

Hellhound on My Trail

Boyce Brown

Breaking Out

Fall Semester 1985, Belgrade Yugoslavia

Hawaii, which I love dearly, has never been able to keep me. A latch key only child left largely to my own devices from a very early age, I peddled, ran or hiked across every road, ridge, and trail on O'ahu, 130 miles around, 100 miles paved. I quickly came to know everything there was to know about the physical layout of my tiny island. I dreamt endlessly of escaping its narrow confines, possessed by a desire to get out and stay out for extended periods of time, longer than the occasional junkets: interisland trips, journeys with my Dad to see his best friend in Los Angeles, trips with my Mom to see her people in North Carolina and regular Christmas vacations with my Dad's big family in El Paso every other Christmas, alternating holidays an informal clause of the custody agreement.

There were always side trips from El Paso to Juarez to eat greasy tex-mex, and buy cheap booze and groceries and pots and pans, to Carlsbad Caverns to spelunk with elevators and well-lit concrete pathways and gawk at the swarming bats of dusk, to White Sands to slide down massive sand dunes on metal discs and cardboard boxes, to Ruidoso in beautiful pine mountains for skiing at Sierra Blanca on the Mescalero Apache reservation and acquaint myself with strange and delightful things like snow, alpine meadows and mountain streams near our rented A frame cabins.

The long series of El Paso visits came to an end when Grandma Nana died as I entered high school. Grandpa Brown died when I was three. I didn't remember him at all.

Because I had been studying Mandarin Chinese since the 7th grade, I went on a six week student tour in China during the summer between 9th and 10th grade. An obnoxious group of Jewish American Princesses from Scarsdale High School went with us. I quickly learned that Scarsdale had one of the highest per capita incomes in the

country. In Hawaii, I had only been to one Bar Mitzvah. We had pizza and cokes at the reception.

One fat ugly junior, who won big points for being heavily into the Cramps, started me on the road to sexual awakening. We would lie in her cool subterranean dorm room three stories beneath the dusty, cicada-droning heat of Summer Beijing together on her narrow bed, our heads facing in opposite directions, each reaching up under pants or shorts, under panties or underwear, gently feeling up each other's hips and ass. On the few occasions I went for the pubes, my errant hand got an immediate smack.

Everyone borrowed each other novels. I read Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* and the first three volumes of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, broke into someone's Oreos and got into alot of trouble.

After four weeks studying the language and taking sightseeing trips in and around Beijing, we spent the last two weeks riding trains all over the huge country, usually in unairconditioned third class cabins. There were many long hot journeys including a 12 hour trip from Beijing to Xian, where I saw the awe-inspiring terra cotta army, still in the ground where they were discovered, an aircraft hanger built over them. At most toilets all across the nation, in the largest cities or the most isolated rural outhouses, you squatted over a hole and did your business. You also quickly learned to bring your own toilet paper. We progressed onward through Nanking, Shanghai and the gardens of Suzhou. Rather a let-down for being of such legendary beauty. The lack of material comforts was beginning to make the Scarsdale girls insufferable.

I was happy to close relations with them as they grew more and more aggravating over the course of our travels, especially after it became obvious that there couldn't be anything between me the cutest member of their delegation, a Chinese-American. Even more so as I was growing close to a Haole kamaaina girl who was much cuter than my Westchester County Temptress of Fondled Asses. She had gone to my school since kindergarten but was a grade ahead of me and had spent her last two years in San Rafael

High School near San Francisco, or "San Ra-hell" as she called it. I never knew her from school before the trip. She had strong arms and a strong back from windsurfing in the northern end of the San Francisco Bay all the time, very sexy. She was excited to return to our school so she could windsurf Hawaiian waters for the first time and meet all of her old friends again.

On one of our last nights in the People's Republic of China before Hong Kong, we found ourselves lying together on the patio of my shared room in the lodgings of our delegation at the Shanghai Physical Education University dormitories. We stroked each other's stomachs beneath shirts and talked. It was sweet and tender. I progressed from hand-on-breast-over-shirt to hand-on-breast-over-bra, delighted at my progress.

Answering my prayers in a way I was not at all expecting, she said "Let me bag this bra."

There is a God! I didn't even have to ask her for permission, or try to unhook it! Manna falling from the sky! Good fortune indescribable! We kept at it for some time, never going too far or pushing anything too fast, and decided upon a walk for a change of scenery and greater privacy. It was heady and delightful.

(I had only had one real relationship before that, with Kara. She took me horseback riding through the tropical pastures of Windward O'ahu around the Olomana mountain stables because she loved the big zany ties I wore shirtless to cross country practice in 9th grade. I kissed her on Kailua Beach that evening after horseback riding, staying over at a girl's house for the first time in my life. As we cuddled on the sand and gave each other shy pecks here and there, I accidentally touched her pubic hair through the fly of her boxer shorts while caressing her stomach. "I would make a pass at you if I only knew how," I said shyly.)

We stopped to lay down together in the middle of the dewy grass of the sports field. Tightly wound silvery ropes of clouds hung across the bright full moon sky. I kissed her breast, my first. Walking back to the dormitory, we bumped into a group of

Chinese teachers and students, some of whom I recognized as our local chaperones. We were informed that they were many search parties made of members of our delegation and local chaperones had launched to find us. I tried to talk my way out of it in Mandarin, but the authorities had already been notified and too many people had already gone to too much trouble.

We were both inches away from being sent back to Hawaii early without completing our trip in Hong Kong. I was really looking forward to seeing one of the most cosmopolitan and vibrant cities of the world. We wound up finishing the tour, but only because expedited flights couldn't be scheduled.

We fooled around a few more times after we returned to Hawaii. On the most exciting occasion we did everything except penetration on the quiet isolated banks of tropical Nu'uuanu stream above Kapena Falls.

The next summer I walked to the same waterfall on my way home the last day of school with a friend who was going to a running camp with me that weekend. I was relishing a swim at the neighborhood swimming hole as a proper way start to summer. I jumped in from the highest ledge, about thirty feet up, reached out to grab a leaf from a tree on the way down, got swung sideways and landed on the side of the face.

BBBBBBBBBBBWWWWWWWWE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

All I heard was a loud ringing. Swimming was done. I made us start walking the last mile of four home. The ringing gradually subsided to a weird echoey effect as we walked. After a very short time trying to relax at home, it became excruciatingly painful. I was rushed to the emergency room for codeine and ear drops to fix a busted eardrum. No swimming for two months! Before summer had even started! In Hawaii surrounded by an ocean and perfect weather! Where everyone surfs and swims all summer!

My first great escape out of Hawaii was in my junior year of high school. By chance my father happened to sit next to the Western United States Director of a large international student exchange organization on a plane. He encouraged me to apply. I

leapt at the chance, even though a requirement of the program was that you couldn't pick your destination. They could have thrown me in any random Third World hell hole and I would have gladly gone. It would have been Out. Anywhere but here. Gone Daddy gone.

I would have ventured anywhere in the world except Western Europe. I was adamant about that. "EVERYBODY goes to Western Europe," I thought to myself with bitter self-satisfaction. "I don't want to go where everybody else goes."

I had been on a quest since adolescence for radical sincerity and individuality, contradicting norms, pinpointing contradictions and decrying incongruity anywhere I could find it. (This was of course before I learned the horrendous and banal news that you can be as distinctive and high minded as you want to be and only a handful will ever notice, not to mention that there is nothing new under the sun, creatively speaking.)

The country I was assigned to was suitably esoteric: Yugoslavia. Every so often I can still smell a peculiar combination of wood smoke and roasting red bell pepper that brings all the memories back in a flood. The bleak gray brown dinginess of the buildings and leafless trees of the rolling countryside. The school where I felt like a stump of wood who couldn't understand a word. The teachers who could've cared less. The female schoolmates I had recreational crushes on. Trying to get it on with them was about the only reason to go to school.

I talked to two in particular. One was much cuter, more shapely, taller and had a better smile than the other. So, shyly, I talked to the other one more often and tried to use her as a go-between. Once my go-between passed me a note from the cute one that said in Serbo-Croatian: "You are a handsome and respectable boy." It was tantamount to a declaration of love. I was delighted but never capitalized on it.

The families of these two girls were on opposite sides of an extremely famous feud decades earlier between Monarchists and Reformers (Petrovich and someone else).

People on both sides were assassinated. They joked about it but with an undertone of bitterness.

For the first time I was nearly as free as an adult to do as I pleased, with no little accountability, few responsibilities and a small amount of ready cash. The \$16 monthly stipend was the best money I had ever seen in my life. We had to go ask for it from our program director downtown bi-weekly. Living with a Yugoslavian host family took care of meals and lodging. My little stipend went pretty far there, where my host father who had a masters degree in Anthropology was forced to work as a electrician for \$250/month, glad to be in such a stable occupation.

I bought the ice cream and coffee my host family couldn't afford and still had money enough to spare to haunt the smoky cafes of the bohemian Skadarlija District down the hill towards the river from Downtown, order small pizzas served with little decanters of olive oil to be eaten with forks and knives (tres Continental) and the local beer, "B.I.P. Pivo." Even though I always ordered a beer because I could, I always wished I had ordered a Coke.

Riding the Rails

October 7 1985, Belgrade Yugoslavia

I tried my hand at riding the rails. An alarm clock began my journey at 4:00 a.m. By 4:20 a.m. I woke up, and packed food, water and a book. By 4:30 a.m. I was on the bus headed for the rendezvous. By 4:50 a.m. I got off and started looking for the Hotel Pusik. For all of my planning I wasn't quite sure where we were to meet. I felt like Hitler on the Eastern Front, improvising. What is it about Slavic culture that invites you to just wing it?

I walked the dark streets and read Cyrillic street signs to place myself on the map, which I opened like an eager tourist

"Never put off till tomorrow what you can do at 5:00 a.m.!" I told myself cheerily.

I soon found the closed hotel. I wondered why it was closed. Don't some people want in or out of a hotel at 5:00 a.m.? 15 minutes later, Bonnie arrived. We started on our way towards the railroad yard.

We made a very cautious entry, carefully avoiding all of the watch houses and passing trucks. We checked out the different types of boxcars and their locks. In the midst of our detective work, a set of cars started on its way to Zagreb or Greece and Bonnie jumped. "Where will we sit? Where will it go?" I wondered and coaxed her back off, ruining our first chance at hitting the happy trails. Since our adventure was just beginning, we took it in stride. Even in crisis, our minds stayed clear. We decided to go and wait at the junction where every train going south had to pass, hoping that numbers might insure us a ride.

We walked more boldly now. The dawn was starting to break. Lots of people were using the yard as a short cut to catch buses to work. Should I have foreseen its utility as a short cut and walked boldly from the start to avert suspicion? We arrived at the junction and hid in the bushes. As we skulked under cover, it occurred to me that people seeing such guilty behavior as this might assume we were trying to jump on the next train. Maybe playing it more open would be the way to go.

It was totally daylight by now. We waited and passed the time with Bloom County books, chocolate bars and gummy bears. At first, we threw everything in our bags and stood at attention every time a train passed. We quickly grew tired of the frenzied packing and unpacking and began a new practice of confirming whether these attention-getting trains were in fact the freight trains that we needed. Up until now how they'd all been passenger trains.

We were sitting, books and candy strewn everywhere, when an electric train stopped and the conductor asked us aboard. We quickly gathered all of our crap and jumped on. We gathered from his bad English and our bad Serbian that he would take us to Novi Sad, the next big city down the line.

So we rode the rails not in a dusty boxcar but in the first class section of an empty train! We sat and marveled at the view and our good luck. How could it go so well? But after 10 kilometers, the conductor told us to get off without telling us why. We weren't worried. We still had Bloom County.

After I finished the last cartoon, I starting looking around. An empty set of open boxcars! Too bad it wasn't moving. Another empty passenger train pulled up. It had an open door. It was like the door in horror movies, when they start playing that suspenseful music.

"I don't want to go in there. There might be a penalty!" I joked nervously.

As a matter of discipline and dedication to adventure I jumped on. I checked to see if the conductor was barreling down the train's walk way, intent on doing me bodily harm. He wasn't. Bonnie hopped on board and we ducked into the bathroom in case he walked through the train. We were close together, senses heightened. After a long wait we started moving. It felt great! We had conquered our fears and were moving towards the unknown, maybe to arrive hundreds of miles away in a different country!

A kilometer later, at the next station, it stopped. I went out of the bathroom and poked my head out of the train at the railyard around us. A janitor got on! We're in a bathroom! Let's go!

We jumped out. We thought we had put what we thought would be enough distance between us and the station to avoid all relations with the authorities of the maintenance yard. It turned out to be not enough. Someone must have seen us. Shortly after I'd checked out the other remaining trains for prospects of moving again, some station guys came up to us. I knew it would be trouble.

They marched us inside and started asking questions, some in English, some in Serbo-Croatian. Luckily, that original ride gave us a ready made excuse. Bonnie picked up on it and we soon sailed through.

"We got a ride but he kicked us off," she said. "We've been trying to get back ever since."

"Why don't you have your passports?"

"We didn't know we were going anywhere," she continued.

After consultations on the phone concluded in our favor, they brought us both Cokes. One of the officials took us to the nearest bus stop. We gave up riding the rails for the day and caught the bus home.

Puppies

October 8-15 1985, Belgrade Yugoslavia

Those dogs were always barking. I had ventured into the shrubs around my host family's apartment block before to engage them in mortal combat, skirt death by their gruesome fangs, and perhaps kill a dog in order to show the others it was not a good neighborhood for barking dogs but they always fled before I arrived.

I heard a barking dog while I was playing soccer nearby and I lost no time running over to play judge, jury and executioner. I jumped into the brush with voracious barks of my own. The offending dog was long gone but I heard a rustling and looked down. I had jumped into a litter of eight puppies. Making a quick transition from combatant to puppy-lover, I sat down and starting playing with them, doing the usual, stroking and holding them, letting them hop and tumble around near me. They did the usual, tail wagging, licking, biting and trying to make off with my fingers, as if I might not miss it if they pulled slowly enough.

I came back the next morning to play with them again. I came back that afternoon and they were gone. As I made my final survey before leaving for good, I saw them in a new spot nearby. Just four. I thought the other four had died. Then two came by. Then one, then the eighth.

So we played for days. I read Walden with them. I was bored in this dingy city where I didn't know the language and the dogs were a welcome diversion. I enjoyed watching the furry daredevils leap at my fingers, miss and then dramatically confront the fact that the slope we played on turned their six inch jumps into two foot free falls to waiting thuds below. They bumped my forehead when they tried to bite my ears, and fell on their backs and slid down the slope.

I knew they were hungry. It appeared their mother had abandoned them. But when they started eating dead cats, I had to end our relationships. It was O.K. There's not much variety in playing with puppies. For awhile they beat back the boredom in Belgrade. For a moment eight clumsy dogs were the saving grace of Yugoslavia, a country that had beaten back divisions of Nazis on its own in W.W. II.

Steppes Unrolling

December 1985, Belgrade Yugoslavia

My elder host brother spoke English well, which contributed to my laziness about learning the language. Between that and hanging out with the other seven exchange students from my organization way too often (four Americans, two Norwegians and an Irish), I never got an adequate handle on the language to make it in school or really throw myself headlong into the culture.

My favorite moments were cutting school to run and walk by myself all day in the suburbs and surrounding countryside, veritable third world villages, past cinder block huts alongside rocky unpaved streets, chickens foraging in the wretched mud of weakly piddling streams on the sides, across packed dirt trails through fields and forests, or else to clamber the endless walls and alleys of the ancient Roman ruin of Kalemegdan Fortress, standing high on a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers. I could sit for hours on some precarious perch, suspended two hundred feet in the

air staring at those two brown green rivers, the island floating where they joined, and those endless, endless brown plains receding into the distance.

I felt the vast steppes unrolling in an almost unbroken flatness through Romania, the Baltic Sea, Central Asia, land of high cheekbones and bushy mustaches, all the way to China. All of that impossible vastness taunted me, as newly fallen snow demands fresh tracks to violate its purity. I thought of the Huns, the Mongols and the many nomadic warrior races that had crossed great distances on horseback across endless oceans of grass for millennia to ride along the plains below me now.

I knew I was at an ancient crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa and promised myself that no jet airplane would herd me back home to the islands in June when my stay ran out. On the threshold of an opportunity so grand - one granted to so few and one which may never come again - it would be a crass betrayal to return, contemptible, pathetic and weak.

We exchange students especially liked to watch broadcasts of the American television show "Dynasty" together. Everyone brought a piece of the party puzzle. Juice, cookies, sweets or beer and wine. These were often fine parties. Lisa and Bonnie, the two objects of my affection, were almost always there, much to my delight. They kept my romantic hopes alive in an otherwise boring city. When I was into Lisa she wasn't into me, and vice versa for a frustrated round or two.

Blues Closet

December 1985, Belgrade Yugoslavia

My host family's apartment couldn't have been larger than 600 square feet at the top floor of a six story walk-up, across the way from a good looking young couple with a baby and a black Mercedes. The man was a successful manager of the state baking company. They seemed rich. It made the top floor seem desirable, like they were the best places in the joint, even though they were both so dinky.

My relationship with my host mother deteriorated rapidly as she complained about me directly to my foreign exchange program local director without giving me a chance to defend myself or address her concerns, damaging my standing in the program. One problem appeared to be that I drank too much of their expensive coffee. These admonishments were especially strange as she had never participated in meetings with my exchange program before. My host brother did all of that because he spoke the best English. When she finally participated, it was only to bad rap me. I felt bitter and frustrated.

I dealt with my alienation by setting up shop for myself in the pantry closet most evenings. It was big enough for me to sit in it with a chair and prop my legs up on a shelf after moving canned goods and bags of onions, potatoes and apples out of the way. I listened to blues tapes and drank espresso in the dark.

We exchange students had a country-wide gathering of our tribe in Sarajevo in the Winter. On the train ride to and from Belgrade we bought cheap white wine from the canteen and turned it into a rolling party. We were a small group. Baker's dozen from throughout the country, representing a wide variety of nations, predominantly America, Norway and Ireland. Most of us were placed with families in Belgrade, the capital.

Sarajevo was a beautiful ancient city in a snow covered mountain bowl with the gentle Drina flowing through the middle of town. The natives justifiably prided themselves on the racial tolerance, historic architecture and natural beauty of their cosmopolitan surroundings. For centuries, Sarajevo had been at the confluence of the powerful Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire and a doggedly independent Serbia, alternatively suffering and prospering as a theater of war, crossroads of trade, and center of culture and learning. Since W.W. II, they had known peace.

Their greatest claims to fame were as the setting of the assassination that started World War I, the 1984 Winter Olympics, and the famous novel by Ivo Andric, Yugoslavia's only Nobel Prize-winning author.

"This is the only equal to Hawaii as a place of peaceful diversity and hybridity in the world," I thought to myself as our group toured around the town. "They should be as proud of their city as I am of Hawaii." I felt a kinship with the inhabitants.

One evening while the rest of our delegation was doing goofy team building-type exercises, I was taken to the side and given a lot of heat about my lack of investment in the Yugoslavian culture and other assorted failings by three program alumni in their early twenties, swarthy Yugoslavian male twins and an intense short Australian chick who was just in Yugoslavia on holiday in conjunction with our Sarajevo trip. I had met the twins in passing a few times before in Belgrade. They were friends with Bonnie and had always seemed generically friendly before. Fucking backbiters.

"You have got to change. Fullstop," the Australian woman decreed. She had just joined the police force of her hometown back in Oz and was by far the most bellicose and belligerent. The twins were in the amen choir. Various assorted sanctions and penalties were threatened. I barely understood the nature of the charges against me, which had just come up very recently, and these strangers were threatening me with all manner of sanctions and penalties. I wondered why my local director wasn't involved in this harangue. At least she had more background on the situation.

"Fullstop?! You don't "fullstop" me! Nobody "fullstops" me! Especially a woman I've never met before and twins I barely know," I thought. "What the hell do they know about my situation?! I barely know them from Adam. You threaten me, I'm gone. Fuck you!"

As soon as they were done berating me, I went out for a long walk in the slow heavy snow, absolutely fuming, and began plotting how to leave. After returning to our hotel for a hat and gloves, Bonnie joined me for my second leg. We walked with our arms over each other's shoulders down a random snowy road in Sarajevo.

"I'm attracted to you, Boyce."

""And me to you, Bonnie."

"What do we do now then?"

"I don't know."

If I didn't get the chance to go to an American School in Switzerland a few weeks later, I would have without question begun hitchhiking across the world with a couple hundred dollars, probably towards Africa first via the Middle East.

The Leysin American School in the Alps near Lake Geneva was a bizarre insular party school for misfits and rejects whose parents lived and/or worked (usually in oil production or military technology) the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, the Gulf Emirates, Europe and the Maghrib (north Africa) and Libya. The school building had the cardinal advantage of being located only two hundred yards from a ski lift that provided access to an entire mountain's worth of fabulous ski runs. All of the student body had either been thrown out of or couldn't get into more socially exclusive prep schools (like LeRosey Academy) or more academically challenging prep schools (like TASIS, just across the valley, whose ass we kicked in soccer during a season of playing most of the Anglophone high schools in the Francophone Swiss Alps, at the end of which I most unexpectedly won "most valuable player").

We knew we were a second rung school. It showed in low morale, constant partying, minimal attention to our studies and an obsession with skiing at every opportunity. Although the drinking age at the three village taverns was officially 16 years old, it was never enforced. In fact, we could even charge our bar tab (few rounds of beer and Pastis and a basket or two of pommes frites) to our parent's account at school. Many of the beginners still making the gradual transition to world of depravity eased the bitter flavor of Swiss draft lager with a shot of grenadine syrup in their mug to make a pink cocktail that tasted like bubble gum.

There was a smattering of Arab royalty and European playboys, dark eyebrows on handsome men and charming waifs, accomplished skiers who spoke three or four languages.

The clique of popular Americans was, strangely, far behind the times. They had apparently last track of American cultural trends the day they moved to isolated repressive residential compounds in Saudi Arabia years before. The girls still had wings in their hair and the guys were still into Def Leppard and Motley Crue and they walked around with their hands in the rear pockets of each other's acid wash jeans. They were vehemently against me as a stranger in their isolated little world high in the Alps that never changed.

I found it strange to be so hated for doing so little by a bunch of awkward hicks. At least the cool clique that rejected me in Hawaii were handsome, well-dressed and cosmopolitan! The new wave/punk rock and twisted preppy nerd benches I sat at back in Hawaii were much cooler than these folks. We were only four or five months behind California, the mother of all cultural trends.

For over a month, no one talked to me at all. Fortunately, there was skiing to distract me and regenerate my soul. I skied six or seven times a week for hours at a time, all day on the weekends.

I loved to go off piste by myself into the forgotten back country forests, far from the maddening crowds, especially when clouds settled on the mountain tops and left me dashing quietly through the dark trees stems alone, lost in my own heady and mysterious world, enchanted by the silence, solitude and thick fog. These expeditions helped me discover private new trails back to school from various points all over the giant mountain. Sometimes I ended well below the school and had to climb laboriously back up the slope.

Some expeditions brought home the danger of skiing alone. Once, I was skiing by myself on a sunny slope that was not actually a part of the ski resort. It was late in the season and I was very far from anyone. Suddenly, my passage broke loose a huge plate of packed, melted and remelted snow, five or six inches deep and 300 meters across. If my skis got caught beneath the sliding snowpack avalanche, I would have been dragged

helplessly down to the bottom along with it. I had no idea how far down the mountain the avalanche might go, the speeds it might reach, or what it might crash into. I kept my skis as buoyant as possible and skied quickly across the width of the snow slide avalanche, actually skiing on top of the sliding mass as it slowly gathered speed on its way downhill. I made it past the fissure zone into safety and stopped to watch.

After a few hundred meters of sliding downhill, the avalanche had acquired quite a bit of momentum and destroyed all of the saplings for dozens of meters down a valley until it ran out of steam among the big trees.

One day in science class, one of the guys in the cool American clique was amusing himself by squirting me with water from the tap with his hand while the teacher was away temporarily out of the classroom. It was the straw that broke the camel's back, the last obnoxious thing I could finally no longer tolerate.

