he was going as "a heterosexual." Ha ha. I wondered if I could lose him in the crowd.

We drove to the vicinity of the Castro. Parking was impossible, but we found a place on a nearby hill and walked down, becoming engulfed in the throng. She tried to keep an arm on both of us, pushing through the packed streets where it felt like too many people had come looking ordinary. They were probably from out of town. It had the desultory effect of when an audience goes onstage and mingles with the actors who're in costume and outnumbered three to one.

I suggested we stand on the sidewalk since everyone else was in motion. We could watch it go by like a delirious procession. There were a few good horrors, not to say male whores and apparitions, bearded men with hairy chests in corsets and high heels. They wore exaggerated wigs, a not so complimentary homage to the artificial feminine.

There were meat cleavers and cleavage and a few sperm-heads. Someone had a picture frame on her head (as if to symbolize the limitations of self-awareness). The walking dead, untrue believers, witches and bitches and UFO's (unidentified fallacious oddities). There were impersonal impersonators and worse. On a fire escape a man in a skirt with a strap-on phallus pretended to sodomize another man. The crowd was cheering him on. It felt like we were back in the 1500's at some bawdy Elizabethan free-for-all in England with the irreverent rubbing shoulders with the pathological.

B. came out of a crowded bar with a margarita and muttered something about a simulated blow-job. We made our way to the intersection of Castro and Market. It was packed. Her friend would prove to be her undoing that night – planning to meet him an hour later for a ride home which could have been accomplished with a cab. We continued up the street, passing through a blockade. There were a few people walking back and

forth. A couple went by in white aprons splattered with blood and gore. They had butcher knives embedded in their necks.

A few women (I think) had the rubber torsos of older overweight women, their worst nightmare I suppose. There was a young woman in a white lace bra on which she had attached two baby-bottle nipples.

We went another block and looked down at Market Street. There was a stage with spotlights on the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, showing off their fetishized personas so we walked down to have a look. A Jesus figure with his arms tied to a cross. Someone said "Jesus on a stick" and it wasn't me. A vacant zombie walked by chewing on the bloody tendons of an amputated foot. Women were recoiling. If you can't get a response from women, what is left but to gross them out?

B. was acting distracted, like all of this was a sideshow and not the main event. For once she was right, and she suggested another party on a brilliant whim. We walked for six blocks up Divisadero. The red smoking flares were a nice touch for the evening. The party hovered in the realm of the possible like an extravagant balloon on a thread. We almost didn't go, being not in the mood to walk, and our only affiliation was a friend (Laverne) who is sleeping with an actor who was going (a semi-theater party as it turned out).

She wasn't there when we arrived, hearing noise and music from down the block. People were spilling out on the front steps and singing. We went up the stairs into a fine layout, what I would characterize as warm and European with a bohemian look and a few luxurious touches. Gourmet food and all sorts of drinks. We didn't know a living soul and were winging it. A young man in black walked up, polite and friendly. B. mentioned

a name or two, enough to show we hadn't walked in off the street like complete strangers. He said "Help yourself," referring to a spread which included cloves of baked garlic, bread and cheese, and grapes. Barely half the people were in disguise. It was like the first place we went to in that respect (slow death compared to this). I got more compliments for the figure of winged victory hung around my neck and a skeleton earring than for the blood streaming down my face. Many a writer or musician knows the feeling - he is bleeding but the public likes his ornaments.

B. has as much trouble making friends as she does breathing, and I was relaxing by the minute. I was in the kitchen with some crazy conversations bouncing around. There were people with cigarettes, if you can imagine. I had a glass of wine and was not in the mood to leave (I could have stayed for several days). Around 12:30 a.m. she had to leave for that pointless rendezvous with her friend. We had been there for an hour. She was looking for a good party all weekend and stumbled on this one, but was stuck with her ever-tangled plans and had to leave early.

Our connection to the party arrived ten minutes before she left and to good effect. Laverne is thin with fine bones, an ex-model in her mid-thirties. She came as a marble statue or a dead woman with a white shroud over one shoulder and not much else. She was covered in white paint from head to foot, and stood around with the rest of us like an apparition. I had just been talking to a DEAD BEAT POET (in a beret with a fake goatee). He proclaimed his approval, "I love naked women!" (Her boyfriend was in normal attire and one of the more stiff or reserved guys there.)

The poet – a real one in real life – was an exuberant Latino fellow in his thirties named Francisco Alarcon. He was drinking heavily, and we got into a long discussion in

which we commiserated on a few points – how being a poet in this town is discouraging or problematic. It borders on the obvious and there are special interest groups. The poetic has become synonymous with the politically correct. He muttered some lines to a woman to the effect, "You're a two-timing user… but I love you." He had some other lines about being "spiritually unemployed" while standing on the corner of life. Reminds me of a Corso line: "Standing on a street corner doing nothing is power." My response to that is like a traffic light: yes, maybe, no.

For the hell of it I asked him to name three poets he liked. Okay, five. Pablo Neruda. Charles Bukowski. Octavio Paz (hesitating). Tom Waits. Leonard Cohen. Not a bad list, all things considered. He was not a true believer in Neruda (whose Stalinism is hard for some of us to understand). I told him I saw Bukowski give a reading in North Beach twenty years ago. He was onstage with a small refrigerator full of beer. I have read Octavio Paz, but mostly his prose. Tom Waits of Chula Vista (a mind is a terrible thing to Waits) has secured my undying respect as much for his sound effects as his words, and Cohen is okay.