"Isn't this what you're trying to do, my good man?" I said, putting my head under the tap nearest me and turning it on full blast. I drenched myself and everyone within ten feet of me, shocking the class. I guess the depths of my frustration finally became obvious to them, or else they respected, feared and/or were amused by such bizarre behavior. At least they stopped flipping me off in the hallways! A few started even taking a shine to me and inviting me to sangria parties.

Shortly after, one of their star boys got his ass kicked when he tried to pick a fight with the only black kid at school, an extremely gentle Nigerian, who caught the first two punches in his hands softly and flattened him with one punch back.

Towards the end of the semester I had finally found some real friends, the few sensitive, intelligent and creative ones there. Some of us would occasionally rendezvous for shopping and zany madcap adventures in nearby Montreaux, Lausanne and Geneva on the banks of Lake Geneva and spend the night in the flats and hotel rooms of parents and friends of friends.

The Teeth of Noon

Spring Semester 1986, Lake Geneva

I got off the train when it stopped in Montreaux and skipped down the stairs into the street below and the washed out dimness of dusk. Suisse Rail stopped at the top of the slanted hill town. Over the staccato rhythms of low rise flatroofs I saw Lake Geneva broad, calm and blue. On the mountains across the lake, spring had lifted the white skirt of winter off of its green thickness. The mountain walls fell so sheerly into the water that the lake seemed to be hanging like a precarious cobalt cloud, five hundred yards higher than it should have been. A lone trout could slip from the bottom, fall wriggling to the damp ground below and cause the entire ponderous mass to collapse in a chaos of froth and destruction. As long as I stuck to the high ground I guess it wouldn't matter.

I found the bar Monica mentioned two days ago. Over the phone she said it was near the auditorium where the pop festival would be held at. They had cheap beer and real wood. Outside the plain Provencal style facade of the cafe, a clot of fat balding men stood in a loose circle talking amongst themselves in English. They wore silver sunglasses too large for their face and black satin jackets over black T-shirts too tight for their round stomachs. Their talk was brassy and nervous, with frequent lapses into vengeful quiet. They seemed to be at the vanguard of some sort of mission, a mandate that gave them a sense of entitlement they were not yet comfortable with. I looked at one of the sunglassed shovelheads with a scrupulously expressionless face and then broke a full facial smirk, my mouth an inverted boomerang.

"The French are such fucking snots," I heard one of them say as I looked back, opening the door to the bar. I caught the M.T.V. logo on the back of their black satin jackets. Inside there were more of them, some female, trying to adjust to the tyranny of being in a different country without convenient sources of slurpies and gourmet salads.

They oriented themselves to their situation by making light of their surroundings with stereotypical popular culture "parlee voo Frances?," mocking it with loud affected

"excusez mois" or playing it up with bumbling Maurice Chevalier lady killer smiles. Monica sat across the cafe, her back towards me. I skipped across the floor of the bar dodging tables, tapped her softly on the shoulder, smiled, joined her at her table and ate a pomme frites from her napkin covered basket. I looked up to catch the eye of the short dark waiter leaning against the bar, raised my eyebrows, pointed to my table, made a drinking motion and put up one finger.

"Bonjour. Ca va?" I said.

"Ca va bien, merci. Et tous?"

"Bien, bien. What's all of this M.T.V. jazz? Do you know anything about that?"

"Neihardt says they've been here for two nights now," she said with a slight French accent. She was a great skier, especially with jumps tricks.

"Are they filming the pop festival for television?"

"Taping, mon cheri. Filming is a chemical process." She held back a smile and leaned back as the waiter came with a liter bottle of beer and a tall thin glass, which I filled holding it slanted so it wouldn't foam too much.

"So culture has penetrated even this sleepy backwater?"

"For tonight and tomorrow. Do you know who will be playing?"

"All of the big stars. Enough for M.T.V. to be here. Eurthymics, Roger Daltry, alot of people"

"It is the best of modern music then, no?"

"Yes. Elvis Costello lip synching. Fabulous. How the mighty have fallen. If M.T.V. is here, everything that was ever genuine has now been lost. It is the kiss of death."

"Shall we go to another bar and skip the whole affair?"

"No. The show starts in a second. We've already paid. Let's finish up and go in."

It took ten minutes to get inside through the crowd of thousands. We were whisked through turnstiles fast and fluid without interrupting our heated debate on the

relative merits of the Baroque and Rococo periods. Except for Blake, DeGoya, Rembrandt and Michelangelo, I couldn't be bothered with western art until the late nineteenth century. Small booths on the way sold Keith Haring T-shirts and posters. I touched Monica's shoulder with my hand to stop her and stood immobilized a discreet distance from the booth, vacillating between buying and not buying a poster of a breakdancing slinky with a head, arms and legs in three vivid neon colors.

Was I seeking fawning hands of adulation for my good taste just because of where I had been, a strange, lucky and private intelligence? I broke down and bought it.

The stage in the auditorium was showy chrome and Easter colored lights. Each group only played one or two songs to make it easy for the boys in the editing room to deliver a tight show to the viewers at home. By the third mini-set neither of us had any idea where the other one was and neither cared. I could have spent the night with her on the shore of Lac Lemman in a grand sprawling house all to ourselves in the same neighborhood as the house Lord Byron, the Shelleys, and company went insane in.

I would have smelled Europe itself for years after every time I smelled her perfume if I had gone with her but we let ourselves drift apart in the well dressed crowd. I was cranky with the general regret of lost love and pushed my way harshly to the front to see Eurythmics finish the night in black leather and white linen. Their set, the best one, was the only one not lip synched.

The crowd swayed with languorous and unstoppable force. After a third time I bumped into the same person, he cast me a formally disgusted look. It broke into an unstartled smile when he apprehended I went to his school in the Alps. I found him again after the show and slept on the plush carpet of his hotel room.

The sun was hot through the glass of the window and I awoke easily and completely. Beige carpet, white walls, bright room. Four long bumps in a double bed and two other bumps on the floor. Green gallon jugs of sangria, brown half-liter bottles of beer, mounds of gray cigarette butts and gray ash in ashtrays. I took a shower and

brushed my teeth with a watered toothbrush found there and felt largely composed. I slid open the only window and looked out through the pale gray old buildings onto a sliver of Lake Geneva shimmering deep blue. I got what I could out of the semi-attractive view and turned back around to look at the chaos of the hotel room.

A small mound of new Montreaux Pop Festival T-shirts sat in a rumpled heap on the single table, with the same graphic as my poster. A girl sat up in bed, squirting tiredly with her back against the wall. She smiled loosely without opening her lips. I gave her an equally reserved smile back. I pointed to the window, to ask silently if she would like it closed. She shook her head, smiling gently. I headed out for the 11:30 a.m. train back to school.

I wanted the first time I saw Dent D'Midi with my new knowledge about the difficulty of meaningful human contact to occur within the context of my regular ritual. Swing open my dorm room door onto the patio, lean meditatively on the railing and look out across the valley. I got on the train and sat on the left side facing away from the mountain and stared fixedly out the window the opposite direction the whole way.

Peugeots and Fiats drove on the highway, old farmhouses and new apartment blocks flew by, every hedge was well trimmed, every sidewalk well scrubbed, every wall in good repair. It seemed as though nothing in Switzerland submitted to gravity, with the wear and tear of time so consistently effaced by immaculate maintenance. I got off in Sion and waited for the cog train, keeping the newsstand between me and the mountain. It was almost as though I was being chased. I couldn't look behind me. I couldn't look at the mountain. Not now that I knew its name.

The cog train stopped in front of the little kiosk and I got on with some elderly ladies and a group of third graders. I gave the conductor my thick pasteboard ticket and went up to stand behind the railing outside at the front of the first car. We left the level streets of the valley town and rose up the mountain through brown vineyards with gnarled

stumps whose winter pruning remained unsprouted. Dozens of spring rivulets and waterfalls rushed brown off the mountain.

I got off at the highest stop of the three in the village served by the cog train and walked back to school with my eyes on the street. The edge of the road was slushy. Little streams cut through the icy slush on the edge of the road like continental river systems seen from a satellite. B.M.W.s with ski racks and German plates rolled by on the noisy sharp black pebbles. Two friends from school making the hallowed Sunday afternoon trek to the grocery store for chocolate and Muesli said "hi" from the other side of the road. I looked up, said "hi" and looked back down.

In my dorm room, I finally paused a moment. I was burdening the mountain with too much expectations. What new mysteries did I think I could pry from the mountain this time, now that I knew its name and could properly invoke the hidden world behind it? "Letdowns are everywhere," I thought as I opened the patio doors suddenly and stepped outside. Tattered patches of snow lingered on it forest shadows. The first spring blooms accented the steep pasture of intense green with yellow and white. Giant herds of slow cows, each one equipped with a bell, walked up the mountain roads in a delightful cacophony.

The pasture fell away sharply to a valley of such impossible vastness that it seemed someone was kidding. I could step off the patio and walk ten miles on springy air across to the other side, very close to France. I pushed myself off the railings with my elbows and took a step back, fearing I might actually try. Villages below me were clusters of brown dots interspersed on the green pastures in a ribbon beneath the mantle of white snow. Switchback roads scarred z's up ridges into valleys leading to France and Italy.

I leaned back onto the railing. One mountain asserted itself out of the vast ridge in size and height, like fourth gear moving out of third. The Teeth of Noon made sense as a name. It seemed clear to me. The passing of time clamps hard and hurts. The

mountain was so much larger than the rest. There seemed a heartbreak in sheer volume. An aching tenderness to the finality and completeness of its size.

G.E.D. Bridge

Summer 1986, Honolulu Hawaii

After a rocky start I had come to like skiing and Europe. There had been side trips to Lucerne to get blasted at their rowdy costumed Mardi Gras in the Catholic German part of Switzerland (and call my headmaster at night for train fare back after missing the school bus loaded off my ass), to Portugal's Algarve Coast in the far south for Spring Break hash, surfing and rattling plastic cases of Sangres beer, and to Salzburg for the Sound of Music, Mozart and Hitler's Aigelsgarten (beautiful mountains; I stole a black miner's fez from the tour of the underground salt mine; I taught several people how to play the pass out game by breathing very deeply for a minute bent over and having someone hold back the sides of your neck until you pass it, everyone loved; one of our delegation aroused the foulest stench I have ever smelled as he peeled off his cloths to sleep in large dorm room all of the guys shared one night, a combination of nearly every conceivable bad smell, why was he sheepish, how could he not notice; Stroh's rum, powerful and sweet, was the local specialty and mixed well with everything; a large part of the central city dated back to the 14th century; the buildings from the 16th century and earlier all had the dates they were built painted on the corner; a shopping promenade went right through the historical district; every enterprise had antique or antique-style brass signs, even McDonalds.)

Although I wouldn't have minded graduating from Leysin American School, the paternal financing for my Continental aspirations was no more. I returned home to Hawaii to resume my studies at the Punahou Preparatory Academy, the private school I'd gone to from 6th to 10th grade and valuable repository of all of my odd intelligent friends, many from cross country and track.

Upon my return, the dean of my grade said, "Please reapply." She had assured me before I left that this would not be necessary, that I would be able to simply return without any formalities. I personally knew of several people who had also spent their junior years elsewhere and returned to school without difficulty. My dean told me that she "was very sorry but there was no room" (in a high school of nearly two thousand!), reneging on their promise to let me graduate from there. The best efforts behind closed doors by my Harley-Davidson riding poetry teacher were to no avail.

That summer my best friend Marc (who had also studied with him) and I, when we weren't too busy philosophizing over pudding pops and Bacardi mixer pina coladas on my Dad's beautiful pool deck, would occasionally stop by our favorite teacher's faculty house on campus to drink wine, eat fried Portuguese sausage and talk about writing and Punahou. Neither of us could understand how such a talented renegade was tolerated by the staid and conventional faculty and administration. His stark and powerful poetry seemed relentlessly at odds with the genteel, non-questioning and conformist atmosphere aspired to by the honchos of the oldest prep school west of the Mississippi River, which got its start in the mid-19th century as the school for the children of the missionaries and the occasional Hawaiian royal family member. These missionary families "came to do good and did very well" in business and sugar, eventually becoming the primary economic force of the islands. Many of the school buildings were named after the blue eyed devils who overthrew the native monarchy in 1893.

At one such confab of wine and sizzling sausage, my poetry teacher described the Star Chamber Meeting of teachers and administrators that decided my fate.

"They asked me 'How do you do it, Hindley? How do you keep him in line? You seem to be the only one that doesn't have any discipline problems with him?' I didn't know what to say so I just told them what I thought they wanted to hear. I waited a few seconds, leaned in slightly towards the table and said 'Because I got him scared.' They all

nodded like they knew what I talking about! Scared! You, scared?! Can you imagine? It was really strange." He laughed with a scornful disgust that I appreciated greatly.

"I was good because I was interested in what you were teaching. I've always been like that. If I liked the subject and the teacher I did fine. I always did well in English, Social Studies, Asian Studies, Chinese. I'm surprised none of those teachers went to bat for me. I thought I had friendly relations with them."

I never understood precisely why they kicked me discreetly out the back door, forcing me into public school for my senior year. Presumably, it was for some variation on being a discipline and attitude problem, the catch-all "disruptive influence." The usual, I guess. They'd been trying to get rid of me since I started attending years ago. Although their facilities and academics were as good as the best in the nation, it was essentially a factory to produce standardized units of the ruling class of Hawaii. Any teenagers who were too arrogant, creative, curious, unconventional, original or obnoxious to submit to this regimen were simply vomited out of the system.

Although I was stunned and disgruntled about getting kicked out of Punahou (and the sneaky underhanded way they did it), I was at least as angry with myself for not keeping the pledge I made at Kalemegdan Park to walk the earth. Enraged and trapped, I labored all summer in indentured servitude to my father for the expense of my year in Europe, building lava rock walls at my his newly purchased Mansion on the Hill on Waialae Nui ridge above posh Kahala, the most prestigious neighborhood in Honolulu. When I wasn't working I spent most of my time wandering the concrete storm culverts of nearby valleys daydreaming about earning my G.E.D. and taking immediate flight as soon as I finished building the walls.

"What is home after all," I wondered, "but stacks of glossy magazines, refrigerators of imported beer and the comfort of an antique bed? What keeps me here?"


During the evenings, I listened to jazz, drank tea in unlit rooms and tried to wish back into existence my old life of drinking two franc Pastis (an anise-flavored liquor) and

skiing through mist and trees. I got drunk occasionally and wrote long collapsing epistles to overseas friends and would-be love interests scattered across North America

Kalani High School Introduction

Fall Semester 1986, Honolulu Hawaii

A few off-hand words from my A.P. English teacher (who was also my cross country coach) on how much more colleges respected a high school diploma than a G.E.D. tipped the balance. Although I was still furious at not being able to return to Punahou or Europe, and daunted by the prospect of starting from scratch again for the third time in a year, the fight had been beaten out of me. By the end of September, I finally admitted to myself that I wouldn't take flight until graduation. My abiding dreams of escape faded away. I took the path of least resistance and stayed.

Before long I became enmeshed in my new world at Kalani High School. Although it was supposedly one of the top three public high schools in the state, the first couple of months were abysmally boring. My only consolations were my single interesting class (A.P. English), being the star runner on the boy's cross country team and daydreaming about  who ran in the middle of the pack on the girl's team.

I had a special blank expression reserved for cute girls like her and her many beautiful girlfriends. In my dogged pursuit of individuality, I refused to give them what I thought they received from every other guy - beaming smiles of gratitude for being in the presence of such a delectable beauty. Instead, I kept my expression scrupulously plain - which on my Anglo-Saxon pulled-down-at-the-end-of-my-lips-face, Cro Magnum bump under my eyebrows, looked like I had just detected a bad smell. How the average girl was supposed to read this as the faintest indication of the jaded psychological complexity I was trying to project, I'll never remember. I dreamt of finding that one special girl who would see it as the sign of a Unique and Compelling Individualist she would fall head over heels in love with. Fortunately, since I was a new kid and the only one at school in

penny loafers, double pleated trousers and oxford shirts, Jennifer was able to read it as "mysterious."

Jennifer was a girl of equal sartorial splendor that I was attracted to immediately. On a campus where everyone ran around in rubber slippers, surf shorts and untucked T-shirts, it was perhaps inevitable that we would be drawn to one another as nattily attired Romantic Outlaws. She got dropped off at school by her mother in a B.M.W., when most students walked bused, or were delivered by more modestly priced vehicles. She surely did stand out, always dressed as she was to the nines, turned out, put together. She was one of a very small group in a large school that did so and in my humble opinion the very best. Never ran cross country in anything less formal than pleated khaki shorts and polo shirts, which seemed to be going a bit too far in the sacrifice of practicality to style.

She had olive-brown skin that tanned easily, wavy shoulder length dark brown hair, dark eyebrows, brown eyes, high cheekbones, a small full round mouth, adorable narrow shoulders, perfect little handful breasts, narrow hips and thin shapely legs. Because she looked like so many of the other girls that I had grown up with, I assumed that she too was born and raised in Hawaii. She looked primarily Japanese, confirmed by her surname, mixed with some other dark race, probably Portuguese or Puerto Rican. She didn't look Filipino. I assumed that she was "hapa" (Hawaiian for "half"), or biracial.

The Japanese, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Filipino and Chinese were all brought over in large numbers many generations ago to labor on the sugar plantations. Inter-marriage became common practice. A common racial blend now in a beautiful dark local might be Hawaiian, either Chinese or Japanese, Filipino, and one or two Caucasian nationalities. These hapa and local kids are the racial aristocracy of teenage Honolulu.

If Jennifer had been like the countless people in Hawaii who have the blood of more than just two races in them, she would have been called "local," because she was dark and looked like she was born there (even though I learned later that she wasn't). Caucasians that were born and raised in Hawaii, like me, weren't called local but

"kamaaina," meaning long term resident.) Locals and to a greater extent hapas are the racial aristocracy of teenage Hawaii because they are invariably among the most physically attractive ones at any school, party or beach.

I sensed that Jennifer's fine fashion sense was a defense of some type, shielding and sheltering some injured and vulnerable part of her tender young perceptive soul. The issues of Elle, Mademoiselle, Glamour and Vogue (European editions when available) constantly protruding from her woven Kenya bag were lucky charms, atavistic totems to help keep the Horror at bay.

The constantly fresh and new prospect of watching Jennifer in glimpses during the day was the only thing that made me want to go to school in the morning. By second or third period, I was already daydreaming about the impending lunch with her. Our cliques of friends had many common members, so she would often sit with my friends and I when not at the "cool surfer table."

When she did sit with us, I could place myself across from her or a few seats away from her without giving the appearance of trying to make some move. All I actually needed was to be in her presence, to look at her and daydream about her. In fact, it was no struggle at all to convince myself that this private pleasure was nearly perfect, vastly superior to trying to go out with her, to be cruelly rebuffed or discover that she was not quite the girl I imagined her to be, to retain her as an eternal "possible" instead of an accomplished unchangeable "could never be."

Her shyness drew me towards her and quickly became an obsession. That such a beautiful elegant girl could be so shy and insecure was an unfathomable, heart rending mystery that I had to explore to the very bottom of its dark and unplumbable depths. It appealed to me as tales of cities paved with gold and heavy with the aroma of sandalwood used to charm earlier generations.

It was a long, strangled and delicious semester of lunch time sexual politics and of paths crossed on campus and at Kahala Mall as spontaneous as rocket launches.

Kalani High School Pool

Fall Semester 1986, Honolulu Hawaii

One Saturday afternoon after a cross country meet I finally saw her in a bathing suit - sort of. It was near the end of the season. Both the boy's and the girl's teams won O.I.A. Champs - the championship for all of the public schools on our whole island of O'ahu. We had all run well. Most everybody had run a personal record. Those chosen for the state championship team had all run in ways that made it clear how we must run to finish well at States. The boys team had a real shot at ending Punahou's four year winning streak, a dominance that I had contributed to for two years earlier as a varsity cross country and track runner during my freshman and sophomore years.

The hour long yellow bus ride back to town from the North Shore was giddy. Back at school we all hopped the chain link fence and celebrated with a dip in the pool. As Hawaiian youth who all grew up barefoot, our gripping toes made it a snap to pop right over. Everybody was in high spirits, shouting, splashing, running, laughing, basically doing everything the red signs told us not to (which did not record an attitude towards the occasional and duly appreciated moonings). In short order, Jen and her amigas appeared, four high octane local beauties.

I bobbed quietly with my eyes barely above the water, voyeuristically watching Jennifer climb the fence with a shy self-consciousness that engrossed me. In spite of her fabulous body, she was wearing a very modest swimmer's bathing suit. Low on the hips, high above the breasts, built to make a swimmer's body slick against the water, not to show off at beach or pool side. I only saw a little bit of gently muscled back as she made her way down the chain link. She hopped down onto the cement and quickly wrapped a towel around her legs. Why? How could she so little credit her own beauty?

Mesmerized by her sheepishness and her slouching shoulders, I watched her walk self consciously (as though all eyes were on her) across the concrete pool deck to join her

girlfriends, smoothing out their towels beside the water. To avoid charges of spying, I dove underwater with the stealth of a dolphin to watch her wobbly silhouette from the bottom of the pool. Did she climb last of the group intentionally so she would already have somewhere to go when she landed?

I surfaced and forced my eyes to look in other directions. At swimmers dunking each other with techniques learned in P.E. water polo, at the happily squealing victims being swung into the pool by their hands and feet, at the people shooting water polo balls into floating baskets by rebounding them off of a wall.

My desire to look at Jennifer was overpowering but I knew I would have to wait another moment or two. My face grew warm. I submerged again, closed my eyes and drifted in the thick medium listening to the muffled shouts and splashes. I exhaled and let myself sink to the bottom and lay there with my eyes closed for a moment.

I surfaced. A light rain had begun to blow down from the Ko'olau mountains further on up the narrow valley, big warm golden drops of voluptuous liquid sunshine falling from a cloudless sky.

Patisserie

Fall Semester 1986, Honolulu Hawaii

Usually the school was our base of running operations. Monday through Friday we ran as far as the orbit of aerobic conditioning and inclination would take us along the smooth asphalt shoulder of ever-busy Kalaniana'ole Highway, competing for oxygen with the exhaust of shitty Toyotas and customized mini trucks beating reggae or rap; or else run mile repeats on the invisible path that wound and rewound through the blocky bureaucratic architecture of campus in sorry pretense of a real three mile cross country course - convincing enough though to occasionally lure actual meets - but on the Sunday after O.I.A. Champs we extricated ourselves from prosaic routine and met at Honolulu

running Mecca and recreational resource Kapiolani Park in the cool humidity of the early morning and in our small way courted the mystery and tenderness of a Sunday morning.

It was discovered in mid pre run stretch that it was my birthday. Several teammates chimed in, setting post-run dates for birthday donuts. After our run and warm down stretch, the birthday expedition clambered into our coach's new orange vanagon, careful of his lovely three year old hapa daughter and his even more lovely three week old Italian road racing bicycle.

The vanagon disgorged us some moments later on the sidewalk at Kahala Mall in front of the Patisserie. Karen DeSilva, a gorgeous thin dark little Tamil girl straight from Sri Lanka (who had larger breasts than you might associate with such a petite creature) and leading financial backer of the party went for a crisp ten dollar bill from a nearby money machine and met us inside the cafe.

It was one of those dark overcast wet street days so beloved of shy and melancholy adolescents. Coffee, Bavarian Double Chocolate cake and people being nice to me invested the dim rainy morning with a heady sweetness. I was in fine fettle to probe the Europhilia of Jennifer and see what it hid. In yellow naughahyde booths across white formica tables, we traded our war stories from the European front.

She was wearing a thin yellow Costa del Sol T-shirt through which I could see the outline of her bra. I asked her if she had ever been to the Costa del Sol (I must have been the only person at Kalani who knew where that was without being told). She had just knocked around Spain and Italy that summer with her folks.

"I LOVED Italy," she enthused. "Everyone was so fashionable in Milan."

I could see that she was the latest in a long line of converts to the faith of "only Europe has mastered the art of living."

"But they only have two or three outfits," I countered jokingly. I gave her the thumbnail sketch of the year I had just spent there. Semester in beautiful downtown

Belgrade on an student exchange program, and a semester in an American School in the French-speaking part of the Swiss Alps after I fled my Yugoslavian host family.

"An American School ? I was at an American School in Tokyo for two years."