He asked me to name some poets. I mentioned Corso and Rimbaud and Sylvia Plath off the top of my head. I didn't get any further as he had a reaction to the last one, saying she was morbid and psychotic. All the more poetic, I thought. I prefer that to the sophomoric thoughts of the prematurely enlightened, especially when they come in a diluted prose with arbitrary line-breaks. Sylvia Plath was stuck in a remote orbit that could not sustain life for very long.

He was getting chummy with his arm over my shoulder and there was some mention of finding one's own voice so to speak and sticking to it. A blind faith in subjectivity, although it sounds like driving with your eyes closed.

Meanwhile, we were still in the kitchen. I saw an older man, an actor from a play I saw a couple of years ago, and said hello. He is a friend of one of the actresses in Marin. He was holding a beer with his hat tipped back and his stomach sticking out.

A loud white woman from New York, a journalist who wrote about hip-hop, said, "I'M THIRTY-FOUR!" She was stuck on the fact that a young actor named River Phoenix had died for no apparent reason (drugs). He walked out of a club in Hollywood and collapsed. Someone said Fellini died, which was the first I heard of it. He was seventy-three. There was some discussion as to which event was more significant, but all I could think of was Fellini, having seen most of his films.

I wandered into the front living area and was impressed with the layout, including the lamps and rugs and a wall lined with fine books. A woman changed the music, who I realized was the hostess. She was married to the young man in black. I mentioned the books. She said many or most of them were his. He studied literature at Harvard, though he works as a carpenter these days. That barely made sense to me. He was trying to make some headway with short films. She was an actress[110] and a little tipsy, a bosomy blonde in a long gown. Both of them were around thirty. She had a Jean Cocteau fixation – having his books and a couple of pictures on the wall, and showed me something he wrote which was addressed "To Americans," after spending a month in New York. I thought it was a quaint communiqué by a megalomaniac - as if I would write a letter to

[110] Her claim to fame, which she didn't mind telling people, is that she spent the night with Robert De Niro in New York some years ago. She was working in a shop when he walked in and swept her off her feet.

the entire population of France after I spent some time in Paris, expressing my love and concern. It makes more sense if you're famous.

I'm losing track of the sequence here, but at some point I was sitting on a soft lounge with an iron and glass coffee table covered with glasses, books, and an ashtray. A few people were dancing in front of me, including a Latina woman who had been – I won't say making overtures, but making her presence felt. I looked at her and she returned the stare. Then I was up and moving with her, but the music changed. It went into a slow number so I had my hands on her waist. We were moving slowly and it seemed encouraging. However, as sometimes happens, things become evasive and you lose a signal in the semi-drunk commotion of a party.

She wore a tight-fitting purple satin gown with a crown and a sun medallion. I think she was a queen, but she lost her car keys and wandered off to look for them. The woman returned a few minutes later. She couldn't find them, shrugged, and said, "Let's dance," which was a further encouragement. However, it was 70's funk which I'm so-so about. After a while some of us were looking at a video on the tube. It began as a Barbie doll saga in stop-frame animation, but it became X-rated. There were no holds barred with the appendages and doll-like blow-jobs (for a hollow man). It had a curious effect. A couple of women, including the Latina, were recoiling and left the room, while a slender blonde in tights standing next to me was attentive and amused.

The host finally showed up and turned it off by request. It was after two in the morning and a few people had left (including the Greek statue). It looked like I was going the distance, having had a fair amount of wine. I was getting along with people, but was less into the music. The hostess couldn't get enough of it. Her husband would walk over

and turn it down and she would walk over and turn it up. He would return and turn it down.

I ended up in a chair by the balcony window. There was a string of white lights in the plants and I had no complaints, flipping through a vintage magazine with an article on Cocteau. I tried to read it but was not making much headway. The Latina woman had passed out on a nearby lounge.

Then the hostess disappeared, the husband turned off the music, and people were leaving. I went over to the horizontal woman. She was semi-conscious, being in a languorous mood. I gently retrieved my jacket from under her head and she held out her hand. I asked her name and she said, "Ana." "Ana what?" She responded, "Ana what…," like she was trying to think. I said goodnight. It was another close encounter with some potential, but she couldn't move.

I shook hands with the host, said goodnight, and walked out. We had spoken earlier. I asked him how one got from Harvard to here or something to that effect, but it may have come out wrong. He wasn't very forthcoming.

3 a.m. I was walking with the DEAD BEAT POET who was weaving. He could barely walk in a straight line. He was with the tall slender blonde in tights who was becoming more interesting by the minute. We had spoken at some point in the evening, with her looking like a wood nymph. She is not an actress. I said that I am often out of sync with theater people and she said, "What do you do?" "Writer." I thought of the line about musicians and said,

"Never marry a writer."
"Does that mean you're not married?"

We were headed for her car which was not very close, and having an off-the-wall discussion with him being pretty drunk. We were still on a poetic theme with my white face dripping blood. I said it was okay being shot in the head since writers are empty-headed, meaning that in a good sense. He liked that. She announced, “I have to pee,” but never found a suitable location.

Her little sedan was parked on the sidewalk, and he got in back. Besides taking me home she wondered if she should go see her ex-boyfriend. It sounded problematic. I was dropped off at the corner of Hyde and Ellis. “You do live in the Tenderloin,” she said.