"Tokyo? When did you come to Kalani?"

"My junior year."

"You mean you've only been at Kalani for a year? Did you grow up here and just go to Tokyo for a few years?"

"No. I grew up all over. I just moved here."

"Go on! You look so local!" I exclaimed. I asked her one of the two prerequisite questions exchanged by all youth getting to know one another in Hawaii. "What nationalities are you?" The other sacred question, "what high school do you go to?," was unnecessary for obvious reasons.

"Japanese - Spanish," she said. Later when I knew her better I learned it was actually Okinawan-Mexican. She thought that combination was *declassé* and preferred to start out as Japanese-Spanish.

"What was the last town you spent a long time in before Tokyo?" I asked.

"El Paso, in Texas."

"Get out of here! El Paso?!" I said, growing excited. "I used to go there every other year to visit relatives for Christmas until my Grandmother died! When were you there?"

"From 5th grade through 8th grade," she answered, growing enthusiastic herself.

"O.K.. So - four Christmases ago - you were there?"

She looked up, thinking. "Yes."

"So we were there at the same time! Wow! How weird." We paused for a moment to let the unexpectedness sink in of having Europe, American Schools and El Paso in common in the middle of the Pacific.

"Boring place though, El Paso?" I offered.

She agreed, nodding and laughing quietly without looking at me.

After joining the general conversation for a little while, somehow Europe came up again. Eager to exploit the moment to my advantage, I began playing a little game that I knew only Jennifer and I would be able to sustain, naming European cities in their native languages back and forth. We traded turns as we went through the litany with a focus on her beloved Italia.

"Milano...Roma...Firenze...Napoli...Venizi..."

By playing, I was trying to say to her "Look, dear one, it is possible to know what Europe has to offer and still turn your back on it. Every 17 year old American who thinks of international travel instinctively thinks of Europe. Let's not be like every 17 year old American. It's been done before. Let's travel new roads. Asia and the Pacific is so much more relevant to Hawaii than Europe! Especially for you, you're Asian! Poor thing, so helplessly hamstrung by the false idol of Europe."

I wanted to tell her that Europe was just another way of shoring up our desperate fears of rejection and inferiority by reciting well-coddled anecdotes, dropping illustrious totemistic names and, at least on some level, inciting envy. The very act of sharing your experiences in words implies a difference between you and other people that doesn't need to exist. I could tell that the game was not conveying this message. Before we exhausted our mental lists of European cities, the exchange began to depress me.

I stared at my coffee and stirred it with a spoon. She stared at her cake and poked it with a fork. I remembered a conversation I had with a guy in Serbo-Croatian at the Frankfort Airport about the hot new Yugoslavia rock band, "Zabrenjeno Pushenje," or "No Smoking."

I wanted to ask her if she noticed how the rain yesterday seemed to be like golden drops of liquid sunshine, eager to impress her with my sensitivity to the beauty of nature. I couldn't bring myself to ask, and rationalized my oppressive shyness lamely by

concluding that I would rather think she might have noticed than ask and find that out she actually hadn't.

"The club is mine to join," I wanted to tell her. "But I don't. Europe has been done before. Europe is a prepackaged dream. Only the dreams we weave ourselves will ever save us. We have to be willing to take that leap of faith, far from what we know, into mysterious realms of enchantment, curiosity and danger by flying off to distant shores or being alive to the neglected aspects of our own culture that can put us in touch with the mystery, the last remaining pockets of regional folk authenticity that haven't been destroyed yet by mass media, corporate franchising and interstate highways."

Her mysterious lack of self confidence made her seem unable to understand this perspective.

Why am I always attracted to women with a core of insecurity and tinges of the Fear before the Universe? Am I afraid of strong women or do I recognize kindred spirits in the vulnerable ones? Do I want to consume them like Pygmalion and internalize them as my own creations? I saw Jennifer as a Bodhisattva, standing on the threshold of Nirvana helping the teeming masses over the hump of self-doubt into Nirvana, selflessly giving of herself before enjoying her rightful privilege of salvation. I saw her as a few steps away from the Bodhisattva robe, tender and sympathetic, if she could only be shook free of the tyranny of fashion magazines and pop cultural standards of beauty which crushed her self image. If she could only be dislodged from her hypnosis by Europe as some sort of vague cure-all for the tedium and crassness of the Here and Now in Mainstream America. I ruminated for the attentat that could wake her up to who she was. How could I make her see?

Jingle Bell Run

Holidays 1986, Honolulu Hawaii

After the regular cross country season, a group of us that had grown close still ran as a team in a number of local road races. Shortly before Christmas we ran the Jingle Bell Run together. Christmas in Hawaii must seem like a strange affair by the standards of Mainland America. None of the usual icons are present. Balmy weather and tropical seas turn all of the standard blue eyed conceptions of the holiday on their ear. Santa Claus is brown-skinned, arrives on a canoe or surfboard, has a beer belly and is always flashing the shaka sign (more commonly known as the "hang loose" sign on the Mainland) with one hand and carrying a can of Primo beer or a bag of toys with the other.

The popular new tradition of the Jingle Bell Run was a formidably loony event involving thousands of people doing their best imitation of an ambulatory combo Mardi Gras, Halloween and Christmas. While zany costume may have been, competition was certainly not a motivating factor. Most of us were just there to run, be goofy, people watch and float the kegs waiting for us after the Friday night race.

The race started around dusk and involved running in groups of seven and caroling at three judging stations along the way. I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket or with handles, so I only signed on to jog with them for moral support. I ran to the starting line from my Mom's house three miles away and missed the start. Since it was just a quick little four mile loop, I would miss them altogether if I didn't hustle and every corner I could. I passed dozens of people in costume. A centipede team wearing hula skirts and strap-on antlers. A Chinese Santa with a long natural goatee carrying a surfing fins and a Mach 3 boogie board. A giant Christmas stocking with running legs poking out of the bottom and oversized yellow Li Hing Mui crack seed labels sticking out of the top.

I finally caught up with my group at the last judging station near the finish line. Waiting in line to sing, they gave me heat lightheartedly for missing the start.

They launched into a doo wop version of "Dashing through the Snow" that seemed shockingly professional, set to a simple yet well executed Temptations-style choreography. I was not expecting that; I didn't know my friends had such hidden

talents! Jennifer looked positively adorable snapping her fingers and bouncing her legs to the beat. Such thighs...

At the finish line there was a stage and some music, slack key and Hawaiian contemporary. Three vans with big red and white Budweiser logos painted on them were parked nearby. Taps poked into their sides of dispensed free beer. We all tossed back as many as we could, not knowing when we would get carded or when the forbearance of the tap master would run out.

We all piled into four cars to rendezvous at the Kaimuki Zippys near Kalani to eat and figure out what to do next. A local fast food chain with a menu chock full of favorite local specialties, Zippys is usually an acceptable compromise when a small- to medium-sized group is having difficulty deciding where to go next, whether to eat or just hang out.

Many comrades went home from there after finishing their Zip Pacs, Chicken Katsu and Teri Beef Plates. The inner circle remained and required further amusements. I tried unsuccessfully to buy beer at two places nearby before finally striking gold on the third try. I emerged with a twelve pack cardboard suitcase of Olympia beer and a four pack of wine coolers. The two remaining carloads of people rendezvoused to drink in the Ala Wai Park parking lot. Drinking in the parking lots of city parks is a hallowed tradition for underage Hawaiian youth, if you can avoid the cops and mokes (large locals who like to pick fights). Ala Wai Park was central. The vast bright concrete jungle of Waikiki was just across the drainage canal.

Before long Jennifer and I were sitting by ourselves on the curb with the car door open so we could hear the radio. The night was warm and humid. A light breeze blew now and then across the playing fields of the park. After talking for awhile of indifferent things we began to make stunning admissions. We both had crushes on each other for some time and had been too bashful to admit it! Each of us felt totally unworthy of the other's tender regard and said so on that curb of delightful discovery.

I was crestfallen to learn she was already seeing someone. He had simply pulled her to the side and asked her to go steady only a month before. Shocked by his directness and flattered by the magnitude of his request, she agreed. I was into her way before that!

"If I had asked you that before him, would you have said yes?"

"Oh yes!" I was smitten.

After the beer was gone, it was time to go home. We made sure to share a back seat and held hands together, not caring whether the other people in the car noticed or not. That was all the physical contact we needed. Sparks were flying everywhere.

She assured me that she was far more attracted to me than she was to him. We promised to call each other the next day. Although neither of us said anything about it, I was sure that she would dump him in short order.

Giddy Christmas

Holidays 1986, Honolulu Hawaii

All of the many aunts, uncles and cousins on my Dad's side of the family were in Hawaii that Christmas to take full advantage of the huge house with a pool we had just moved into. The morning after the romantic revelations of the parking lot curb, I woke up to a house already at full roar. Four small cousins and my paternal half-brother played and screamed in the pool. A T.V. was blaring. Music was bumping on the outdoor speakers. Aunts and uncles were up, talking casually in nightgowns and boxer shorts, drinking coffee, rubbing their eyes, patting their matted hair, and picking tidbits from platters of cookies, candy, fudge and assorted goodies strategically placed throughout the house.

I was giddy at the prospect of love, absolutely walking on air.

What time was it? Too early to call Jennifer? Quarter to ten. No. Not too early to call. Couldn't call from this madhouse though. Need some privacy. Caution! Sappy conversation ahead! Which I am looking forward to immensely! I hopped on my ten

speed and rolled down the ridge to a pay phone a block away from Kalaniana'ole Highway.

"Did you have a strange dream last night about talking to each other in a parking lot?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Did you mean what you said?"

"Yes."

You could have knocked me over with a feather. We had to meet somewhere that evening. Nowhere public, we both agreed, so that Andy and his friends wouldn't see us. They were going to be caroling around the neighborhood that night. I spent the rest of the day with stars in my eyes, enraptured, thinking delightedly of the day when our love would be above ground.

I rolled down my ridge again that night, this time on a skateboard, carefully snaking back and forth across the blacktop so I wouldn't gain enough speed to fall and break the bottle of Spanish Frexinet Champagne I carried or ruffle the petals of my single red rose. I held the stem forward and cupped the bud carefully in my hand as I skated down the mountain.

I rolled off of the rough asphalt of the street onto the newly paved parking lot of the Kahala Church of Latter Day Saints. The warmth of the evening heightened the smell of the fresh asphalt.

I transferred my rose into the hand holding the champagne bottle, popped the skateboard from the street into my hand with quick downward kick of the tail and descended a short flight of stairs, from the smell of fresh tar into the smell of pikake (jasmine to my mainland friends). I was at the secluded dark entrance of the deserted church, where we were to meet. I had arrived first, wafting in the shadows as I waited briefly. Within moments she arrived, dropped off by her mother. How did she explain getting dropped off at a locked church at 9:30 p.m. on a Saturday evening?

She came bounding up the sidewalk with a bright beaming smile. It fell away as her eyes adjusted to the dim atrium of our tryst and she struggled to find me. Her mother's car pulled away from the curb. I emerged from the shadows with the red rose between my teeth and gave it to her with a kiss - the first and only we would ever share.

The physicality seemed to startle her. She drew her face back for a half-second before realizing how completely alone we were and how secure she was to receive the bud and surreptitious kiss. Although instantaneous, the hesitation had been obvious. What other hesitations did it portend?

A few moments later we crossed the street hand in hand to drink the champagne in a park. We cuddled on the grass leaning back against a tree, passed the bottle back and forth, and told each other why we loved them and what had attracted each of us to the other in the first place.

A flatbed truck went by with Andy and about twenty of his friends perched on it, out caroling.

Soccer Practice

Spring Semester 1987, Honolulu Hawaii

Two months past and I was still the Other Man. She hadn't dumped him and it didn't look like she was ever going to. She was too scared of breaking something that was already established and secure.

"You've gotta bet big to win big," I kept telling her.

She would nod, say "You're right," and not do anything.

I was getting really disgusted and had already called it off once from a pay phone at Kalani saying "In a different life, under different stars." She agreed it would be for the best. At school for the next few days we avoided each other like caged panthers. Finally we came together. I asked her what she really felt. She said she hoped I would call her

back the next day and say "Just kidding." I said that's what I felt too. We called it back on, establishing a bad precedent of half measures and unfulfilled ambitions.

One afternoon at soccer practice, the boys team and the girls team scrimmaged together in coed teams. I was right fullback and she was left forward so we spent the whole afternoon on the same part of the field together. I between brief bits of action in our part of the field, we hovered near one another. Although I hated her for not breaking up with Andy, she was having a rare episode of being sweet, delicate and confiding, which always made her irresistibly cute.

She kept hopping up and down saying "I love you! I love you!" quietly, just loud enough for us to hear, smiling brightly. I melted and forgave her for her two long months of cowardice, in spite of how tortured I felt by them.

Sunday Morning Red Dirt

Spring Semester 1987, Honolulu Hawaii

One weekend we met at a party Andy definitely wasn't going to show up at, on the tenth floor of a condo overlooking the lights of Waikiki highrise hotels and condominiums from just across the Ala Wai Canal, across the street from the park where we discovered our love. As the hour grew late, most of the partygoers had gone home. The few remaining diehards cleaned up the apartment in one quick pass with everybody pitching in. Everybody retired to the bedroom except Jennifer and I, who lay by ourselves alone on thick shag carpet in the dark. The orange lights of electrically illuminated Waikiki shown in through the curtain and sliding glass door to the balcony.

I slowly stroked her back as we listened to R.E.M.'s "Fables of the Reconstruction," just up to her bra strap and slowly back down. It was as intimate as we ever got. I never felt her breasts, not even over her bra. I never saw her naked. We certainly never fucked. But it sometimes seems to me that not even sex could have been more intimate than those soft silken strokes.

"Do you hear it?" I said about the jangling guitars. "THIS is America..."

"Yes..." she said with polite uncertainty, not at all sure what I was getting at. She was still obedient to Europe in the same way that she was obedient to her Previous Commitment. Obedient to her fear, obedient to some indiscernible pain inside of her that I couldn't put my finger on. "If I could only shake her free of the images that hold her captive," I thought, an arrogant Pygmalion.

"Don't you hear the dusty sidewalks of small Mainland towns in the West or South?" I asked without vehemence, certain it was not sinking in.

How could I communicate to her that the elegant highbrow diffident individuality that she liked in me was in fact a love for those most uniquely American writers, the Beats, Dos Passos, Whitman, Melville, Steinbeck and crew, a mystical connection with the ancient mysterious philosophy of life, love and society that I heard in country blues and in contemporary reinterpreters of the tradition like R.E.M.?

I stopped brushing her back with my hand, rolled over and stared at the ceiling. We held hands until we fell asleep to the wafting strains of the music

"Take a break driver 8, take a break, we've been on this train too long..."

I extricated myself the next morning with minimal good-byes and walked alone down the red dirt trails along the streets of Moilili to go catch my bus, the #2 School Street to Kalihi. What is more bittersweet than making your way home alone on a Sunday morning? What is more poignant? Another Saturday evening spent looking for God in the divinity of human relationships and another Sunday morning of profound disappointment in the desperation of stray kisses and abstract fondles.

The morning was overcast. It wasn't even 9:00 a.m. The streets were deserted and still wet from the evening rain. I stayed on the grass alongside the red dirt paths to avoid the mud.

I felt the red dirt going under the endless highrises of Moilili and Downtown, past my homeland of light industry and housing projects Kalihi, under Salt Lake, Pearl City,

Mililani, all the way out to Wahiawa, an hour away in the high saddle between the Ko'olau and Waianae Mountains. I felt civilization as a veneer. Buildings, roads and parking lots all plunked down from the sky to cover the soil.

Waialae Iki Cul de Sac Party

Spring Semester 1987, Honolulu

Someone organized a party on a deserted cul de sac high in an undeveloped part of Waialae Iki ridge. Everyone just parked. There were around twenty cars and trucks, with 40 - 50 people milling around and drinking by their cars. My friend Jesse started draining a bottle of cheap vodka held vertically over his mouth, "going vert," as we called it.

"If it hurts, go vert!" I said, encouraging his copious consumption with one of our favorite slogans of the moment.

Jennifer was there, with Andy and a bunch of his friends. If there were to be any trouble between me and them I knew couldn't look to any of the assembled to back me up. It was mostly "cool" and "surfer" cliques whose members I knew but wasn't really friends with. In fact, they were more likely to be friends with Andy and his set. And my best friend was in the process of getting rapidly shit faced and had fallen down the ridge into the bushes once already.

I heard Jennifer apologizing to Andy in the distance profusely in the most abject tones for something related to a long love letter I wrote her a week or so before, a hefty ten page missive of god knows what logorrheic content that I was foolish enough to sign. He found it in her things somehow.

I couldn't make out everything they were saying. Her saying "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry" repeatedly, him saying "Well, you just have to prove it," her agreeing pathetically "I will. I will." Her apologizing to him instead of defending our love when she had told me that she loved me made me absolutely certain that we did not have a

future together. I was hurt and disgusted to my core and immediately began walking the four miles home by myself, leaving my drunken friend to his own devices. Some acquaintances saw me walking halfway down the ridge and offered me a lift the rest of the way home. I was still livid and couldn't help expressing it in portentous oracular sentences of finality.

"Coming here tonight was the worst decision I've ever made in my life," I repeated again and again. They were better friends with her and Andy. My outburst had a good chance of getting back to them. Maybe I wanted it to.

Finishing Kalani High School

Spring Semester 1987, Honolulu Hawaii

The rest of my last semester in high school was dismal clock watching until I could get the fuck out of Hawaii. On my way to sixth period German and on her way out of fifth period French in adjoining rooms, we often passed one another. It was a three second window of opportunity to communicate, our only arena for premeditated bon mots, ripostes tardy by hours or by days, careening non sequiturs, silent adulation and skulking dread. It became a pulse, a lifeline.

Evenings usually saw me sitting in the dark in the room at the far end of my Dad's house on Waialae Nui ridge, staring numbly out of the large picture window at the orange street lights of the Kahala plain and the inky Pacific void beyond. I was usually listening to classical music on the radio and drinking rum or vodka mixed with whatever juice happened to be in the house. Vaughn Williams "Five Variants for Dante's Nazareth" became my sentimental theme song.

Sometimes, more often than I care to admit, I would become so restless at home sitting at the window looking at her neighborhood in the distance that I would pedal my ten speed the two miles to her house in Kahala half-loaded. I don't know what I ever expected to find or whether I ever really intended to stop. Just rolling by was enough - or

all I'd risk. Occasionally I saw Andy's pale yellow V.W. bug parked out in front. Every time I saw a pale yellow V.W. bug driving around town (which was quite often, Honolulu being crazy about V.W. bugs and Karman Ghias) I worried it might be his and my heart raced.

Once I saw them embracing in the garage as I rolled by. I'm not sure they could have recognized me in the dark but I could swear I heard my name.

Some awkward misguided telephoning was tried. I called Jesse to tell her to call me, in case Andy picked up the phone. It was just a pathetic and futile. The conversations went nowhere. Our relationship, which had never had a chance to thrive, was clearly dead in the water. She wasn't going to dump him.

I took to spending all my free time during school in the library with stacks of back issues of the New Yorker magazine, perusing the genteel intellectual cartoons with a hip flask of Canadian Club and looking forward to the break between the fifth and the sixth periods when we would pass each other grumpily for a few seconds, eyes averted.

Occasionally, some soccer friends and I gathered at my Dad's house for drinks before practice. Somehow, Jennifer got coaxed to one of these shindigs. I mixed a small bowl of Long Island Ice Tea. It was so vile that no one drank any except me. Biking to practice on Jesse's borrowed one-speed cruiser I put on the brakes when I caught up with Jen, who had already left walking with her friend Cindy. I was trying to do a slick fishtail maneuver with the rear wheel. Instead, I completely crashed going at least 20 m.p.h. right in front of them. I still have a scar on my left hip where the street ground through my T-shirt. I was told the next day that I also tried to kiss Karen, the beautiful girl who threw my birthday party. How embarrassing! I can't imagine what I did during soccer practice! I don't even remember returning home, except for how pissed my Dad was when I returned, for leaving such a sticky mess everywhere and for raiding his liquor cabinet in such magnitude.

Skating Down a Fire Road

Summer 1987, California

By the end of my senior year, I had only gotten into the University of Hawaii and St. Johns in New Mexico. Unimpressed with either option I took flight within weeks of flinging my red Kalani mortar board with a bitter smirk into the anonymous crowd of Neil Blaisdell Coliseum. (Boy, did we really butcher our rendition of the class song, "Lean on Me!")

I read the Sunday travel section of the Honolulu Star Bulletin carefully with a florescent yellow highlighter, circling all of the cheapest flights anywhere on the West Coast. I wound up flying into San Francisco, a boy of 17 with braces, a backpack and a skateboard. I visited a Leysin American School friend in Palo Alto first, an intense red headed intellectual volleyball player. She was just about the coolest girl I met there. Why did she have to be seeing my best friend there, Brian?

I headed north from Palo Alto, passing right through San Francisco. I didn't want any big cities until Seattle. Just north of the Golden Gate Bridge, some cops pulled over, presumably to give me static about walking on the shoulder of an interstate highway. I jumped over the steel guard rail and skateboarded half a mile down an unpaved rock-strewn fire road into Sausalito. I was worried they might have radioed another unit to pick me up when I arrived at the bottom.

"Dispatch, this is car #104. We have a code 316 skateboarding down a fire road into Sausalito. Can we have someone pick him up down there? Over."

Apparently no such call was made because I got away clean.

Poetry in a Railroad Yard

Summer 1987, Portland Oregon

I kept forgetting to stop somewhere, hadn't eaten in a day and the freight train ride to Seattle was coming up. I was getting a little sick of the whole baguette, cheese, salami

and fruit routine and came up with an idea for first class railroad hobo victuals. I dropped into an esoteric gestalt grocery store with naturalistic bins of nuts, carob chips and organic cookies and a notable absence of industrialized saran wrap and styrofoam near the yard and picked up the fixing for homemade burritos: tomatoes, lettuce (short work for the thin blade utility paring knife, cheesy Excalibur of the 50 cent bin), salsa, sour cream, refried beans, tortillas, plastic bottled water. "\$1.50 for water!?" I chaffed to myself as I selected the product. "Well, I need the jug."

The woman standing behind me in the checkout line saw the water bottle in my basket and said, "I should drink more water. Just plain water. Bet I might if I had some fancy water like that." It was called Champs Elysee. I guess the French name helped it seem swanky. "It is a little expensive but I need the container."

"Traveling?"

"Those yards," I said casting a glance over my shoulder, "back there go about anywhere you want to go."

"You mean the freight yards?" she asked incredulous.

In the parking lot outside of the store, she gave me two numbers. One was for her answering machine, "But that's broken."

I walked to the railroad tracks. High above me was a four lane freeway overpass. Hobos collected firewood from broken shipping crates lying around, originally stolen from piles behind nearby warehouses. There was an entire shanty town along the sides of the tracks on the bank of the Willamette River with nice view of the city lights of Portland and the dark hills beyond.

The village was neatly arranged into a hundred squatter claims clustered together in a group, each compact square subdivided with a motley assortment of stray boards, corrugated cardboard and scraps of tin. Here, where I most expected to witness freedom from the accouterments of the American consumer culture swirling around us, I saw instead every variety of conventional homelife equipment showcased shabbily within the

dirt floor cubicles - furniture, mattresses, pots, pans, stoves, dish soap, breakfast cereal, even the occasional portable T.V. It was a sly and remarkable parody of domesticity.

Where would I find the purity and freedom I was looking for?

I approached one home and respectfully addressed its denizen, "Say friend, which tracks head to Seattle?"

"Those ones," he said, pointing to a line off a ways, rounding a bend. Next to it a black stem railroad stoplight, gave oncoming traffic the green light. I hoped that meant a train might be leaving soon.

"These here go south then? San Fran?"

"San Fran, Bakersfield. Yup."

"When is the next one to Seattle?"

"Round 9:00, 9:15 I think. Not sure though."

I thanked him and went to a pile of broken crates. It was a cold night and as all of my rides had been telling me, "Humidity only makes it worse." I asked some guys there about the time of the next train. It started a general conversation among the four of us. I listened to their answers as I put a crate (Sunny Farms, Oxnard CA) on the ground, held it down with one heavy black boot and crushed it the other to make kindling. Between each stomp, I raised my head and looked them in the eye.

Smash! "7? I just missed is then."

Smash! Wood flies a few feet. "I heard 9 from one guy. I like that one best. Means it's almost here."

Smash! "10? 11?"

I gathered my armful of wood, walked toward the stoplight and the track north, and kicked some empty sterno cans on the ground, smiling at them. I asked a few more people milling around and got a few more different numbers before dropping my wood in one big clattering racket, far enough from the tracks so no embers would leap around as the trains rushed by. I looked around for some paper and found a yellow two week old

Wall Street Journal. The Dow had dipped slightly in light trading. I started a fire with free matches from the grocery store. Some Mexicans wandered over to warm up a bit. I tried to ask them about the train but they didn't understand me. They finally left. I stood close to the fire, rotating myself constantly like a pig on a spit.

After a few minutes I could see the lights of a train coming. I grabbed my pack by the scruff and disappeared behind some bushes until six cars worth of engineers eating sandwiches and drinking coffee had past. It idled by slowly on the sharp bend. I stepped back out from behind the bushes. Six engines - that train was definitely going somewhere - but I was not heartened - they were all tractor trailer piggybacks on flatbeds. I don't trust piggybacks one bit. The hitches rattle powerfully back and forth like they could snap at any moment and let the heavy trailer squash me like a bug. Rattling death traps, I call them. Don't want to ride them.

I waited unanxiously as the train rolled by, hoping for an empty boxcar but not really expecting one. I sat down again next to the fire before the train had even completely passed. I rolled out my sleeping bag, to try and catch a few z's before the next train, on some cardboard boxes I threw on the rusty coils of a disintegrated mattress. I followed my backpack into the sleeping back, climbed in gingerly, careful not to snag nice nylon sleeping bag on any errant strand of wire.

I have an instinct against repose in yards as crowded as Portland but little in the demeanor of those people roaming around aggravated such an impulse. I soon fell into the compromise of a troubled sleep, waking when I grew too hot or stifled, drifting back off into sleep again.

I felt a weight against my leg, shifted and woke up to find a bearded greasy jacketed bum, brain-addled by years of drinking Lysol, the right age to be one of the many lost Vietnam veterans roaming the roads and rails, squatting over my sleeping bag with my wallet (full of \$60, my only money!) in his outstretched hand. He swayed slightly but made no attempt to run. How long he had been sitting there like that? Still

half asleep, I snatched my wallet back from him quickly and restored it to a blue jean pocket. We began a disjointed, stop-and-go, simultaneous exchange.

Him	Me
Please..	Get outta here
I need money...	no...No!...
Give me...	Go...Go!
Some money please...	Now!...(I pointed away)

He finally stumbled off. Now I knew who'd been drinking the cans of sterno that I had seen all over the place. Some of these hard core guys heat it to get at the alcohol and stave off the D.T.'s for a few more days.

Well, I'm up now. I might as well use my time productively. I rolled up my sleeping bag, strapped it to my pack, pulled out a can of permanent spray adhesive and stood it up on the ground. I used to use a glue stick but poems posted that way to pillars and walls grimy with dirt and locomotive soot never stayed up too long. I reached deep into my bag, grabbed a stack of paper tightly and pulled it out past \$3 thrift shop sweaters. I sat on the edge of the mattress coils. By the glowing embers of my railroad fire, I flipped through rumpled folder papers, quickly scribbled notes on receipts and paper bags and photocopies of my favorite stuff from Gary Snyder.

The stack was a few months backlog. Some made me cringe. These I dropped onto the embers. Some I kept coming back to until I finally put the stack down, save four pieces. These I would submit to the Fatalist Monthly, my favorite young uncle's literary magazine in Austin Texas. I walked to a pillar with the papers and my spray can. Sometimes when I have come back through railroad yards a second time, I have seen my poetry glued with spray adhesive still standing, only a little bit worse for the wear. Sometimes there are responses and even responses to the responses, a bebop exchange honked with ballpoint pens instead of saxophones.

Loveless Lake Visit

Summer 1987, Tacoma Washington

I drifted up Highway 1 to Tacoma to meet a quasi-flame from Leysin American School. We had kissed and held hands walking in the snow during the last week of school and established correspondence proffering various cynical attitudes towards love.

It was late July by the time I got there. Her family wasn't there. Their house was on a small lake. I slept in their motorboat for two nights and spent my days roaming around the lifeless streets of Tacoma like a ghost, skateboarding with my big pack on my back.

When they finally showed up on the third afternoon, I knocked on their front door as though I had just arrived and never made any references to sleeping on their boat. They deposited me for the length of my short stay on a couch in the spare living room downstairs. I stayed up late during each of those full and near full moon nights that soaked the room was a bright silvery glow, watching the staircase that descended from her bedroom like a hawk, hoping against hope that she would come down in a T-shirt and boxers to kiss me. She never did. I didn't have the guts to walk up.

As we drove the dark wet streets of Tacoma in her little compact car looking for what fun we could find, I tried to detect by the music she put into the tape deck whether or not she was trying to use the music to communicate with me.

Was she awake when I was during our nights so close to each other in separate bedrooms? Does the sweet music of the Woodentops she is playing mean she dreamt of my kisses too? I turned to look at her long peroxide blonde hair and small boned profile and felt almost sure that she did. She was just scared of having conjugal relations in her parent's house? Right? Right?

But the relationship, which never really began at school, clearly would not blossom here either and I took it on the lam. She drove me up to Seattle to see an old friend and spiritual mentor from Hawaii.

My First Pad

Summer 1987, Seattle Washington

He was moving to a different part of town and sublet me his dorm room for the rest of the summer. He even lent me his hot pot and cube fridge, establishing me in my first solo domesticity. By days, I landscaped and mowed lawns, catching assignments by trotting down to the student work office with my friend's University I.D. card and taking phone numbers for temporary work off of the bulletin boards.

As perfect a set up as it was, something kept me restless. I was happy not to try to find a new place at the end of the summer and drifted away. It's almost like I was looking for something and I knew immediately that Seattle didn't have it - even though I had no idea what I was actually looking for. But I would recognize it as soon as I saw it! I didn't have any real reason to go on traveling. I had been happy there for a month and was leaving a good friend and a pleasant city, drifting towards nothing in particular.

Drifting

Summer 1987, Western United States

I hitched the interstates across Eastern Washington, Idaho, down to Utah, way stations en route to Nowhere. In Salt Lake City, stopped to the night with a Mormon friend from the Kalani cross country team and with a foreign exchange student friend from Yugoslavia. In three days, I was on my way to Denver with the 26 year old sister of my Belgrade comrade on her way to start a job teaching at a prep school in Princeton. Her fully loaded little compact car whizzed along a 100 m.p.h. on the long downhill straightaways and then labored severely to crest the top of the ridge at 40 m.p.h.

From Denver, I drifted south to Pueblo and another quasi-flame from my Leysin American School but she was too strange, even for me. I was on my way again in short order, drifting south randomly towards Santa Fe.

An Unexpected Destination

Fall Semester 1987, Santa Fe New Mexico

I had not planned on following up on my St. Johns acceptance because the curriculum was so esoteric and the tuition so expensive but since I was in the neighborhood I figured I'd give it a try and at least scam them out of a week or two of free lodging. I arrived a few days in advance of orientation week.

I spent my first night in Santa Fe under a concrete stairwell in some State Government building and my second night on a park bench closer to campus. On the third day orientation week finally began. I woke with the light, as one usually does sleeping in the open, and whiled the morning away with a hike to the top of the great Pinon dotted sand shale hills behind the St. Johns campus.

Rabbits dashed to and fro between the short runty trees. I threw rocks at them occasionally, thinking vaguely of roasting them on a stick over an open fire, just like in the movies. I made no special effort to actually hit any of them. I figured they might be carrying tuberculosis, the Plague or god knows what other kinds of nasty bugs. I knew there was Plague somewhere in the Rockies. I wasn't that hungry yet. I might be able to scam some cafeteria meals at the college soon.

The top of the mountain offered an expansive view of Santa Fe, a tiny central village of brown adobe surrounded by sprawling suburban ranch homes, lost in a beautiful, vast and desolate desert bowl. When the sun was high enough in the sky to assure me that all of the university offices would be open, I walked back down the mountain.

The administrators were very friendly and actually seemed to know who I was. I guess with so few incoming students annually, they do know just about everyone, especially someone from as "exotic" a locale as Hawaii. Polite as they were, I still couldn't talk them into letting me stay in a dorm room.

"It appears that your account hasn't been paid yet."

"Oooopps! Fancy that!" I thought. "How could that have happened? Perhaps because I didn't know I was going to come here until a few days ago? Maybe because I told my father that I wasn't interested months ago? What if I told them the check is in the mail? No, they would want to call my dad to confirm it.

I went to a laundry room in a dorm to clean my clothes and plot my next move. A mousy coed was already in there doing her wash. I tried to engage her in conversation to pump her for information and general impressions of St. Johns. She was guarded and spacey, with skittish eyes. Unfairly, I took her as representative and decided on the spot not to spend four years there.

I did however want to stay in Santa Fe for awhile and dig the city. I rented half of a duplex for a month from some old Hispanic with deep alcoholic creases on his face and thick fingered rough hands and got a job busing tables at an old transient hotel that had just been extensively remodeled and given a new lease on life as a luxury hotel with high tea on the sidewalk in the afternoon and the whole bit.

The superabundance of muffin joints and espresso bars on every corner and the artificiality of the extremely quaint adobe-style building code began to depress me. I also soon learned that I didn't have the hustle bustle small motor skills needed to be an effective bus boy and fled as soon as my month at the house was up. That damn hotel never did give me my last paycheck.

Garbage Man

January - February 1988, Calgary Alberta

I spent a few days looking for work unsuccessfully in Vancouver. It was too cold and I heard that there was work for the 1988 Olympics in Calgary so I headed across the blue Canadian Rockies by bus. Lord knows it would have been too cold to hitch! To

more extreme horror, it just kept getting progressively colder the further east we drove, the streams and ponds along the freeway more and more caked with snow and ice.

What have I done?! Out of the frying pan and into the fire! I knew the reassuring warmth of the bus would come to an end soon.

I got into Calgary by late afternoon, stepped out of the front door of the bus station and stepped quickly back in. It was about 30 degrees below zero and windy as hell. I had no idea where to go and didn't even know where to start looking. I felt all alone, like I didn't have a friend in the world.

I milled around the Greyhound Station in a dull panic until I found a city map. The university was nearby. I was sure to find a warm nook or cranny there. I set off in search of it through the bitter cold. It was already dark.

I prowled the university halls looking for something discreet and out of the way, before finally tucking myself in a corner under some study carrels. Please just let me sleep until dawn. I swear I'll skadaddle then. Around 3:00 a.m. one of two security guards gave me a few light kicks to wake me up. They were sympathetic and agreed in conference amongst themselves that I might die if thrown out into the elements at night. They let me stay on the couches in the lobby if I promised to be out in the morning before the students came in.

The next day, in gratitude to the nice security guards, I was up before the first footfall broke the silence of the stone tiled hall. I went back to the bus station to leave my backpack (skateboard long since mailed back to Hawaii) in a locker. I cleaned up in the bathroom at the station, washing my face and hair, drying my hair crouched under the hand drier, combing it and brushing my teeth. It civilized me. I returned to the University to lose myself among people I looked like. Even those two security guards wouldn't have been able to recognize me amongst the teeming masses having a quick bowl of soup in the midst of pursuing their degrees in the busy food court.

I got a coffee and a big chocolate chip muffin and sat down to a formica table. It is amazing how much better you feel after cleaning up and putting something in your stomach! A grave, life-threatening catastrophe of exposure to the elements had been avoided and a game plan for survival was coming together in my head.

I looked through the classifieds of the student newspaper with a pen. Walked around with it rolled up and a second cup of coffee looking for the job boards. I finally found it in the student union. I wasn't looking for it with any haste. I felt fine just at that moment and wasn't in a hurry to feel any different. The typewritten listings on pastel 3" x 5" note cards had listing numbers on the bottom right hand corner but no telephone numbers. A card at the top of the bulletin board with directions written with a big El Marko felt pen told job hunters to take the listing number and their student I.D.s to another office and the phone numbers would be given them. Without an student I.D. card it looked like I was up the creek without a paddle.

I left campus to track down other job leads from the school paper as best I could by bus and foot. I quickly discovered how hard it was to fill out a job application with no address, no phone number and no work experience more than five weeks long.

That night and for as long as my money lasted, I stayed at the Salvation Army men's dormitory for \$3 a night, in one of thirty beds crammed into two medium sized rooms. To guaranty myself at least one meal a day, I usually took their frightening and bizarre 75 cent breakfast too, even though it broke the budget. I was advised at one of these breakfasts of a place to go where, if I went there early enough (no later than 5:00 a.m.), they would ship me out to different kinds of day labor and pay me cash weekly.

I found the place and took the stray jobs they gave me, stacking potato chips on palletes in warehouses, unloading assorted boxcars, and (the only one I ever walked away from) pitching pieces of coal clump by tiny clump onto the ground from a dusty top-loaded bulk item car outdoors in sub zero temperatures.

I moved to the Alberta Provincial Government's Single Men's Hostel when I finally ran out of money before my first day labor pay check. It was a place for indigent men. I was finally given a day labor assignment that lasted more than a day or two, as a "swamper," the assistant to the garbage truck driver who hops out at every stop to roll the dumpsters in line with the tines of the truck and then throws them back into their cages after they are emptied. I had a place to stay, free food every evening at the soup line and a steady job. Calgary was beginning to be not so bad. At least I was sure I wouldn't die.

Soon I even had enough money to go see shows at a blues bar called King Eddy's. The drinking age was 18. The 1947 boxing champion of Nova Scotia accused me of stealing his fried chicken and french fries. He was right. I thought he had gone so after a respectful period of mourning, I started eating.

I got my college applications general delivery in Vancouver and filled them out papers strewn everywhere on the floor of the bright and busy food court of the University of Calgary. I drafted an account of my adventures at the Portland rail road yard as my essay.

Before long, in spite the cherished and delightful Chinook winds that came down from the Rockies every now and then to raise the temperature from freezing to 80 degrees in one hour, I had to boogie to beat the cold. I hated constantly battling sub-freezing temperatures.

I made friends with a 24 year old baker at the local Albertson's grocery store at King Eddy's. He offered to let me spend my last night in Calgary with him and he would give me a ride to the outskirts of town early in the morning because he went to work at 4:00 a.m. I took him up on it.

After he drove me out in the darkness, I sat against the new unpainted pine fence of a suburban residential development, huddled in my sleeping bag to wait for the day's traffic to start and watched the Northern Lights dance. Veils unruffled, ribbons capered,

and colors shifted delicately in and out. The fact that I was not at all expecting it made it all the more entrancing.

Beating the Cold

February - March 1988, Canada to New Orleans

In my efforts to escape the cold weather I wound up in the only place on that latitude that was any colder, Winnipeg.

I ended my evening's unsuccessful efforts looking for the Winnipeg Single Men's Hostel sitting in a heated glass rectangle bus stop with no idea of what to do next when an old man came in to the shelter to beat the cold too. We started talking. Eventually he invited me home to his floor for the night.

He seemed pretty skanky but he was old and small enough for me to beat up, so unless he was armed he wasn't a physical challenge. He was actually very polite and even served me tea before we crashed. As he scurried about the kitchen preparing it, I flipped idly through a stack of magazines on a table. Under the Field and Stream decoys were numerous hardcore pornos. I smirked at seeing my suspicions confirmed and felt disinclined to peruse the literature any further.

I slept with my feeble Swiss Army knife open in my bag and forgot it was there when I woke up in the morning. I shook my sleeping bag out in the morning to pack it up and it bounced down onto the floor while he was in the room. He wasn't offended and even seemed to understand the need for caution and preparedness.

Back on the streets of Winnipeg early in the morning, I said to hell be with being cold one day longer. I bought a bus ticket to Minneapolis to get a good chunk south. In the Minneapolis bus station I saw a sign that said "\$39 Anywhere We Travel - Stage Coach Lines."

I marched straight to their ticket counter and asked "What's the furthest south you go?"

"Texarkana, Arkansas."

I conferred with myself briefly before making such a large purchase although I knew I was already sold. That's nearly the whole length on America from north to south for \$40. Before too long, I returned to slam my money on counter and buy a ticket. The bastards lost my sleeping bag in Texarkana and didn't compensate me! I felt so violated, helpless fighting against the bureaucracy and so defenseless without my sleeping bag (my very home!).

I arrived in New Orleans the day after Mardi Gras. The leafless trees were still covered with an incredible amount of colorful plastic beads. I saw Abbie Hoffman, Hunter Thompson and some right wing guy speak at the Tulane auditorium. I tried to kiss her on a campus lawn that night, was rebuffed without rancor and soon fled.

Life in Austin

April 1988, Austin Texas

There are better people to call to get you out of jail than your ex-flame but for some reason they are always the only ones you know making \$7/hour, cash, when you have the misfortune of pocketing a bottle of Bufferin in front of the store Dick.

The arresting officer who came to the chain supermarket was young, his cheeks and neck still thick with baby fat. He led me out of the storage room and took on a noble air as we walked through the deli section. He was proud to be parading someone in cuffs through public. This was what he quit night school for at the junior college. He searched the crowd for acclamation as best he could without injury to his dignity but no one looked up from their work comparing price per ounces.

A lady in a white leather jumpsuit with thinning hair bent over, engrossed in the potato powders. The cop expected her to right herself so we could pass in our full width. He skipped out of her way at the last minute when she didn't and bumped me into the ramen, knocking some over, five for a dollar.

In the squad car, it became obvious he got his ideas about how to be a cop from the some place as the rest of us, television.

"You stole Aspirin? What's the matter? You got a headache? You'll have more than a headache soon."

At the station, he told me to follow the paunchy red faced man who was getting up from his desk. I looked over at my ride after the frisk job. He was still hanging around, standing by the door with his hands out of his pockets and his mouth open, looking vacant. He left for indeterminate adventures when my new connection sat me down for processing.

This guy was a bureaucrat and saw dozens of putzes like me every day. He knew we were harmless. Unthreatened, he didn't put on quite as big a show and was pleasant enough, even veering towards jovial. I was relieved that my parking tickets from Seattle didn't seem to be appearing on the computer. Yet for all the first timer ribbing he remained unduly attached to the idea of fifty dollars bail. He pushed the phone across the desk towards me.

"Lisa?"

"Boyce? Are you drunk?"

"What if I am? So what? Don't you trust me?"

"Easy pardner," the cop said.

There was silence at her end. No time for jokes. "I'm in jail."

I could almost see her face brighten, forehead rise, thin lips part slightly.

"Jail? For what?"

Good ol' Lisa. She always knew I had it in me. But this was going to disappoint her, I could tell. I took the plunge and spoke with as much pride as an inane crime could justify.

"Shoplifting."

"Shoplifting? What did you steal?"

"Cheese."

"Cheese?"

"No, only kidding. Aspirin."

"Aspirin."

"No, only kidding." I held my hand over the receiver and did a Hunter Thompson accent. I spoke so quietly and indistinctly so I wouldn't be overheard by the bureaucrat across the table, so quietly in fact that I didn't think I used anything even remotely resembling articulate speech. "Well actually I was under the influence of Mexican Brown you know potent strange shit and so what I did was I was mistook a bottle of aspirin for the...for the, you know...Hope Diamond."

I was about to mumble something incoherent about the Smithsonian Institute and glass cases when she spoke, as though trying to get the attention of a day dreamer.

"Boyce!"

"Yes?"

"Are you really in jail?"

"Really."

"Where?"

"Downtown."

"I presume I'm making bail?"

"Fifty bucks."

"You couldn't think of anyone else to call, could you?"

"More or less." She laughed.

"I'll be by," she said and hung up.

"O.K. Dinner at six? All right. All right. Bye now. Bye bye."

I out the phone on the cradle and pushed it back across the gray linoleum desk.

"She coming?" he asked. I nodded and rose as he did and followed him to lock-up.

"Sorry pal. No free lunch," he said and pushed the grill closed. "By the way, the chick in there is a guy." I pictured the blown kiss I would receive if I looked so soon after hearing something like that, so I refrained from looking and sat down on a cement bench built into the cell wall. A far gone Mexican wino lumbered over slowly and hovered unsteadily above me with an outstretched palm. He mumbled indecipherably. The peeling brown paint and graffiti revealed green underneath. The plaster on the ceiling was chalky and rotten around the many brown water stains. I tried to ignore the soft taps my head received from the wino's palm whenever the circle of his wobbling careened too widely. After a long enough wait to present my sympathy with his lostness, I stood up and walked away. I leaned against the wall and read the scratched names and mulled over living with Lisa, my first cohabitation with a female. We fucked up when we moved in together. This is where most people go wrong.

Did we really think it would stop at roommates? That it would be so simple? Did we really think that we would just have our little apartment and save our little money and everything would be just fine. She would go back to school next year. This was a business proposition. Romantic tension would not enter the picture.

I heard my name called from the open end of the cell and walked out of the gate held open.

"Ready buddy?" His navy blue uniform last fit well during the Carter administration.

As I followed him, I thought the bandanna Lisa usually wore might make the Sergeant Dimwit clerk behind the counter nervous and inspire him to tack on another fifty bucks of Shady Character Tax before he felt secure enough to release me into her hands and onto the unsuspecting city. Lisa knew what the bail was. And I knew Lisa.

"I heard it was fifty, fuck you!" she would say and storm off furious leaving me standing there slack jawed and gaping behind a ragged line of dirty masking tape.

I came to my position behind the tape and saw Lisa talking to Dimwit at the counter. There was no commotion, no bureaucratic glee at a chance to be obstinate. Lisa's face was distorted through the thick bulletproof glass. The angularity of her nose and high cheekbones flew off in strange directions. She skipped the bandanna. From what I could see of her, she was even decent enough to throw together a stable conservative look. She almost looked matronly, in a young and with-it sort of way. My liberation seemed to be running unimpeded. I was home free.

She looked up as the clerk wrote out the receipt and saw me through the wobbling glass and looked back down. She resisted a smirk but not with any great effort.

We walked in silence up the cool wet stairwell out into the dark orange-lit streets and got into her car, a yellow Rabbit with rust on the bottom of the doors. The night was still warm from the day. Inside the car without the task of walking to divert us, the silence grew more oppressive. All of the windows were rolled up and the only sounds were the soft taps of the clutch going in and out and the resultant pitch changes in engine noise. She didn't turn on the radio and I didn't ask her to. For the moment the inferior position suited me. In that was I could thank her for bailing me out. I watched the city go by: locked up 9-5 retail store, still open laundromats and 7-11 convenience stores. Neon beer signs glowing in bar windows. As the silence endured it became more and more despotic and reminded me of the damage done in deeds over the last few weeks.

The wreckage first began to accumulate when I returned home one day from some construction work to find half of April's rent laid out in twenties on the stove and an apartment stripped of most of what had made it a home.

I called her a few times at her mother's but it was always in that sentimental twilight that comes to us after the fourth or fifth beer alone in a decimated apartment. Our phone talk never made much progress. It careened wildly between aching need and diffident dismissal. We finally agreed to meet to see a mutual friend play open mike at the Black Cat. We returned that night to our queen sized mattress on the floor and our

reunion was full of amnesty and wanting. I never fell asleep that night. I sat on newspaper naked on the radiator and looked out of the window onto the gravel parking lot, recently oiled and glowing gray in the moonlight, and at Lisa naked under sheet. The sky bleached slowly into a pale purple. I put on my cloths silently, left her asleep in bed and walked out into the tender streets of Sunday morning with a fresh round of the heartbreaking bottles of Saturday night.

By the time we got off of the highway coming back from the station, the silence of the drive had shown me ten times over for the emotional criminal that I was, my constant breach of good faith. At the first red light that caught us I got out and closed the door behind me without malice. She kept her eyes on the light and drove off when it turned green. She hadn't looked at me since we left the station.

Walking these dark streets again, I cruised the sidewalks and saw myself from the perspective of the inmates of the showcase houses. The civilized world stops where the living room light fades onto the dark and delirious lawn and overturned shopping club skateboard. When night falls on the North American city the great flood of life retreats into separate accretions around the blue eyes of televisions. Beyond this network of glowing knobs there is no reality. Life is stillborn beyond it, desolate only. No one suspects the streets. No one ever pauses from their pot roast, considers that there might be a figure flowing through the arteries coursing darkness between the islands of blue eyes, that might be looking at their split level existence at that very moment, sharing it, and gaining power from it in unseen fellowship.

It was far enough away that my heels would be cooled right about when I pulled into their neighborhood, so I made my friend's house the destination of my journey. They were a band from Lubbock. I met them at the Lazy Lunch one night when they were opening for Agony Column and I was selling T-shirts. I lit them up and they let me drink off of the case the bar gave them. One time we all tripped together and went to see the most hysterical band we could think of, a petulant English trio that wore alot of black,

pursed their lips alot and closed their eyes constantly as they fell back to hit that extra soulful note.

The audience was mostly young spud wannabes like we once were, cutting their teeth on the club scene and doing their best to project a moody detachment. Although we had already progressed to the next level above moody detachment, that of ironic enthusiasm, we remained in strong sympathy with them nevertheless. They were our roots. It was all in good fun but we couldn't help goofing off of them. One of us would go stand next to them and ape their poses of moody detachment. It was never long before their friends and the people around them would start turning their necks to see where all the laughter was coming from.

They knew Lisa from when she was a bartender at the Lunch and respected me for having hooked up with her. She was sultry, dark and tall, probably 5'8". I spent alot of time at their house, especially after she bailed on me. The fact that I ever hooked up with her in the first place could still set off ripples of disbelief among them. I couldn't explain it either. Sometimes you just get lucky.

Their tiny two-story house was squalid in a way that is hard to find outside of the single wall construction, torn window screens and humidity grease of the South. Dirt from their grassless lawn was slowly coating their dingy white house brown from the bottom up. I knocked on the screen door hanging off of its hinges.

Usually I was on my way in before they even answered but tonight Wilkie answered the door quickly. He stood on two-foot high strap-on stilts, wearing tan shorts that were too tight, no shirt, and beaming at me from behind a feather headdress-mask. He loved his get up. He reveled in it, pacing around the upstairs room, singing his best imitation of opera.

"When did he start developing these symptoms?" I asked looking from eye to eye at those seated in the single room on the ground floor. Butini sat on the floor with a smoking red glass bong on his legs, nodding at my question while he held a hit in. Lazlo

was sitting next to him, wrinkling a plastic bag of pot back and forth in his fingers, waiting his turn. His name was actually Lauren but he was a Yankee who got tired of hearing his name pronounced "Larn," so he just started going by "Lazlo." He looked up from beneath a nest of rough black hair and opened his mouth but didn't say anything when he heard Tyson answer the question.

"He found them in the garage with some of Butini's old drums and fixed them up. They needed a strap."

Tyson looked back at the Reid Fleming comic he was reading, to give it one final good-bye before committing himself to the stranger, to conversation, to the night. He pushed it across the table and had a swig of Shiner bock.

Butini passed the bong to Lazlo and said, "He used a cat collar."

"Two collars," Tyson said. The water percolated in the bong as Lazlo hit it.

"He found a neighborhood cat and called him over to pet him for awhile and took his collar," Butini began again, talking up from the floor.

"It was too short so he got another cat and took his collar, too," Tyson added.

"Threaded them together?" I asked.

"I guess. Did he use tape?"

"I don't think he used tape."

"That's wild. You guys just need a gig now."

"We have one. Tonight. Four bands at the Campus Cafe, outside."

"Wilkie gonna do it up?"

"He's going to wear his stuff playing. He's totally psyched for it. Jason and Tina and all them are coming over later. We're all going to walk over in costume."

When Jason and Tina's friends arrived, they came bearing news of a frat party across the street.

"We already talked to some of them on the sidewalk," Tina said. She was dressed in elegant non-camp gleanings from Salvation Army. "They seemed pretty cool. They said to come over."

Lazlo got up and joined Tyson looking through the blinds.

"Of course they're going to seem cool," I said. "Testosterone demands it talking to a chick."

Wilkie emerged from the adjoining room, said "Three cheers for the wonder drug!" and took a swallow from the brown longneck he held aloft. Murmurs of approval bubbled from the newcomers who hadn't seen his outfit yet.

"Hip hip hooray!" I said twice but no one took me up on it so I downed a fat gulp. I think it passed for exuberance. Lazlo and Tyson raised the blinds. Now we could see the party but it was still silent under our music. We were playing the corniest 1970s stadium rock we could cull from the records. Tyson tried to put on Flipper but it got shouted down by Lazlo and Bill. Too normal, not nearly ironic enough. AC DC was voted somewhere in the middle. We left it to the side.

A bunch of us were drinking on the patio checking out the party scene across the street. White convertible Sciroccos, Suzuki Jeeps and Saabs were parked along the street. We knew what we had to do. In an everyday tone that sounded funny wafting down eight feet Wilkie said, "So they said we could just come over then?" He had taken off his headdress temporarily to preserve it for the show.

"We even said there was a lot of guys," Tina mentioned.

"Well that's perfect because my beer is getting low," Wilkie said, pounding his beer and heading out shirtless across the street, the screen door bouncing to a ragged lopsided close behind him. Several of us followed.

I talked to a short girl with a pony tail in a tank top on a second floor patio. Daddy sold one of his Rolexes to set her up in school and apartment for a year. She was in the apartment at first but moved into a sorority the sisters were so fun and sometimes

they had parties at her old apartment now because it was just empty but she bet those Delts made a copy of the key and they're just going to wreck the place she knew it did you see their house where they lived it's a wreck there was even a mattresses on the road right next to the house where they actually lived and what do you do.

"Do you go to school?" she asked.

It was good to take over the conversation for awhile. She left me dizzy with all of her talking but my trips to the keg were starting to add up. In spite of the fact that she was beginning to look attractive, I felt compelled to begin describing my imaginary piano act in the lounge of the Holiday Inn off of I-35.

I was getting into the upholstery job I had planned for the piano, making aggressively less and less sense just to startle her, when I looked up from leaning on the patio railing and noticed their house across the street in hubbub.

"Excuse me," I said. "The crops are coming in. Meet you on the back forty." I walked back to the house.

The joint was a hive. Black garbage bags and black frizzy wigs were leaping into the air. Big chunks of cardboard were being cut with exacto knives and spray painted black and silver. Some of the women were outlining designs on the band member's faces with eyeliner pencil and filling them in with black and white face paint.

I was witnessing the resurrection of Kiss.

The entourage finally moved towards the gig and we swarmed around our spiritual leader, Wilkie. It was Saturday night. The whole city was out on the streets. They honked at us uproariously, cheering us loudly our whole way up the Drag to the show. Four crazy dudes in Kiss outfits created nothing but good feeling in all concerned. Kiss transcended all boundaries. No one could see them and not laugh. They were budget 70's glamour rock Bodhisattvas spreading good cheer and helping the masses over the hump of boredom and good taste into salvation.

The show rocked. Lazlo made flame throwers out of Lysol bottles. Butini played drums in a big plastic bubble filled by a fan going full blast. Wilkie sang and played, eight feet tall. The mosh pit bounced and spun, everyone picking everyone else up, skanking the slow songs.

We coalesced together in a sweaty mob after the show and took up a collection for beer. I rode in a white commercial van with a friend of Jason's. He took all of the equipment (and a few groupies) up to the show so the band could walk to the gig in costume. Now we were designated buyers, going to get beer and meet at a house on the tangent of our gang.

He popped a tape into to the tape deck and we lit up. It was cool to chill after the hubbub of the dark show. We arrived at the house well before everyone. I had used the show to outrun the corruption, corrosion and decay the evening began in and now just sat in the dark of the van, listened to X, nursed a Shiner bock, catalogued the many emotional exhaustions I had felt in my life and let it all run through me. Let the regrets well up deep inside. With that music at that moment, I as though I could feel my turmoil in all its fullness, learn my lessons and let the negative energy pass out of me and dissipate into the night. Aggressive Chords. Melting tenderness. A ribbon of saxophone. It was good music to come to exhausted.

Lisa had an instinctive goodness that made you clean up your act around her. She pulled no punches. There was a sincerity rising from somewhere deep inside her that made me want to rise to her level. It made my usual tendency towards fractiousness painful and obscene, my cynicism gutless and tawdry, my motion across a room stiff disjointed and lumbering.

Ghost Town

Summer 1988, Arizona

"I'm looking for work. You know of any?"

"I hear they still need people up in Jerome. Some company is making some type of ghost town wild west convention center. I'm running alfalfa up there tomorrow."

"Alfalfa? They got a lotta horses up there?"

"Fair number. Not much space to walk around there. It's just perched on a cliff. More for show than anything else. Add a little atmosphere, I guess. They were giving such good money they got all the horses they needed pretty fast. They already had all needed when I heard about it and it hadn't been news but for a few days."

"How'd the first people hear about it?"

"Word of mouth from the guy running it, I guess. Wasn't too publicized. Nobody needs them to work nowadays anyway. Got motorcycles and trucks and tractors and what not. Why not make a little money off them?"

"And they're renovating for a convention coming right up? That's the deal?"

"That's what I heard. They need people for a few weeks to meet their deadline."

My road had to get off of Interstate 10 to go south somewhere. The hay in the hand welded trailer was for a friend of his 50 miles down the road. He couldn't get enough alfalfa lately. He was throwing it all away. Whether this meant alfalfa or something else I did not ask.

He pulled onto the off ramp, not slowing down too much from his highway speed because he was so weighed down with hay. He was sorry he couldn't give me a ride all the way especially seeing as how it was so close but it was late and he was probably just gonna spend the night at his friend's. He slowed for the stop sign where the off ramp hit the drag through town. He stopped and I got my pack from between the bales and the wall of the truck bed. I slung it over my shoulder, waved him on. My hand hung there after he passed. I looked away from the receding truck, let my hand fall and stood alone at the bottom of the off ramp.

I woke up beneath the overpass troubled by dreams I could not remember. The concrete and steel girders offered no clues. Awareness came to me slowly. Flat on my

back I kicked a concrete wall to my right to see if it was there. My heart was racing. I lay flat and stretched out my arms and my legs on the newspaper I'd laid out so it could catch up. My face and neck was residued with a thorough coating of grimy interstate Vaseline distilled from the flying refuse of styrofoam coffee cups, greasy sausage wrappers and smudgy newspaper ink. I felt like a grease puddle beneath a dumpster.

I set my palm mirror at eye level on the concrete suboverpass shelf between the two highways to get more light to clean up by. With a rag and a plastic Coke bottle full of water I washed my face and neck, combed back my hair, shaved and brushed my teeth. Upon completion of my grooming activities, I repacked everything but the water bottle, leaned my pack against the wall, sat down Indian style in front of it and stared at it like a shrine.

"I heard they still needed people up there..."

I already tasted the capricious sandwiches and coffee of wealthy buffets but I also felt something more. I felt accounted for. I felt that I could cross dangerous thresholds unscathed, walk to my destination across sandy earth, weaving a path through short sagebrush to the posse of hills on the horizon and arrive without food, the sheerest danger of all. I stood up and scampered like a crab up the concrete slope to the median of the highway. It was loud, streaming with the distance and discipline of early morning traffic.

The mountains were a good day's walk away. They stood in the distance like a bundle of gray purple exclamations on the flat plain. I went back under, snatched up my pack and bottle, dashed to one of three trailer homes in a park built for twenty and went straight for the outside faucet without taking my eyes off of it. I filled my jug and headed straight for the highway, tightening the cap as I walked.

I walked up the onramp and swung around to thumb, giving people space to slow down onto the shoulder. A figure on the side of the road grows more cutting and explanations less dense as his distance from a town center grows until finally he forfeit

his chance to any ride at all, barring a 49 Ford kindsoul. The moment of decision came and went past "too far from town."

I kept on walking to keep walking. I swirling backwards make eye contact with oncoming traffic, curious if any on the road were gracious. Later, weaving a path through a sagebrush flats, a train whistle blew. I understood it with perfect clarity.

I wasn't precisely sure where in the mountains the town was so I just got as high as I could before dark. I had to get above things so I could put my hands in my pockets and look. Keep my back to the walls. Stay in the shadows. Check the scene out without being interrogated. Get my information from the shadows, from reflections.

I woke early. The sun was already bright and hot by the time it broke free of the horizon. My legs, the small of my back and my shoulders ached from yesterday's walking. It was the most walking I had done in a long time. I was sunburnt on my face, neck and hands. I unzipped my sleeping bag and pushed myself up out of it. The ghost town was a pounded dirt main street with buildings and platform sidewalks being renovated or built all new. Raw pine painted in fresh blues, browns, reds and yellows.

I figured to walk round above it to get things back in motion and check things out in the town. I rolled my bag and left it with my pack behind a bush down off to the side and walked the ridge above town to limber up, check things out and generally set the morning in motion.

Before long, I worked up considerable heat. I had to stop and take off my red ski jacket before I proceeded any further down the path. Thirty feet on, I saw a dead campfire. I took a shot of adrenaline in my stomach. Sign of man in a lonesome place. I pulled my jacket tight around my waist. My eyes narrowed.

The gray ash and charcoal didn't have any smoldering embers. I wasn't from last night. Empty cans and bottles stood against a nearby rock. A cardboard box held empty bread bags and plastic milk jugs.

I walked down the ridge slightly towards town. Nada. I walked in a different direction as though I were going to the nearest highway. Twenty feet down that path on the side was a bum lying against a bush. I walked down towards him. Five feet uphill from him was the hip flask he had stolen from my gear the day before. I picked it up and patted the dust off on my jeans. It was empty. It had been two inches full of good scotch that had been going round the fire at the Tempe freight yard. The bum panted in his sleep in a greasy wind breaker against the bush. The uphill part of his face was sandy. I saw the severe lines of alcoholic age. For him there was no difference now.

I walked back up the ridge and looked out at town. Carpenters with work belts or power tools emerged from scattered buildings. A group of five stood drinking coffee and waving hands in at buildings in consideration and planning of their day's work. I collected my shit and headed down to ask for work.

They had been saying that folks would arrive Monday. By Friday I was still skillsawing the ends off of a new platform sidewalk. I started at one end of the road and went down methodically to the end of the road.

"Excuse me!" a man yelled over my mechanical din, embarrassed, the first conventioneer. With no accommodations apparently ready for him he just walked down the street to grab the nearest workman that could point him to the martini reception. I told him the people were coming Monday.

"You're kidding!"

He suddenly saw his entire Toyota dealership yanked out from underneath his feet. His wife wouldn't be able to shop in Cincinnati on the weekends anymore. She would leave him. His daughter would stick her tongue out at him more often. He wandered off, not at all sure what to do, back to his Supra and slept it off for awhile. He could always worry later.

I put my cap on as the sun rose higher and tied my bandanna around my mouth as the pounded dirt of the street rose into a thick layer of afternoon dust. People kept

collaring me for directions because I worked in plain view and was an easy target. I got so many visitors I started to flesh out my role stand as a tour guide by standing wide, heavy and loose in my Seattle work boots with a bandanna over my mouth to keep the dust out, cap on the keep out the sun. I pointed directions with my still running skill saw. I categorized people according to their reaction. The royal We tightened up their lips and nose. The belligerents said That thing touches me you'll be plenty sorry. I won't be able to buy any Toyotas in the entire greater Louisville area. Some wouldn't give me the satisfaction and pretended not to notice.

I felt a presence behind me as I worked and jumped up and spun around landed right in my stance. It was young Toyota brass from Japan. I cut the saw and let it hang in my hand.

"Excuse me. Do you know where I may find some cement?" he said with minimal accent.

"Come over here," I said and walked him to the room we keep shit like that in. "Tell me what you need doing. We might already be planning to do it. Save you the effort."

"I am not sure you would be able to help us."

"You're quite sure?"

"Yes, thank you."

"O.K." I started to carry a bag over for him but he insisted on taking it. He walked off into an alley between two newly completed buildings. Some of the folks in charge of the renovations gathered on main street to figure out how to speed things up. I walked over and listened.

"I guess we could staple them."

"I guess we'll probably have to."

"Kind of a let down for them spending all of this money."

"They can just get their shit together if they want this done right."

"No doubt, no doubt."

"I wonder what ol' Ted's gonna make of all this noise."

"Where's he been anyway? I haven't seen him around lately."

"Maybe he up and keeled over. Keeps saying he's got a bad heart. 'I gotta bum ticker. Took too much speed touring in a country band. Got palpitations now.'"

"Bad heart his big claim to fame."

"Bad heart and a bunch of stories. He sure can tell a story. Must have met all of them old honkytonkers. I don't even care if he actually met them. It just sounds good to listen to..

"He can pick a tune on that ol' guitar, too."

"One of us outta go check up on him."

I went back to work. I'd been taking little boxes of the food they served the workers in the canteen on up to where I first saw any traces of him. Ever since I arrived in town, I never saw Ted the bum. I wasn't even sure he was getting the little boxes of food. They were always eaten but no telling whether a human ate them or a possum, jackrabbit, coyote or what.

The crowd milled around on main street in the morning, somberly and expectantly. Two men sat on motionless horses on opposite sides of the street. Small groups of people hovered around each horse. As Toyota dealers from all across the country, not too many people knew each other well enough to take sides one way or the other, although some may have had the same whores in certain large cities like Memphis, Las Vegas and New York.

I walked up to a comrade who worked banquet last night, sitting on the side of my sidewalk. I sat down next to him and ran my hand up and down the edge of the newly cut wood.

"Nice handiwork eh?" I asked.

"This you? It'll pass," he said.

"Pass, shit. This is practically the best thing we did. You don't know what kind of corners we out to get this out on time."

"I've been picking it up on it here and there. You know Elmers glue just won't do it!"

"Eh - Don't talk Elmers to me! We're strictly a Krazy Glue crew!"

A man with his arms around his chest looked at the horseman nearest us and nodded. He dropped his arms and walked to the other horsemen.

"What's the deal?" I asked.

"What do you know?"

"Different guys same woman."

"They were about to fight but everyone got tense about their franchises and made them race horses instead."

"Who's going to win?" I said. "Let's get a pool going."

"What do you mean win? Look at those horses!"

"How did they chose which horses they would ride?"

"They jumped on without either saying anything. I think they don't care. It's morning, they don't know the crowd and they just want to get it over with. I'm surprised they can sit on a horse. They were both stuffing my pockets with money for beer last night."

The starter had his arms around his chest again. He nodded up to the horsemen and stepped into the middle of the road. The two on horseback followed. The crowd moved quietly to the sidewalks. Some went behind the buildings to the steps of the shacks further on up the hill. The starter pointed discreetly from his hip at each horseman. They nodded. He raised a red bandanna in his hand overhead. They leaned forward with the reins in their hands. The starter dropped his bandanna. They took off galloping down the street and turned out of sight behind the buildings within a minute.

My comrade and I quickly scurried up the mountain above the shacks on the hill behind main street. The first one into the narrow path between the main street buildings and the shacks on the hill behind main street would probably win unless the second rider stayed extremely close and could out drag the leader on the short stretch of street coming back until the finish line. One went wide to make a play for it but couldn't get the momentum up to pass him. He dropped back and they both disappeared again behind a building. I watched the next gap for them to emerge.

I heard a pig squeal loudly, a man yell panicked, then a riot of Japanese Toyota Brass. The crowd on the steps and slope poured in behind them. We all hurried towards them. Four Japanese in gaudy western outfits helped a fifth Japanese similarly attired up the steps to the sidewalk of the new red saloon, laid him down and began seeking medical attention. One of the horses writhed on the dusty street amongst the tattered remnant of a gray stone Shinto shrine. It's hoof thwacked the sidewalk of the saloon intermittently. A horseman had a good scrape on his cheek bone and above his eye and his shirt was torn at the shoulder. He was explaining the crash to someone, walking it through. When he arrived at the end he looked at the horse for a moment and walked away. The crowd followed. A Japanese Toyota Brass person dashed through the slow swarm in a magenta and blue cowboy outfit. The horseman unbuttoned his shirt dunked his head in the new working horse trough scrubbed his cuts underwater with his left hand and patted his face dry with his shirt. The other rider came up. They talked to one another with half closed eyes.

Everyone is reconciled and goes to the outdoor auditorium in the narrow valley for an Authentic Hopi Snake Dance. The regular native American drummer took ill. Ted the Bum filled in for him. The ancient ceremonial dance with infused with the rhythm of a classic honkytonk beat. The strange cross cultural rhythms echoed wildly throughout the narrow valley.

Jessica

Summer 1988, Honolulu Hawaii

I called Jesse from the road on the Mainland

"A girl's been calling for you," he said.

"Which one?" I asked hopefully, picking and choosing from among my favorites.

"Jessica."

"Who?"

"The one you were sitting with in the front seat when I was making out with that tall blond the last time you were here."

"The fat dumb one?"

"Come on! She wasn't that bad!"

"Easy for you to say! You were sucking on some titty!"

"Just call her when you get back. She's really into you."

My interaction with her was primarily centered around trying to avoid seeing Jesse and Jessica's girlfriend make out hardcore behind us in the back seat of a car parked at the beach park at the bottom of Mariner's Ridge. I thought they were going to pork! I was incredibly irritated with and jealous of Jesse and her as they went at it but I couldn't very well drive off and deny my friend free milk, now could I? Instead of going for a walk, I kept myself amused with a sarcastic running commentary. Somehow this was enough to inspire the romantic interest of Jessica.

When I returned home, I blew her off until we happened to bump into each other at a party in a Waikiki hotel room. We wound up dry humping on the patio. "What I am I doing?" I thought. "She's just too fat and dumb! But she's willing. I am torn..."

I called her a few days later. She convinced me to pick her up after school the following Friday to hang out, before a bunch of mutual friends of ours planned to listen to Cecillio and Kaponono in the "welfare seats" of the Waikiki Shell Auditorium. The so-called welfare seats are actually the grass lawn beyond the fences of the auditorium.

Hundreds of people gather outside for popular concerts, drinking beer and wine from well stocked coolers and cooking kalbi ribs and teriyaki chicken on the hibachi to eat with rice and potato salad. You could easily argue that the welfare seats were actually better than the seats inside. In addition to being able to hear the music fine, you could also hibachi, smoke dope, have large coolers and feel generally more relaxed.

On our one and only "date," I rolled up in my yellow 1969 G.T.O. at the Hawaii School for Girls at La Pietra at the bottom of Diamond Head.

"WHAT am I getting myself into," I thought as I rounded the banana boat around the paved entry circle. I'd intentionally come after the rush of end of school because she was so fat, ugly and stupid that I didn't want to be seen with her. She was alone when I arrived to pick her up. That was good.

"Can I say you're my boyfriend now?" she asked.

"Oh Jesus Christ," I thought. "Call me whatever the hell you like."

We drove to my Dad's stucco mansion on Waialae Nui ridge. I offered her a cocktail. She declined.

"You won't be having one?" I thought. "I sure as hell will be. What the hell am I doing here? This is one desperate penis I have here!"

We sat on the pool deck overlooking the deep blue sea, the coconut trees of Kahala, and the golf course and expansive complex of the Kahala Hilton. Cloudless blue sky.

I was so disgusted with her and myself that I put on some of the fastest most aggressive music I had to forget what I was doing.

"Don't you have something else? Something mellow? Any Crosby, Stills and Nash?"

"Naaah! Something fast!" I said.

Out of courtesy to a guest, however, I went to put some on for her. She followed me into the house and kept trying to kiss and fondle me. I kept scooting away from her.

"Something's not right," I offered weakly. "The time isn't right."

"What do you mean 'the time isn't right?'" She was really horny.

That night we met all of our friends at the welfare seats behind the Waikiki Shell.

I wore a long sleeved white oxford shirt and colorful boxers of an ostrich sticking his head in the sand. Marc said he liked my outfit. It put me in fine fettle because he was not only a fellow aspiring writer but a clothes horse as well. I really respected his opinion on fashion. Jessica and I sauntered off away from the group and lay down next to one another on the patchy grass barely covering deep red dirt. She rolled on top of me lying down on my back and started dry humping me.

The red dirt here stains cloths easily. I'll ruin my favorite oxford shirt!

Meeting Amber

Fall Semester 1988, Bronxville New York

After I finally started going to school, I had a friend who lived two floors exactly above me in my dorm, a new boxy building that marred an otherwise attractive campus of large elegant buildings. I would always go and visit her when I felt like talking to someone. She was bright, humane and off-center. Talking with her was always interesting and important. Before long I hadn't finishing experiencing anything until I could finally share it with Amber.

Attractive as she was with long straight brown hair, dark eyebrows and nice small breasts, it never occurred to me that I might actually want to sleep with her. Indeed, I pitied her next lover. There was a mesmerizing black and white photograph above her desk of her hugging her first love from behind. Her arms hung loosely over his chest. He looked down and to the side with a bashful smile. She looked straight into the camera with a smile of unadulterated, blissed-out rapture.

There was honest and unqualified love in that striking picture. But she was here now and had long ago cashed those chips in for a new life. Her next lover would be a

picture on a wall someday too. It was that realization that made the picture compelling. I used to stare at it for awhile every time I visited her.

There were two other women I was thinking of sexually. One was a thin pale girl of medium height with fine thin shoulder length dusty brown hair. Her voice tended towards the high and squeaky and reiterated the cuteness and mousiness of her general mien. Her large breasts, however, did not. She was withdrawn, tenuous, intelligent and a fabulous and delicate player of several reed instruments. I was drawn to her as a kindred spirit and spent many evenings in her room. She always received me graciously but I was never really sure how welcome I was. I never made any advances toward her, attracted though I was.

The other woman I was attracted to was a year ahead of me but, because of my year on the road, was my age. Her long straight brown hair was practically down to her butt, accentuating her height and thinness and, dare I say, exquisitely balanced and fine featured face with long thin eyebrows. She had a quick ironic wit I was smitten with.

Although these two were the ones I was fondling in my daydreams, Amber wound up being the one I kissed in the flesh. With no ulterior motive I took her to the sculpture studio late one night to show her a piece I was carving in plaster-of-paris. No one was there. We left the lights off to regard the forms on tables by the orange light of the street light coming in through the wall of windows.

"Guess which one is mine," I said.

"I was afraid you might say that," she answered.

She saw the request as portentous and took her time, walking slowly from piece to piece, contemplating each one carefully with a furrowed brow.

She came back to one in particular and studied it awhile longer. It wasn't mine but it was the only one similar to mine, with dynamic, well rounded organic forms. She had never seen any of my drawings and had no way of knowing my visual style. I put her to this test, curious, but expecting nothing. How could I? She had no way of knowing.

"This one," she said hesitantly without looking at me.

"Nope."

"THAT ONE!" she said pivoting quickly on her feet pointing at her second choice with firm decisiveness.

"That's the one," I conceded. "Amazing!"

Amber had already startled me on numerous occasions before with penetrating offhand observations that revealed me to myself like revelations. I had spent my whole life in Hawaii, in Europe and in America being at best only partially understood even by those closest to me. She seemed to understand me intuitively before we even really got to know each other. A sense of little girl fear somewhere deep within her also drew me towards her strongly .

We kissed, tenderly, tentatively, holding each other in the dim light amidst small white plaster sculptures.

Although she had kissed me back, the second guessing began almost immediately. Had I been too forward? Had she merely humored me? Was she actually bemused and indifferent? I couldn't tell. We remained friendly and still took meals together as often as we had before. We didn't push it any further until the night of the Debutante Ball put on by a consortium of campus gay and lesbian groups.

The ostensive purpose of the event was for "coming out," as in "of the closet." The student body was 3:1 female to male and nearly half gay, lesbian or experimenting. Guys did drag at the drop of a hat. Heterosexuals in "gender appropriate clothes" were welcome to dance at the ball as well. On a campus of one thousand where you knew everybody by sight within three weeks and most people didn't get off campus that much, it was basically a chance to dress like grown ups. We all jumped at it.

I had already dodged one kissing scene in a secluded stairwell high up above the melee with a drunk girl I had a semi-crush on. I had joined her up there to help her through the worst of her drunkenness. When she tried to kiss me I pulled back, partially

because she was loaded and couldn't mean what she was doing but mostly because I realized that my heart was previously occupied, that I was deeply attracted to Amber. She was embarrassed at my rejection of her advances. I didn't want to hurt her and stayed with her a little while longer.

"I didn't mean for this to happen. I didn't mean for this to happen," she said. I soon left her to her solo agony to rejoin the dance.

After the ball, Amber and I ended up in my dorm room. My roommate wasn't there. We started kissing passionately. For the first time in my life having sex seemed more natural than not. We arrived at that point that had kept me from consummation so many times before. Fear and then relief at the conscious decision not to go for penetration and we could simply kiss and fondle and eat each other out. I felt none of the hesitation I had always felt at that point before.

Natural instincts took over. It was nothing as dramatic as I had always worried about. In our passion, I did tear the top of her black stockings. For a week I was unsure. Was she mad at me for that? Did she think I had gone too far?

We eventually reconciled.

The last night before winter break I took a microdot of ecstasy of hers on a whim. I had never tried it before but had heard great things about it and was curious. No one could really put their finger on what it did to you. Something about kindness and complete honesty. Explanations always trailed off with, "You've just got to try it."

It started kicking in after half an hour. I felt a tremendous thirst, like I could drink beer like water on a July afternoon. Amber, an old ecstasy hand, knew this quandary and switched me to water after my second beer.

I was seeing God. I was passionately and sincerely in love with all five people in the room (especially with their happiness). I was in love with the Public Enemy and Sarafina tapes playing on the ghetto blaster. The sounds inspired me to use the big

National Geographic world map on the wall to share my vision of the path of the blues out of West Africa into North America as it created modern American music.

"You can still find tribes so isolated that their music sounds like the 18th century when they started shipping over a lot of slaves. It sounds amazingly like the country blues. Through New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago where it switched after W.W. II from acoustic to electric."

I drew the path in light pencil and added another line over from the British Isles.

"The folk music scene arrived with the Irish and Anglo-Saxon immigrants on the east coast and drifted southward along the Appalachians. It evolved into bluegrass and country and when it reached Memphis it joined the blues and became Rock and Roll. Rock and Roll opened up into funk with James Brown and Sly Stone and Parliament and the Ohio Players to form so much of that pool of material that hip hop samples from."

I was aglow with enthusiasm and revelation. The pupils of my eyes were going Margaret Keane.

"The music of the world and its evolution is like a symphony. Every large region has its own unique sound to contribute. I'll be right back. I'm going to get tapes," I said and ran off to my room to get examples to illustrate my points, ran back, stuck my head into the door and said "Who needs a beer?" Glanced from face to face to collect orders.

Amber shined eyes at me, smiling tenderly.

I was still x-ing a little the next morning. Amber sat in my room as I packed. We said what young lovers say in the first glow of their love, promises to meet, in Hawaii within a week. Her stepfather worked for United Airlines and she flew free. I zipped up my black leather bag and threw it by the door. We hugged, souls who had found each other, still painfully and sweetly unsure as to where we stood with each other. I walked out of the dorm into a warm light rain towards the Metro North train station. The overcast day and wet streets of the ride into Grand Central Station were as sweet as our parting caresses. It was poignant to look out of the window of the moving train. Even

the wretched waste-filled streams of ratty industrial south Bronx were invested with the melancholy headiness of new love.

Why can't we all live like I felt last night, so instinctively considerate and caring? How long until the drug recuperation afterglow fades and I'm as callous, cynical, guarded and hateful as I was before? Why can't the lessons of the mountain ever be brought back down into the valley? What am I to Amber? She sounds like she had a lot of lovers in Berkeley before she came to Sarah Lawrence College. Am I just another fling?

First Holiday

Holidays 1988-1989, Honolulu Hawaii

I was still x-ing slightly when I arrived in Hawaii in the morning after my first semester of college. My mom's bedroom smelled strongly of Ruffles perfume. I always got a heavy whiff of it walking past the bathroom. For years after, I got an ecstasy flashback every time I smelled that scent.

When Amber joined me in Hawaii, we had to make our lovebed out of two foam futons that folded into three sections on the floor in the front room. The indoor camping aspect of it added a lot of delightful and precious common tasks that were related to such basic urges as sleeping and having sex with each other that bonded us even more closely together.

My old bedroom was taken over by a new brother, a crib, hanging mobiles, toys, bags of diapers, cans of infant formula and related paraphernalia. I would wake up early to drive my mom to work in the legal ghettos of downtown Honolulu so we could have the car for the day.

I returned home to wake up and coax the small naked body of my beloved out from beneath the sheets with kisses and caresses. By 8:30 a.m. it would be bright, sunny and warm. A cool breeze would come in through the nylon screens. The sun would crackle the red metal roof shingles next door. I would turn the overhead fan on low, put

on some music and we would have sex to greet the day. A shower of cool water together. Peets coffee imported straight from Berkeley, rocket fuel to aid in the planning our day's adventures.

I had a million things I wanted to do with her. I had spent a lifetime being a methodical athletic loner on O'ahu, racking up a huge treasury of nooks and crannies meaningful to me but never shared with many others, fabulous vistas, secret beaches and hidden waterfalls.

We took long drives with the ragtop down, Amber in daisy duke shorts and a bikini top by my side, blasting Public Enemy ("I know you hate my 98! Suckers learn when my wheels burn!") to secluded scorching beaches to sandslide, swim and sun by ourselves, to hike Tantalus through Ko'olau Mountain rain forests and have surreptitious sex with simultaneous orgasms on public hiking trails, and to Makapu'u to bodysurf every time the waves were 2-3 or better, which was often (including a sweet silent session of discovery of profound mutual love and reverent hopefulness sitting quietly together before the Waimanalo Mountains as close as we could get to them in a car, a wall of majestic tropical green ribbons of mountain cliff rising 2,500 feet.

We made a long moped journey to the Haunama Bay Marine Preserve on Kalaniana'ole Highway past Kalani High School. Our baskets were full of bouncing cans of guava and mango juice, and greasy bags of half moon and pork hash dim sum, manapuas and rice cakes.

Haunama Bay is famous for skin diving with vast schools of different gentle colorful fish to feed and bulbous coral formations to swim quietly among. Legendary local lava tube Toilet Bowl to play is a half mile walk away. It drains to inches of water in a sand covered rock bottom with the egress of each wave and then explodes with ten feet of surging surf (fifteen counting spray) as each wave comes in; don't get close to the rock walls or you will get smacked around! Come before 10:00 a.m. or the water is too

cloudy from all of the zillions of tourists flapping sand and crap up; the snack concession is expensive; bring food or eat at Koko Marina Shopping Center nearby.

We took languorous drives to the North Shore to do various combinations of sandsliding and swimming at Kahana Bay, eating fresh prawns with melted butter at the Laie aquaculture farm stand on the side of the road, having exciting and dangerous semi-public sex at the end of the trail by the huge heiau (native Hawaiian religious site) overlooking Waimea Bay at Pupukea, jumping off of the big black lava rock into the water and swimming in the Bay and eating a Matsumoto shave ice with ice cream and azuki beans because our love was a special occasion and worth the expense and departure from conventional syrup-only frozen delights of the countless workaday surf weekends.

Back at School

Spring Semester 1989, Bronxville New York

Back at school things passed well. It was difficult for me to fall asleep with her on the standardized thinness of the dorm beds after an evening's cuddling. I usually left to crash alone in my own bed. She later told me this was always a painful parting for her. I understood. Love - gone - alone - darkness.

I held my first "48 Hours" art event, modeled on one I attended in Austin previously. I got \$300 from the school and went to town, literally, going to Yonkers to buy mass amounts of art supplies and cheap toys. In the largest auditorium on campus, probably a three hundred seater, I left these items and every conceivable tool of artistic creation, not only art supplies but typewriters, musical instruments, amplifiers, microphones, a video camera, an overhead projector, and assorted tools. I urged everyone to take psychedelic drugs and stay inside the building as long as possible and let that critical mass of hallucinating exhausted humans spark incredible acts of delirious and brilliant creativity and tender human feelings of compassion and solidarity.

Little documentation of the event follows. There is a photo of me as the anxious impresario-artist prior to the beginning of the festivities. There are photos of the psychotic, terrifying and deadly words and images painted all over the walls where performers enter at off-stage right. There is a photo of me exhausted, cleaning up, with a giant wad of butcher paper, waving my hand like Queen Elizabeth. What follows are the ragged pages left strewn about hither and yon at the conclusion of the event.

48 Hours Writings

Spring Semester 1989, Bronxville New York

dear rolling stones,

would you please perform at my keg party at sarah lawrence. we know you are into kinky sex and we think you'd fit right in here.

please consider this offer

honeykins

dear rolling stones

the above letter is obviously a forgery and should be ignored by your estimable selves.

we would never presume to ask people of your advanced years to travel so far, just for the possibility of some orgasms.

with apologies

your fond rememberers

dear rolling stones,

I am too unoriginal to think up something but I feel like using up paper.

wastrelly

ms. moist of knightsbridge

dear rolling stones,
why doncha bronze your fucking cocks, already?
really

dear rolling stones,
how the hell are you, I'm fucked up but I felt like it

gogogo read it and weep
hey there how's it going?
are you having a good time?
are you having a good rhyme?
what's giggin' jackie?
machine in use
rinse indicator
unbalanced signal
nuclear weapons
pretentious people
drink some beer
multitudinous excitation
this writing implement is quivering
let's all be different
JUST LIKE ME
I love you...
ice cubes in the eye and on the brain
wow what a hip idea to have a typewriter at an otherwise boring party
otherwise they longed to be young Shitheads cause they writing what they know

this is great this is where i start to send key

diplomatic messages

"do you have any cigarettes"

the question posed is the question waiting

If you cannot write, why touch the keys? Yet, all of you seem to insist on it, as if every one of our words were a precious drop of blood. They aren't. You should become secretaries or businessmen or producers of plays or something. Give up. Go away.

Don't you know paper costs money? Idiots.

Idiots he screamed congratulated himself and walked off.

THISISFUNNYBUTIFEELLIKEIMINAFISHBOWL

THE MUSIC WAS FUCKING LOUD AND THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF FIRE
CRACKERS

SAY IT LOUD

HERE THERE LOUD

IT MEANS WISHING

IF THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE, IT'S FULL OF
FERTILIZER

The time is at hand the master race will triumph

stamp out and no more trees or else fucker

yeah what he said Jerry Lives

when the typewriter sways before you you know

you've reached

oblivion

it's all over because it never was

were is the point of this shitwad of a party?

I ask you YOU YOUYOUYOU

TONIGHT IS...THE NIGHT, FOR WHAT? song and dance

I think i'll go there not here go there some other place, i imagined, comprehend,

comprehend, lost before the actual facts broke my schism insanity fish butter cups that's a

code to my friends but not you no skip pure knowledge

THE CRITICAL THING TO REMEMBER

COGITO ERGO ZOOM

SITTING HERE IN FRONT OF A TYPEWRITER TYPING THINGS TO FORGET IN

MY DRUNKEN STUPOR. THINGS TO FORGET BECAUSE THEY DON'T matter

things to forget because the world passes by before your eyes things to forget because the

world is changing things to forget because the world of people never will

what is perceived is real what is judged is not?

so you graduate with the world in front of you the behind supporting your every step yes

the world is in front of you and isn't that all it really is

And so, if the air every lifts over this sickening collection of used paper cups that sticky

spittle in the bottom

Mike sports the red pulse of music

Johnny in white, a spiritual DEFECT, SOON TO BE DISCOVERED.

There were these two girls who were spotted, there was this school, they went there. This guy, this dude came over to them.

What's going on?

There were these two women, they were old. They spoke alot about the war...There was this bomb, it was there, and none of the women knew it. There were these two girls, they were students and didn't really care what happened in the world. There was this world.

- TWO GIRLS SPOTTED

It was a dark and stormy night...i was alone

so fuck me up the ass

so that was a little too real to leave near me

FLESH IS PROBLEMATIC

like poem dislike poem eventually we are all here and to save ourselves we must do it by our bootstraps so we do it is the calling

to rise again

to survive

new idea waiting for the old to can you believe it what is it

I'll give you my

All wacky

I don't really understand this typewriter. It's fucked, big time. Oh well, I can't really do anything about that. Fuck man. Where did Danny and Shelby go? I wonder...

Enough of this. I really don't understand this typewriter. Fuck. Okay I'll start again...

It's really IMPOSSIBLE TO WRITE HERE. DEATH!!!DEATH!!!DEATH!!!
HO! HO! Oh well, I can't write a goddamn thing because this is hardly an environment
which is conducive to concentration.

PRESIDENT BUSH!!! I LOVE THAT MAN!!! I REALLY DO!!! HE'S
STRONG, HE'S LEAN, HE'S MEAN, FUCK THIS ISN'T RIGHT SOMEHOW FUCK
I'm in no state to write fuck I can't do this, never mind sorry I tried

This is my typewriter. It isn't fucked up you are...But I am too. Everyone is fucked up
they just don't understand why they are fucked up. I have the answers.

That wasn't me but I'm back and better than ever. I'm Ramen noodles now. The
Towelmaster Rules!!! Do you have the psi? The madness has grown. There are more
and more mad slc students. Some aren't mad yet but give it time and it will happen.
Specifically, Jeremy broccoli is here and he's just staring. However, Ben is playing
baseball with a clay ball. This could be interesting. I hope no one steps in my water but
I'm afraid that it could happen. In fact, it is getting fucking crowded in here. It's 12:40
a.m. so it must be slc prime time. That explains it. I cannot cook. The Ramen noodles
will prove that because I don't think it will resemble anything edible.

HEAVEN WAS YESTERDAY NEWS

QUIET

IS

yesterdays too I need a typewriter as I always need a typewriter i need to understand it on
a sheer poet gene level yesterday's news when all you cats left you did this like fucking
high school

THE MUSIC BITES

PRETTY PROUD OF YOURSELF BOYCE AIN'T YA
GOT THAT GODDAMN GRIN ON yer face again
ok whatever eric I know you will know what I mean
TALKING ABOUT LIGHT
ABOUT TOO MUCH PROFESSIONAL LIGHT
THAT'S what I see
that and goddamn cheap shit no where to stand music
all the porn stars sighed...And later, they took off their clothes and
fell to the floor
tonight
on the Brooklyn Bridge
the power lines broke
quietly
over
the sunrise
AND SOMEBODY SAID "FAIR WARNING, BLOOD SAUSAGE POSSE'S IN
EFFECT." So I hid behind my UHURU and quivered. It was a real UHURU, not just a
Sears UHURU, by the way. This guy came up and asked, "What ya writin'?" Who the
hell knows? If it's supposed to be such a commercial, no I meant a free world, then what
the hell business if it of yours? Then again, I just said, "LET'S PARTY!"

and we are all drunk, sitting around, playing with clay and paint. it's a sorry existence.
who the fuck cares anyway? it doesn't really matter in the end. HOUSE MUSIC ALL
NIGHT LING...OOPS...I MEAN HOUSE MUSIC ALL NIGHT LONG.

Hey beautiful what's happening

someone said to someone else

no no you are quite wrong

Life was strange. It was strange like the cooling sensation that you get right before the nuclear blast. You know the nuclear blast is coming, but there isn't anything you can do but wait, unless you take the National Lampoon version and bend over so your head hangs between your legs and kiss your ass goodbye. I always thought the SLC was crazy and tonight proves it. Ashley is playing with the overhead projector and Nathan is singing as if he was a harpooned baby seal. There was nothing to do but join in with the madmen and type everything as if it was all meaningful. And type very badly at that. No wonder everyone I know is taking advantage of the fact that therapy at this school is free. However for some people this is the only therapy they have. They'll be crazy in Reisinger Auditorium and play with various electrical equipment. The bigger they are the more complicated their toys become. My toy is only the typewriter. It seems that some other people's toys are much more expensive. Nathan will make a toy of whatever comes along about now seems more content with the microphone. The constituency seems to have grown here and there is a now a much greater variety of madness present. I think that it probably has a lot to do with the fact at I left the door open so the whole campus can hear all the noise that can be made by a microphone and electric guitar and an old piano. Nathan however is still the centerpiece of the rage of insanity. It seems as if it's going to stay that way for awhile. I believe the importance of typing right now is that I keep going and don't stop so I can be a part of the insanity. Nathan is looking at me too much because I am not doing anything. Perhaps this whole 48 Hours thing has some way of portraying what Sarah Lawrence is about but I think not. Yes this is the 48 Hours thing. We don't do this all the time. Oh no Nathan. Now Nathan is doing sections from Greater Tuna. Actually I don't know that the tuna is so great, but I don't know if that actually matter. I attempted to order pizza but failed. If I had the number to Dominos I

would order but I don't and I don't feel like looking for it and nobody else is doing anything but being silly as if I was being normal. Ben is standing over me and I don't think that I like it. There must be something calling me and I can't hear it. Scheizahuntswasse und cockespeil. I think I will take a break at least for a minute and check out what the hell is happening in the pub. Nathan needs a box of tranquilizers and I've been looking for no I've been listening to him for him for too long!!!

Well, Boyce, I hope your feeling pretty good about this.

Matt is here and has been the whole night just like you would like him to be.

There's someone else doing what I hope will not be a problem. She's painting the door.

I know you don't like me. I worry too much and don't mind my own business.

This typewriter is difficult, so you learn to work with it. I think that's been what I've been doing wrong with my whole big life, insisting on certain things instead of learning to work with them, at least that's what I would say if I had to pick something that was wrong with my whole big life. Usually the only time I think about that kind of stuff is when I'm feeling pretty good about it, unless, of course, I'm doing an experiment, trying to force myself to feel bad when I know I should but really don't.

You know how it is, or maybe you don't, when people don't notice when you're really screwing up and only have good things to say. It's a big problem, as are most other things.

I don't think I'll make any new friends for awhile. It's not a process I particularly enjoy, making new friends. I think that's because then you have them, new friends I mean.

Well, I think I've done this thing to the best of my ability and I will now go back to my real life and try to write a psychology paper.

Thanks Boyce. It occurred to me that this is you and you are this, and I liked it for the time I was here and was glad to eat breakfast alone this morning. Not that you care. Not that I do.

Good morning. Maybe I'll come back, though it would probably be a pretty bad idea, though maybe I will, because poor judgment at least will tell you what you don't want to be when you grow up.

Spring Break

Spring Semester 1989, Bennington Vermont - Bronxville New York

We made a disastrous visit to a Berkeley girlfriend of Amber's named Sara up at Bennington College in Vermont over Spring Break, four of us in a small dorm room. Sara and her love interest were constantly snapping at each other. (The love interest, a superlative jazz drummer, had spent a month's worth of grocery money on a big stack of classic 1950s post-bebop jazz C.D.s. My sympathies were with him, prioritizing artistic fuel over quotidian necessities.) If they did this while we were walking, I would drift ten feet in front of them. If they did this in a room, I would drift to a window and stare out at the snowy landscape. I was giving them the space to argue in peace. When the emotional tumult was over I would drift back.

The few evenings we spent there, I wrote in my notebook in the wood paneled study of Sara's dormitory. Writing there alone in that large elegant room with the snow falling in the night slowly around me, I felt like Bennington College alumni Bret Easton Hollis lionized so tremendously just a few years before.

Sara and Amber interpreted this behavior as a pissy aloofness and "a refusal to make the situation work." They were right about the latter. The situation wouldn't work. Why fight it? Why not just leave? Somehow the fighting of Sara and her lover in such cramped quarters wasn't the source of tension. My avoidance of their fighting was. I felt

under fire and wrongly accused by people who would never see my side of it, kind of like Yugoslavia.

Similarly, I began formulating my trip Back immediately. I visualized myself camping down the Interstate alone back south to Bronxville (even though the landscape was covered with snow and it was below freezing). The blow up finally came in the sporting goods section of a department store in town as I poked around silently for the portable pots and pans appropriate to my journey. Sara fled. Amber and I finally had it out by ourselves in the middle of a deserted street after walking two miles back to campus crunching snow on opposite sides of the road.

"Of course you have to do what you have to do," she said about my plans to camp, with tears in her eyes. I didn't understand her perspective. If the situation wouldn't work, why be there? But her anguish was sincere and touching. I couldn't bear to see her in pain. I resolved not to go, but to stay and try to understand her.

We struck a compromise and returned to Sarah Lawrence. We moved her and her roommate's beds together and played house for the last week and a half of Spring Break. We bought so many groceries that we had to taxi them the mile back home from the A & P grocery store. We had someone on the inside slipping us major discounts on our expensive items like imported beer that mysteriously rang as Milwaukee's Best and fine cuts of meat which always seemed to register as Hamburger, and flipping assorted gourmet knick knacks over the check-out laser beams.

That week and a half, we had sex twice in the morning, caught the train into the City by noon, spent the day at the Met, M.O.M.A., Greenwich Village or any number of other exciting hotspots in one of the great cities of the world, usually wrapping up the evening with cappuccinos and a poetry reading at some hip cafe, wine and cheese at a gallery opening, or some strange band at an all ages club, preferably C.B.G.B.s (as we were neophytes and I was a big David Byrne fan).

She told me later that last summer before Paris during our journey through Big Sur and the Sierra Nevadas that Sara had threatened to revoke her friendship, Amber's strongest, if we left together for Sarah Lawrence. She said she told Sara in tears that she had to go with me. We were beginning to make sacrifices to each other and what we had found. The rest of second semester passed well. We grew closer and closer.

Generic Bridge #1

Summer 1989, Bronxville New York - Honolulu Hawaii

My father had said in no uncertain terms that he couldn't afford anymore time at Sarah Lawrence. The first year was it - all there was going to be. Amber and I stayed on campus as long as we could after the school year was over to stretch out our last tiny bit of time together.

In the absence of any better plans, North America beckoned me to hitchhike through it further. As with Belgrade a few years before, Honolulu felt like it had no more lessons for me. It would be a living death to return there. Although I was burning to get back on the trail of the Inexpressible Something I was tracking, practicality reared its ugly head. Since I wasn't coming back next year I couldn't leave any of my crap at school over the summer. Somehow two trunks and three duffel bags worth of shit had to get back to Hawaii. It turned out to cost about as much to fly back with it as luggage as it would have to ship it as freight. I submitted to the inevitable and returned home.

After less than a week in Hawaii I was on the road again bound for Alaska for no other reason than the fact that I had never been there before and it was supposed to be beautiful and sparsely populated. I spent two months hitching down through Alaska up to the Yukon and south through British Columbia and the American West to meet Amber for the first time at her home in Berkeley.

Looking for Work at the Fisheries

Summer 1989, Petersburg Alaska

The ferry Taku pulled into port and I walked off the ship with my world on my back. I had packed my backpack well, compact and well balanced. I was gratified to feel so mobile. I had it all with me. The polyester knit hordes I disembarked with would hurry about, see nothing, and get back on feeling productive and virtuous for having gotten off in the first place. Me, I could stay there if I wanted to, completely self sufficient. My ticket allowed me to catch the next ferry if I liked.

I had imprinted the city map in my head from a wall of the ferry and walked towards a cannery. There was barely any activity along the waterfront. A man walked some garbage to a dumpster. Should I ask him, "Is there anyone here today I can talk to about getting some work?" I paused on the side of the road and considered the question as he disappeared back into the dimness of the building.

A thought came to mind, one I hadn't considered. I only want to work a week or two. Maybe is the kind of work that takes awhile to get the hang of. Maybe they wouldn't hire me if they don't think I'll stick around for awhile. I walked along the waterfront road towards town and the other three fisheries.

Petersburg was a tightly grouped little town with well mowed lawns and new fences. In many respects, it wasn't a typical Alaskan town. It seemed like a playground. I got the feeling it was the summer residence of the affluent and in-the-know of Anchorage.

I found a little park with benches off to the side of the road and followed a trail down to the ocean and finished a pack of M & M's I bought on the ferry, to cheer me up in case job hunting hadn't gone well. It hadn't. The fisheries weren't busy, entrances weren't distinct enough for me to find and the one community bulletin board in town had a few index cards tacked up looking for work but none offering any.

The rocky shore of the park near the dock was littered with cardboard from cheap beer suitcases from town kid's late night parties drinking and making out away from the

watchful eyes of families. I sat down on the bench and had a sacred peanut butter, banana and honey sandwich with some water. Bald headed eagles came and went from a huge nest on the top of the tree above me. I was in the middle of town.

After lunch, I stowed my stuff in some bushes nearby, took off to see the city and look for work unburdened. Maybe mobility would give me more confidence and bring me better luck. Kids played everywhere throughout town. The wilderness behind the new houses and apartments was a boggy swamp. I tromped around on muddy trails looking for somewhere dry to sit and found none. I saw a boardwalk across the bog, climbed onto it and followed it to a tent city where two young dudes were playing horse shoes. One of them hit a ringer and said "Oh sweet!" I travel thousands and thousands of miles and I still can't avoid surfer dudes saying 'sweet'?!

I talked to a guy at the camp. He said they didn't have any work there. I kept on walking, taking a new road to town. The houses all looked so snazzy and new. I kept an eye out for places to sack out in and found a few but as the road kept on and on I figured it would be a long trek back out of town with my heavy pack. I realized I hadn't been worrying enough about the welfare of my backpack, lying lonely and vulnerable far away from me. I thought it would be safe at least for a little while because a family came to the park to picnic when I started on my journey around the island. I figured the family's boy, inquisitive, would find my wallet but duty bound by the wealth of his find would report it to his folks. They, setting a good example, would tell him not to touch it. I even dreamed of finding a twenty dollar bill stuffed in it somewhere.

When I got back, it was unmolested. I ate a banana and watched the eagles some more. A harbor seal bobbed backwards in the current offshore and disappeared. A few moments later he resurfaced where he started to ride the conveyor belt again.

I walked back toward the ferry terminal to find out when the next ferry south was, meandering through town to get one last feel for it. I hit a dead end street. It was that kind of town, that kind of day.

After I got the departure time straight, 7:00 p.m., I hung out on the bench on shore near the landing, reading John Cheever. I had been reading his collected stories this whole Alaska trip and was finally getting a little impatient with it. Perhaps the submerged violence and faded gentility of his suburban cocktail hours were not the most relevant trains of thought for a teenager looking for work in the middle of the Alaskan Panhandle by himself. I looked at my surroundings. They were beautiful. Water, steep giant mountains, trees and snow. Interesting contours, dark profiles and placid waters. I looked at my watch, something I had been doing a lot for someone who had no constraints on his time. It said 6:00 p.m. I was alone with nowhere to go.

Coffee in the Garden

Summer 1989, Berkeley California

I got into Salt Lake City in the early afternoon. At 1:00 a.m. I was still thumbing in the desert at the edge of town, delirious at finally being a long day's travel away from Amber after waiting so long to see her.

"A lot of people cross Nevada at night," I told myself hopefully as I stood on the side of the road. Every Greyhound bus with "San Francisco" destination labels made my heart race.

"Give me a ride!" I yelled at them, shaking my fists. Finally I had to admit to myself that it wasn't going to happen that night. A taxi pulled over and gave me a free ride to the airport to sleep in the passenger lounge for a few hours.

I went to the downtown Berkeley B.A.R.T. station to clean up and look nice for my grand entrance and to find a coin-operated locker to stow my pack in so that I would look like less of a bedraggled road rat. They were already all occupied with the meager possessions of the many homeless people roaming around there. I had to settle for shaving, brushing my teeth and combing my hair in the bathroom of the gas station I stopped at to investigate a map of the city. I found her street and memorized how to walk

there from where I was. I picked flowers on the way to give her a hello bouquet, carefully gathering the widest possible variety of colors, shapes and textures. Passers by must have thought I was yet another moon-eyed northern California hippie. It was a small price to pay for the prospect of a smile on her face.

At her door, I was knocked out cold by how slim and sexy she was in a tight short goldenrod summer dress with spaghetti straps. Later she said she was equally knocked out by the flowers. We kissed hello and I handed her the blooms.

Amber had a tiny semi-subterranean low-ceilinged room, always full of cool air and luscious to return to after a day in the bright California summer sun. The diaphanous curtains over the horizontal sliver of a view of the narrow garden wafted gently in the breeze when we left the door to the backyard open. We spent three idyllic weeks together traveling the Bay Area far and wide before her mother began to agitate for my imminent departure.

In calling my mother to check in I learned that my father had called her from Europe to demand that I return to Hawaii to rehabilitate his dilapidated 44' sailboat and put it on the market to raise money for my next semester at Sarah Lawrence.

I was inclined to ignore him. He was always giving me edicts and ultimatums and retaining me in indentured servitude. I was tired of it. I wanted an education and I wanted to be with Amber longer but I wanted my autonomy most of all. It was touch and go for a day or so as to which path I would take. I felt like this was as good a juncture as any to tear my collar of him and all of the strings he had always attached to supporting me. It wouldn't have been that hard to just find a place and a job and settle right there in Berkeley, independent. The boat wasn't going to sell anyway. It was an obsolete decaying piece of shit with no market value to speak of. Pot-bellied veteran sailors in the Ala Wai yacht harbor bars made fun of the noble aspirations of its name, "Achanar," the southern point of the Southern Cross constellation, and its obsolete design by affectionately referring to it as the "Aardvark."

Going back to work on the boat meant that there would just be that many less weeks with Amber, a horrible prospect now that every day was so precious, nearly our last one. I didn't want to leave. I didn't think he would pay for school even if I did return to Hawaii to fix that old clunker. In tender paws reading newspapers and drinking coffee on the grass of her parent's beautiful backyard garden surrounded with 80 foot high eucalyptus trees rustling in the breeze, she convinced me otherwise.

"If you go back it will be hard for him to justify not paying for another semester because you will have done what he asked you to," she offered.

"You don't know my father," I said. "If it doesn't sell, he won't pay."

"But if you stay you know he won't pay. If you go back, there's at least a chance he might. You've got to bet on that chance."

She convinced me. I left.

The Eviction

Summer 1989, Honolulu Hawaii

The Koa hatch on the bow was indifferently askew. From it an orange power cord emerged surreptitiously to meet the electrical outlet box on the edge of the sidewalk. Ripples circled outward where the cord hung abjectly in the fetid harbor water. Only one group of people was capable of orchestrating such scintillating incompetence, avid desperation and bungled furtiveness in the simple and straightforward task of stringing a power cord a short ways: junkies. I took off my slippers and climbed over the chain link fence onto the pier with special care and quiet, gripping the fence wire tightly with my long toes. I jumped off onto the concrete and stood motionless in anticipation of a potential onslaught of machetes or fists. Neither materialized.

When my adrenaline racked heart finally settled, I strode down the short strip of cement dock and jumped over the low wire railing onto the boat. Looking through the open main hatchway, I saw a fully dressed couple wake with a start at the thud of my

landing on the deck. They were lying on a white wooden bunk on a ratty old twin mattress with no sheets, for houses, not boats. The man got up quickly and disappeared to the bow cabin. The woman looked at me, rolled over and tried to fall back asleep. I stood on deck in the cockpit, a few steps back from the entry hatch and waited for everything to brew down in the dim cabin.

The man returned from the bow cabin putting on a T-shirt. He leaned against the counter top down in the cabin and turned the non-functional faucet knobs back and forth. I walked to the hatch and leaned slightly into the cabin, hanging by my elbows.

"You guys gotta split," I said. "I'm locking up the boat."

"Stay yours?" the man said. He was drawn and hollow, his skin the spongy yellow texture of someone who survives on dollar bills and stray change plunked down on convenience store counters at odd hours.

"It's my Dad's"

"You stay Blackie's boy?"

"No."

"You know the Papakoloa Boys?" he said in thick pidgin English. "I was with them last night and they when go say this was their boat. It figured it was too good for be true so I when I crash here but I never when go believe them."

I nodded from behind my sunglasses without saying anything. I took a few steps back in the cockpit and waited silently for them to gather their greasy jackets and cigarettes and come out of the boat. The man, whose build still had hints of working with weights before he got lost on drugs, stopped playing with the faucet and looked up.

"You can get my fan? From the front," he asked.

It was a primal game, to see whether I would relinquish the superiority of being on the deck, in charge and physically higher.

"No."

"Stay mine but." He made no move towards its alleged location.

"Just leave it. I have to talk to my dad."

He emerged from the hatchway squarely, self consciously, as though displaying hairless muscles under baby oil for the jury at a weightlifting competition. I resisted the impulse to take a few more steps back and stood my ground. He jumped off the boat, his girlfriend close behind. I wanted obvious deckbound duties to establish my presence for the discreet over the shoulder glances I thought they might fling back after a few hundred yards of walking. I hoisted the power cord hand over hand out of the water, coiled it between my elbow and thumb, left it in a neat round bundle on the deck and reset the wooden forward hatch tightly over the square hole. The molding had been ripped off to circumvent the lock.

I went inside the boat to inspect the damage left by the squatters. The air was stuffy with dry rancid sweat and cigarette smoke. There were butts everywhere, anyone which could have sent the boat up in flames as they kept burning during a burnt-out druggie pass-out. I dragged the mattress out of the boat and threw it off of the bow onto the sidewalk.

I patted my pockets checking for money, hopped off the boat and dragged the ratty mattress to the dumpster on my way to the marine store across the parking lot. I bought a new lock, epoxy and epoxy hardener and a popsicle (for a stick to mix my solvents with). I walked back with borrowed bolt cutters, cut the lock and realized I didn't have any of power tools I needed to fix the molding. I returned the bolt cutters to the marine store, came back, ate my popsicle and thought.

Getting Things

Summer 1989, Honolulu Hawaii

I spent three nights trying to regulate my body temperature by coming inside when I woke up too cold on the deck and going outside when I woke up too stuffy in the cabin. I made three or four trips a nights, using my shirt as a pillow. I always woke up

scuzzy and never got much sleep. Took a short walk to the beach every morning for a swim and cleanup from the cold public rinse-off shower nozzles. The boat had no cushions, no lighting, no shower, no toilet, no refrigeration and no ventilation.

My first instinct whenever I felt things breaking up around me was to flee, lay down some tracks, figure things out (or let them figure themselves out) and then move back slowly towards reintegration. Distasteful as the idea was, I had to go back to my folk's house to get various tools and supplies to make the boat more livable.

I got in my yellow 1969 G.T.O. and started home to my mom's house. It was eerie to be on a homeward trajectory on a Saturday. Outside of the rigidities and constraints of the work week, my mom and stepfather were more likely to be relaxed. Harsh words now would only underscore our insurmountable differences and hurt more abidingly than the offhand bile of a weekday afternoon.

As I came into my old Kalihi neighborhood and passed the details that normally told me that this was my territory and I could relax, my stomach grew unsettled. My hands gripped the steering wheel with an almost hateful tightness. Each light blue Honda was my mother's car, each dark brown Pinto my stepdad's. The final turns towards home were tense. I kept expecting us to drive past each other suddenly and unexpectedly. There would be recriminations and rude gestures, brake lights and sudden accelerations.

I rounded the final curve to their house. As soon as it was possible to see, I felt relieved and exhilarated not to notice either of their cars parked in front of the house. I parked, climbed the chipping red paint stairs and went inside.

I went straight for the fridge and rummaged through the leftovers and found some teriyaki chicken and rice. I put what I hoped would not be too noticeable an absence into the microwave, grabbed a juice and went into the front room to drink it and take in the view. It was raining over the light industrial plains of Kalihi Uka and the runways of the airport. The sky was an indistinct and pale gray blue. I took a big swig of guava juice and put it on a table.

I found a plastic bucket and began gathering cleaning supplies from under the sink: dish soap, rags, Ajax, a wooded bristle brush and an unopened bag of colorful sponges. Damn, they're synthetic and won't hold water well.

I got a drill and a power hand sander, some drill bits, a bag of inch and a quarter wood screws and some spare sand paper. We only had 400 and 60, the finest and the roughest. I needed a clean progression from 60 up to about 200 to do the molding justice. I left the bucket and tools and swag in the front room, creating an impromptu staging area and headed off on a scavenger hunt for the essentials of modern life: ghetto blaster, fan (the one on the boat didn't work), lamp, towels, cooler, food.

I had gone through all the obvious stuff and couldn't think of anything else except cloths. As occasionally happens when thinking about cloths, my mind sort of faded out. I dumped an armful of randomly selected garments onto the built-in futon covered drywall and particle board couch that rings the front room. The house is on a ridge and the front room is like the bow of a boat jutting outward into the elements. No walls, just windows and screens.

I sat Indian style looking out the window fiddling with shirts and shorts without interest, eventually gave it up by packing everything haphazardly and quickly to concentrate on watching the squalls coming in from the ocean. Storms move through the Pacific in known tracks. The early navigators (and the good ones today) can chart their direction by adjusting the angle at which they approach the gray columns of wind, rain and cloud. The plain and ocean I can see from my house is wide and broad, my field of vision expansive. I can watch the squalls coming in off of the water or down out of the mountains. Their long straight lines are mesmerizing and can give the illusion that the house itself is moving.

A good storm was coming in, an intense white heavy rain. I moved all of my gear into the car and pulled the futons to more protected rooms in the back. A good squall will drench everything in the front room. I heard the faint then heavier pitpat pitpat of the

first big raindrops collapsing onto the corrugated tin roofs and asphalt of the neighborhood. The trees began to lash. Packed, my duties were dispatched. I could just enjoy the rain. A light mist floated airily throughout the room. It was wet enough to feel that I was in the weather and covered enough to feel comfortable. I took off my shirt and let it bead on my hot sunbrowned skin. A brown Pinto rolled up. I grabbed my shirt and went out the back way. I heard my stepfather flip the mail box closed and start up the steps in rubber slippers. When he sounded halfway up, I went down through the back stairwell, got in my car and drove away.

Fixing the Boat

Summer 1989, Honolulu Hawaii

The boat was cowry pine when it left the New Zealand boatyard. It was with that species of wood that I fielded the questions of t-shirted rum-and-coke-thickened yachties on the sidewalk, who recognized at least a dated glory in the ship. I had my rap down.

"It is a two thirds scale copy of Ragtime. Yes, the famous sailboat that dominated the Hawaii-to-California Trans-Pacific race for several years around fifteen years ago. It was made at the Sheffield Yards in Rhode Island, a venerable old shipyard that specialized in producing sailboats that hauled ass going downwind."

It had grown heavy with plywood and jury-rigged components on its many journeys into dry dock. Little of the original wood remained. Every year at June it was a scramble to find a borrowed motor we could scotch tape onto the stern and assemble the other various and assorted elements needed to pass inspection.

After hanging around the marine auctions Saturday mornings long enough I finally found some suitable cheap wenchers that would work at a good price. I had some crude bases of my own design welded custom. They weren't aesthetically delightful and I wasn't certain that I had designed them correctly but they were something the boat hadn't had in a long time. What I was really interested in was fixing the molding, those strips of

wood that bring such a sense of closure to any boat. I was going to use Koa, the ali'i (royalty) of the native Hawaiian woods, and bring what dignity I could to the faded matron.

I did my part to make it presentable to potential buyers, spending three weeks repainting the cockpit, draining, cleaning and repainting the interior, and sanding and varnishing all of the exterior trim. I had new sails made, listed it with yacht brokers and waited all August for offers that never came. Telephone negotiations with my Dad in Europe grew increasingly tense. Finally, at the very last minute, he agreed to let me return to Sarah Lawrence, three days into the first week of classes.

Falling in Love Fall

Semester 1989, Bronxville New York

I kept a dorm room above us but basically that semester Amber and I lived together in her room on the female floor of the new dorm. I had originally intended for the room to serve as a neutral corner during those occasional periods when Amber and I weren't getting along. It was quickly overwhelmed with hundreds of snippets of pictures and text that I collaged into my first Stone Fruit word-image art book.

We began to speak of our love for the first time.

"I've felt it before but I didn't want to mention it without knowing how you felt," she said. "I didn't want to jinx anything."

The last significant bit of my history that I had kept private was finally shared. On a Metro North train ride home from the City we talked about previous romances.

"Who's the first person you ever slept with?" she blurted out without looking at me as though it was an offhand question that had just occurred to her, a ruse that hid a distinct tension. The first time she asked me that eight months earlier I brushed it off with a variation on "That's for me to know and you to find out," acceptably coy behavior that can easily be forgiven in the early stages of a relationship.

She had an atavistic attraction to this particular piece of intelligence. Although she desperately wanted to know the last major secret between us (and in so doing fuse us much closer together), she didn't want to risk damaging our relationship by asking me about something that I wasn't eager to share with her. On many previous occasions I could tell she was on the verge of asking the question. She always let the moment drift away unchallenged, as though she recognized the question as too dangerous to ask unless I really intended to answer it. I was ashamed to admit that I was a virgin when we met but I couldn't justify keeping her in the dark anymore. We had come too far together.

"Jennifer," I said, lying instinctively.

"I thought so," she said nodding, profoundly relieved to finally know for certain.

Why should I feel ashamed? She's never betrayed my trust or given me any reason to think I might regret telling her the truth. "No. It was you."

She turned to me with a thunderstruck fatalism. "What?! You're kidding!"

"No. I'm serious."

"I've thought that before but I always presumed that would be way too presumptuous."

"How could you tell?" I asked.

She smiled. "You were so gentle with me the first time we made love!"

"That's because I assumed all your Berkeley boys fucked you hard. I wanted to be different from them."

She shook her head, refusing to rise to the bait of my crude comment. "I'd been obsessed with you all semester and would have loved it any way you did it but that just put me over the top."

"Until I met you there been a number of moments when I would be fooling around with someone and sex was clearly the next step, the next level. I'd hem and haw and worry and finally decide resolutely not to do it. It was always a great relief to make

that decision. But with you there was no hesitation at all. It was so natural, it felt like it would have been more unnatural not to. Guess it was just the right time, finally."

"Well, I'm just glad it was with me," she said taking my hand.

I was scared half senseless. We had nothing significant left to parcel out in drips and drabs. My superstition was that once the mystery was gone, the affection would depart in short order. My defenses crumbled around me as my trust in her became absolute. I could tell that when I went down I would go down hard and yet there was no way to avoid it. We were too considerate of each other's feelings to keep a thick-skinned emotional guard up. Resistance to riding the complete ride had become futile.

"This is bound to end badly now," I thought.

On the rare occasions when there were actually problems between us, we avoided each other for a day or two, until we finally worked it out and certified our methodical progression to the next level of emotional intimacy with fabulous sex.

Once I started laughing as she spoke to me when we having a Reconciliation Discussion.

"What's so funny!" she demanded, greatly peeved.

"Sorry. I just had a vision of us having great sex in twenty minutes."

She tried hard to stay furious but within seconds broke into a smile and leapt on top of me. We got into it without finishing our argument or taking off any more than the bare minimum of cloths.

Finally it came time to pay the fiddler at the end of the first semester of my sophomore year. The money was gone. I wasn't coming back. The intervention of professors with my father didn't work. My literature teacher and mentor held a fragile hope that I never dared believe in, of discovering rich alumnae or discreet hidden funds for students worth keeping. Nothing materialized from his careful inquiries.

For the third time in our year-long relationship, Amber and I shared our last days together.

So Close, So Far Away

Holidays 1989 - 1990, Honolulu Hawaii - Austin Texas

Again I had to cart all of my shit 6,000 miles back home. Amber came out and joined me in Hawaii again over Winter Break. It was sad and elegiac. We weren't in the moment. We were already mourning our impending loss, letting the future poison the present. She had cried a few times when we made love that Fall semester and the summer before. At first I thought it was out of an excess of joy, then I thought it was because things were always so uncertain. When she cried during morning sex on that break in Hawaii, I realized that both of those reasons were far too shallow.

"Why do you cry sometimes when we make love?" I asked.

"Because it's as close as two people can get and there's still this distance between us."

"That would be true of anyone."

"I know. That's why I cry."

I held her in my arms without saying anything. What could I say? She was right.

She returned to Berkeley and school and I moved to Austin, the last city that had enthralled me, to find a place and look for work. I had begged and pleaded with my father over the phone a dozen times before from a dozen different angles and always came away with a resounding "no." In Texas, I threw one last hail mary bomb deep into the end zone.

I received a call the next morning saying I could go back to school. Shocking and completely unexpected. I boarded the next plane to New York. It was night when I arrived back on campus. Amber's door was unlocked but she wasn't home. I didn't visit any old friends. I wanted Amber to be the first to know. I dragged my trunks into her room to surprise her and stood in the dark looking out the window onto the grassy quad. It was 7:00 p.m. She would be home from dinner at Bates Cafeteria soon.

Before long she opened the door. I turned to smile at her across the small dark room, like a ghost reappeared.

"I knew you'd be back!" she said. "I just knew it!"

Generic Bridge #2

Summer 1990, New York-California

At the end of the semester, her parents came out to school from California. I was invited to join them for a week at her stepfather's family's summer home on a lake in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

The history of our love seemed to be a history of partings. After yet another such a parting at the dirt crossroads leading into the lake near the community office and library (from which I stole the authoritative history of the atomic bomb to read on my trip), I left her to meet her in a week or two in Berkeley. After all of my hitchhiking, it was my first great complete Westward roll across the continent, like my idol Kerouac or the old frontiersmen or even Western Man himself. In Colorado I got a lift to Monterey California with a black G.I. just out of the army who even sported me a motel room. I was desperately glad for such an incredibly long ride, not to be repeating the pain of getting stuck in Salt Lake City a year before.

I realized Amber would be in my life for a long time to come, what ever our eventual romantic status came to be and made the vaguely crass (because instrumental) decision that I should cultivate good relations with her mother for that reason. I think I finally tipped the balance in my favor one evening when I offered to help her prepare some deviled eggs for an office party.

This new-found goodwill took some of the pressure off but we still knew that we would have to find a sublet of our own soon if we wanted to spend the summer together. Even disgusting trashed-out frat rooms were out of our price range - and she wanted a car

too. Since it looked like we wouldn't be able to afford spending the summer together, I decided to go overland down to Central America.

Amber and I drove to Big Sur and across to the Sierras to write our swan song in tire rubber, bodily fluids and wistful sighs away from the sight of man. Amber was going to Paris for her junior year abroad. I had failed to get into U.C.-Santa Cruz and planned to continue living in Berkeley by myself to gain residency to try again the following year. Then I would still have two more years of school. We had been together for a year and a half. It would be at least two more years before could even consider being in the same city at the same time together again. We were wise enough to know what an insurmountable gulf two years apart at our age would be.

Big Sur

Summer 1990, Big Sur California

I looked at her profile and felt complete. Long straight brown hair, dark eyebrows, gentle indentation beneath high cheekbones. She looked intently out the windshield at the road wearing the fake horn rim glasses she used for driving and reading.

At the first stop sign, I put my hand behind her head and gently rubbed the downy hair at the top of her neck. The touch of my hand snapped her out of a trance. She turned, smiled distractedly and looked back at the road. I looked back towards Berkeley. The golden hills behind town were heavy with the rich yellow afternoon light of San Francisco Bay.

Bay Bridge was full. San Francisco was full. The freeway south was full. She never above third gear until we turned off for Daly City. We were surprised at all of the traffic. We had forgotten to consider rush hour.

The highway rose. At the top of the saddle from the Bay to the Pacific, tract houses of Daly City were strung like square pearls along the spines of dry golden hills.

At the highest reaches, patches of fog moved grandly through sparse green patches of fir trees.

I looked at the strands of houses and wondered who could live in them. Children riding bikes in identical driveways, driven insane by the monotony. What does it do to them? Crystal meth, Metallica blaring out of pickups, hands in the back pockets of their girlfriend's jeans at malls, their girlfriend's hands in their pockets. A low rent and inarticulate orgy of rage against monotonous uniformity and regimentation. Same four floor plan for miles in either direction.

Amber lived here too. It was her home before Berkeley, her "youth." Barreling down the highway towards the Pacific at 60 m.p.h. she told me stories.

"We had a babysitter our mother used to hire. We liked her best. She used sugar to shut us up."

"Bribed you!," I said happily. "That's a terrible way to raise a kid! Did you stay shut up then?"

She gave me an expression as if to say "how dare I question her honor?," looked at me and said, "Of course!"

"Didn't try for that second spoonful?"

"No, no."

"I used to eat sugar cubes from my Dad's office. By the coffee. I liked the way they dissolved in my mouth in different random shapes."

Gleefully we exchanged arcane details of childhood.

"Our house was on the edge of a ravine," Amber said as we drove. "There was a forest down there we used to play in. It was where we buried our pets. I had a rabbit down there too. Developers bought it. Ripped everything down. Made it brown. Put up four ugly "luxury" houses. They cut down my mom's favorite oak tree on her birthday. She cried all day."

Disclosure! Disclosure! Nothing that might be important to who we were now was being kept from one another. We burned with bright perfect abandon, leaving our hearts completely in each other's hands, with relentless confidence that this trust would not be abused.

We came to the top of a hill and saw the sea. It always does me good to see the ocean, even if it is too cold to go in. Too cold to even stop at a lookout, get out the car and give it a proper stare. We turned left onto Highway 1 and started south to Santa Cruz. Passed Pacifica, another homeland, the first place she lived after she arrived from Israel.

"You could see my house...Right up there...These bushes...Oh well..."

Blooming pink oleander blocked the view of the residential ridge she was pointing to.

We stopped a little further down the road to watch some windsurfers. I bounded across the dusty parking lot in rubber slippers to the blue porta-potty. When I came out the fierce and cold wind slammed the door shut with a few loud bangs. Only an agile leap kept the door from biting my foot. I jogged up behind Amber, threw my arms around her waist and put my head on her shoulder and squeezed. I caressed the warm naked skin beneath her sweater.

"Look at them! Look at that one! See!," she said.

"They're hot. Wind's good today."

She emitted involuntary sounds of amazement as she saw one of them use the wave as a ramp and go flying in the air.

"He stayed up!," she said referring to his safe landing.

"It's a pretty common maneuver. Look, some of them are surfing the waves." I pointed at some other windsurfers who were riding the waves like regular board surfers, carving bottom turns and staying just ahead of the break.

"Incredible! Wow!," she said, sighting another jumper.

"Watch these guys turn. You see that one rushing in towards us?"

"He's going to hit the beach!"

"Watch."

He turned on a dime ten feet from the shore.

"Oooo!!"

After a moment of silent watching, she said, "Look how colorful their sails are."

The wind grew too chilly. We walked to the car.

"Next time you come to Hawaii I have to take you to Diamond Head. It's even neater cause the waves are bigger and you get to watch everything from a lookout on a cliff high above the water."

She nodded abstractly from the driver's seat as she looked for a break in the traffic to get back on the highway. She found it and we were off down the road. First gear, second gear, third gear, fourth. The passenger window was smashed from when the crappy factory tape deck was stolen when we were in a blues bar in Oakland last night. The wind blowing was starting to be cold.. I left my coat on and rested an arm on the window.

Cruisin'.

Our destination was Santa Cruz and camping. As soon as we got far enough south to see Big Sur hazy and pale across Monterey Bay I suggested that we go to Big Sur to take in the sunset. She concurred.

We arrived just in time and pulled off into a gravel lookout, a toe hold just wide enough for the car on sheer cliffs. We took a pink wool blanket, a pipe of weed, locked the car and toddled off down a trail through chest high sea-brush, in search of a cliff to watch the sunset from and dangle our feet off of as we got high. Found the spot, dangled the feet and got high.

The view was spectacular and unearthly. Two bands of color, the pale blue of the sky and the deep blue of the ocean, spread out in an almost infinite length in either

direction before fading out into oblivion. At one end, the pale blue sky merged progressively into the bright pink of the setting sun. We huddled under blanket and watched.

When we got back into the car, I drove. The light was fading into a rich gray of polished steel. On the golden hill it seemed positively spectral. It was getting cold. The road was narrow and snaked wildly on the steep cliffs. Not wanting to miss a turn and go flying into an 800 foot ravine, I kept my eyes on the road and snuck looks in as I could on the straight-aways.

Profiles of cliffs receding endlessly into the dim surf-mist. Echoes. Contours.

"If you want me to drive, just say the word," Amber said.

"O.K.. Soon. Thanks. Wow! Look at this!," I said. I wanted to stop for the night as soon as possible, so we could see this country in the day. It was almost completely dark by now. We stopped for a last tableau on another gravel toe hold, agreeing that it would be a fabulous place to wake up.

A nearby ridge jutted a black profile into the distant smudge of pink orange. Just above bright Venus shone, the first thing to shine in the night sky. The pink orange melted into still distinct bands of sea and sky. The rosy hues melted into the galaxy's own darkness at the other end. A speckle of stars grew visible down at the dark end. The dark end progressed gradually our way.

Amber said, "I can see the earth turning."

Finding dinner that evening was a problem. The first establishment we saw was a combination grocery/restaurant whose parking lot was full of convertible jeeps, Trans Ams and Volvos. People in from Napa to the north and Los Angeles to the south for a "hot weekend in Big Sur." Two women in tight skirts and high heels, burnt out at 35, walked with a blonde mustached man to the entrance. Others locked up their cars, talking and psyching up their hilarity with loud laughter. I wasn't sure about this crowd and neither was Amber.

We asked how long the wait would be to eat. 40 minutes. A forty minute wait to spend the night with rowdy electrical contractors and speeding junky beauty stylists? With relief we headed back to our car and kept driving.

The night was BLACK, a black that absorbed light for a hundred miles. No streetlights lined our way on the rural highway. An occasional headlight came towards us illuminating the tall Pines from out of the inky forest void. Amber would dim her highbeams, the oncoming light would dim their's until we passed each other and each would flip their highbeams back on. I would glance into the rear view mirror. The entire canyon of the road through the forest was suddenly visible where before there had been only blackness. We drove for five or ten minutes in utter darkness and then slowed down to 5 m.p.h. for an enclave of lights.

"Restaurant?," Amber wondered aloud, staring intently out the window attempting to discern some function in the cluster of buildings.

I instinctively threw my back against the seat, braced my feet on the floor.

"Drive! Drive!" I yelled. "We're in the middle of the street!"

The post-pot munchies were kicking in so hard for her that it didn't occur to her that some bozo in his eighth hour on the road could be tootling along absent-mindedly down the road at 70 m.p.h. ready to put us out the window and into a hospital. At the next set of lights, she slowed down again, just as obliviously.

"Drive! Drive!," I shouted again, slapping the dashboard frantically.

As though she were merely indulging me in my outbursts, she said, "There's no one behind us, Boyce."

"Were you sure of that when you stopped?," I countered. I always considered it my special mission to make sure Amber wasn't "lying" to herself.

"This is just another Yuppie Scum restaurant. Let's go."

After ten more minutes of night driving, the car slowed to inspect the latest prospect.

"This is just another Yuppie Scum restaurant," I said quickly. "Let's go." She humored me and sped back up. We drove another ten minutes.

"This is just another Yu-"

"You're not going to let me stop are you?," she said quietly. "I need food. That's just going to happen."

Oh.

Until that moment I didn't realize that I was being obnoxious. We agreed without language to stop at the next place that wasn't ridiculously expensive and share a dinner, get soup and salad. Do anything to put something in our stomachs without cleaning us out. We struck out a few more times. We learned what to look for to avoid bothering to stop at a joint beyond our modest means, late model imports in the parking lot and demure lighting in the restaurant, and drove by without even slowing down.

What has Big Sur become? Once it was a refuge for the cognoscenti bohemian elite to escape from the homogenizing soul-bulldozing effects of the Universal Monoculture of cash, banal popular culture and corporate franchising, happily stranding themselves in poverty, isolation and spectacularly beautiful elemental nature. Now it is a poster child for that very air-conditioned nightmare, a favorite playground of "Real Swingers" in for urbane romantic getaway weekends, people more interested in telling their friends, "I'm going to Big Sur" than in actually being there to have nervous uncertain sex in \$130 hotel rooms layered in chintz.

At the southern end of Big Sur with nothing but darkness ahead till San Luis Obispo, we bit the bullet and turned back to make a choice.

Restaurant #1.

We went to the wrong door and had to walk along the glass window to the entrance, which afforded us a good view of the interior. Subdued lighting. Wine bottles on every table. Rustic Puritan tables and chairs, Quaintly Mismatched, with the Original Paint Showing. I laughed at the aggressive cuteness of the decor. Giggling, we arrived at

the lit menu by the front door. Silly numbers next to descriptions of entrees (\$16, \$19, \$21) assured us that it was time to move on.

Restaurant #2: EXTREMELY strange.

We parked in a crushed coral lot just off of the highway at the bottom of a great black crag looming ominously above. The restaurant appeared to be at the top of the crag, which was sprinkled with dim red and white lights and glints of chrome.

"Oh my god..." Amber said in awe. She gripped my hand tightly, entangled her arm in mine and pushed us both stolidly forward towards what appeared to be a staircase up to the eatery. I held her hand tightly too.

Two rows of weak white lights took us up one flight of stairs into a second parking lot. No problem so far challenging the mystery. Amber's eyes were as big as saucers as we crept slowly through the dark lot. I was preternaturally aware, hearing every rustling plant, every distant footstep.

Killer Dobermans exploded into ferocious growls at our feet. We both jumped back two feet hand in hand.

"Where are they?" I said. "What the fuck was that? A recording?"

The exhibition of such a sick sense of humor on the part of a demented owner would have been in keeping with the strange spirit of the place so far. In the few seconds it took to make out the white teeth and eyes of two dogs, they were already silent. Their leashes were secured under the tire of a car. We crept carefully by. They were as docile as lambs, merrily panting with their tongues flopping out. Apparently they just had to get a quick growl in for sport. My heart was still racing. Somebody should skin those fucking beasts. Another parallel row of dim ankle high lights took us up a second flight of stairs to a small concrete verandah and a lit menu. I read a quote to Amber from the top of the page.

"Nepenthe welcomes you to their gay pavilion, where your troubles will float away with the soft breeze of the ocean mist."

We stared at each other, googly eyed. This place was NUTS! \$9 for cheese and crackers was pretty nutty too. We sallied forth down what we hoped was the path to be seated so we could at least spy their "gay pavilion" if not patronize the joint. The path terminated in a face full of big black leaves. Perfect! We pushed the leaves slowly and surreptitiously away from our eyes and peeped out onto the red concrete pavilion, lit entirely with red paper lanterns hanging from wooden posts. A strange indescribable music bubbled just outside of our ability to hear it clearly.

"Where the hell are we?!", Amber asked, holding her leaf back and turning to look at me.

"Who knows?" I said, shaking my head. "Some alternate reality."

"Is this even earth?"

"Couldn't tell you. Go figure."

"Let's eat here."

"Are you kidding?! This place is psychotic! We may never make it back to our home planet. We may slip through a wrinkle in time outside of the Milky Way!"

"Doesn't that sound good?"

"Maybe, but not at \$9 for cheese and crackers."

She smiled and led me away by the hand. We retreated down one flight of stairs, past the docile dogs (that still deserved to be roasted over a spit for the fright they gave me) and down another flight of stairs. Miraculously, our car did not disappear in a quantum fluctuation of the time-space continuum. Highway 1 was where we left it too..

We got in, laughed viciously for a few seconds to decompress and took off down the road again, me driving.

Restaurant #3. Food! Food! Food!

After driving a little while I saw a sign that said, "State Park 1/2 mile."

"Hey Amber!"

"Hey Boyce!" We were getting pretty giddy now with hunger and road fatigue.

"There is a restaurant at this park. I remember it from when we came in the opposite direction."

"Oh goody goody goody goody!!!," she said bouncing up and down in her seat, restrained by the seat belt.

"See? That's why they invented seat belts. You just settle down, young lady, or there'll be no Chicken Cordon Bleu for you!"

She hung her head in mock abashment and drew the sides of her lips down.

In a moment we came up on the restaurant.

"Hippa...Iszzatta...Whattza..." she gurgled, pointing at it.

"It's O.K. dear. It's O.K.," I said, stroking her hair with one hand and driving with the other, in mock reassurance of her mock agitation. "There's a fence around it here. The only entrance is through the park. It's right down here."

"Ittza..." she gurgled again, still pointing at the lights of the restaurant receding into the black wilderness behind us.

"See? Here's the nice entrance. There there." We slowed, made a sharp turn and drove over a few speed bumps to the ranger's hut at the gate.

"Any space in the park?," I asked.

"Got a reservation?," the khaki uniformed male Hispanic ranger said.

"No."

"No then. It's booked up."

"Do many people usually come after 10:30 on a Friday night?"

"Actually, they do. We close the gate at midnight. Most people party all night and come in at a quarter till."

"Really? Is the restaurant open?"

He conferred with the other occupant of the minuscule hut, another khaki uniformed ranger, a woman with a curly blonde perm.

"Till 11:00," he said.

"O.K. Thanks." We drove in over more speed bumps.

At the restaurant we planted ourselves in front of the menu. Rational prices! Good choices! Score! We're here! Amber took a good long time figuring exactly out what it was she wanted to eat. The cashier finally came up to tell us that they had stopped serving at 9:00 p.m. Fuck! Were the heavens against us?

Desperately, Amber asked the cashier if there was anywhere nearby to eat dinner.

"Well..." the cashier said, ruminating on the question. "It's Rock and Roll night at the Toady Oak, so they stopped serving early. There's a store in Glendale, right by it though. You could probably get some snack food there at least. It's just ten minutes down the road."

We walked out to the car. I knew which store she was referring to. It was the first one we passed when we entered Big Sur! The one with the mini skirt girls and blonde mustached guy. Opening Amber's door from the inside I told her as she got in.

"I think the place she's talking about is that first one we stopped at. Remember?"

"Great!," she said, smiling, battle weary and bemused, confident she would finally eat soon. I kissed her. Everything was copasetic. A long trip to come back where we started but we were happy. Food soon. I'd get to cook for my baby on my little camping stove.

At the quasi-rustic convenience store, Amber immediately dug a handful of taffies out of the bin and started chomping on one to tide her over. We meandered aimlessly through the narrow aisles of crackers, canned goods and potato chips, luxuriating in the sudden cornucopia of prepackaged delights. I grabbed a can of chili, some ramen noodles and a loaf of bread.

"That sounds gross!," Amber said.

"You'll see!," I said wagging my finger. On a sudden whim, we scampered excitedly over to the liquor fridge for booze to make our long day end in a little party. I

plucked out an oil can of Fosters lager from the great wall of beer. She extracted a little solo of red wine.

"Hey, classy!," I said referring to the screw off top.

"Would you like to smell the bottle cap?" My little 5'2" long haired sommelier deserved a kiss!

We took our armfuls of swag to the counter. Amber threw in a last handful of taffy, giggling sheepishly at the 200+ pound cashier lady. We paid and took our paper grocery bag of treasures to the car. The night was cool and inviting. Soon we would be in it, camping, cooking, eating, sleeping.

"Do you want me to drive?," she asked. Because I could already hear the satisfying sound of a can of beer being popped open, I said sure and threw the car keys onto the roof on the driver's side.

On the dark road yet again, seat belted, groceries behind me, everything settled, I pulled the Fosters from out of the bag, opened it, took a slug and put the cold steel can between my legs.

On the way to another State Park we were going to try to camp in, we passed a procession of four teenagers dressed in black walking along the dark highway without sleeping bags, packs or flashlights, miles from the nearest driveway.

"What the fuck was that?," Amber said. "This place is weird!"

"No shit! They didn't have anything. No packs, nothing."

"Fuck!"

"Must be off to a black mass or something."

"Don't say that. We're about to sleep in the woods."

At the state park, the parking lot was full but devoid of life. We pulled into the only spot we could find that wouldn't block someone in come morning, between a Porsche with a blinking red alarm light on its dash and a beat-up rusty old orange pick-up with a camping shell.

We decided on a reconnoiter before we brought out all of our camping crap and slipped off hand in hand with my trusty flashlight down a dark sandy trail. We came to the edge of a dark forest. I tried to flick my flashlight on but it didn't work. Alas, Betrayed! After serving me so faithfully for all of these years solo, when it finally came time to impress a chick it won't shed any beams of light! What a pussy!

We conferred.

"Do YOU want to go in there?," I asked.

She clung to me tightly. "I don't know. Do YOU want to go in there?"

"We might get used to the dim light and be able to see."

Amber laughed, as though I could only have been joking.

"Well, let's go back," I offered. "We can try the other trail and see if it has shorter trees."

Back at the car she suggested "Let's bring our drinks."

"Excellent," I concurred.

We started off in the opposite direction on our second expedition for a camping site. The trail quickly became a narrow wooden plank over a deep still bog. The moon wasn't out. We could barely make out the plank by a silvery blonde contrasting to the dark muck below. We hesitated on the bank at the edge of the swamp.

"What do you say?," I asked, hugging her from behind.

"I don't know," she answered nervously.

"Let's go. I'll hold your hand." I wanted to walk to the middle of the plank, stand in the center of our fears and let them run their course. With each tentative step we worried the plank might give way and drop us into the water, to be chomped in half at the waist by some weed covered monster.

Although I have camped and hitched my way across North America long enough to know that places fearsome by night rarely frighten by day, I was still prey to same

visions common to all of us big city kids whose primary contact with the wilderness is through slasher movies.

To challenge these manufactured fears, I lay down lengthwise on the thin boards and stared up at the stars, with my head a scant six inches above the water. There wasn't enough room for us to lay down side by side, so Amber lay down lengthwise opposite me, the tops of our heads gently touching one another.

I was only aware of three things: the luminous Milky Way and a sky inconceivably thick with stars everywhere, the gentle gurgle of the flowing water beneath my ears and Amber's head touching mine.

Mountain

Summer 1990, Big Sur - Sierra Nevadas

We slipped out of the park just as the uniformed black park warden was setting up shop for the day in the hut by the entrance. We turned onto the main road and drove by in daylight the scene of our adventures last night.

Where the road dipped into valleys it became a blacktop canyon through giant gray green forests of Spruce, Fir and Pine, with a ribbon of ecstatically blue sky above us. Where then road swung out onto the cliffs it became a narrow well-paved goat path a thousand feet above an impossibly blue sea, the sky infinite and cloudless, the cliffs glistening and rocky. Wisps of sea spray and morning fog came swirling up the vertical cliffs from the sea below.

We stopped for the first tableau of the morning. We could have picked any one of a dozen. They were all spectacular. I followed a footpath well cleared by the countless Hush Puppies of adventurous Winnebago drivers to the edge of a cliff. I pretended that I was the only one taking in the vista. The blue haired R.V. set, the middle aged couples driving rented luxury sedans, the kids screaming to go eat at Hardees - none of these people existed.

"Amber!" I shouted back towards the road.

"What?" she shouted.

"Come!"

She arrived by my side and put her arm around my waist for the first time of the day.

"Listen," I said craning my ears to the sea.

"What?" She didn't hear anything.

"Don't you hear? Seals!" I heard their barking faintly, disappearing and reappearing according to the play of the winds.

"No," she said tentatively.

"Listen. It's faint."

"Nothing," she said politely, not wanting to offend my enthusiasm.

"Oh well." I looked up at the sun with my eyes closed and felt its warmth on my face. We walked back up the path and continued on our way south of Big Sur.

We stopped at a general store with platform sidewalks so Amber could use the phone and check in with her mom, tell her that she wouldn't be back that afternoon as planned, not early anyway. I went in and bought a 40 ounce of Colt 45 malt liquor and some candles. She was still on the phone when I came out. Here's a game you can play at home! Kiss your girlfriend's neck while she's calling her parents! Oh the laughs!

When she hung up I said a single word: "Lunch?"

"Barbecue? Smells great!" We walked down the platform sidewalk to a counter in front of a homemade barbecue of two fifty gallon oil drum halves by the side of the store. A guy with a big bushy beard, bandanna and sunglasses ran the show, turning charred sides of beef and chicken with a long skewer, throwing water out of a cup onto the coals, and keeping a watchful eye on roasting cobs of corn and a big simmering pot of beans.

We took our heaping paper plates of lunch across Highway 1, sat on the curb and looked at the wide Pacific Ocean. I dashed back to the B.B.Q. stand for bread, onions and a jalapeno pepper, returned, rolled back the paper bag holding my beer and cracked it. The cool liquid was refreshing under the bright sun. A cool breeze blew.

The ribs were good. No sauce, but a good dry rub, greasy, with just the right amount of char. Things like that count as we pass our time on this sweet old world. The sun was delicious, as delicious as the sight of my beautiful girlfriend. It was gonna to be sad to say good-bye.

After eating my fill, I looked over my shoulder at the picnic tables by the B.B.Q. stand. It was a strictly locals only scene, the private preserve of Big Sur cosmic cowboy hybrids of redneck and hippie, nursing the weekend's second longneck beer.

We discussed our plans. "I asked the chick behind the counter how much further south to the end of Big Sur country," I said. "She said 20, 30 miles."

"That's it?"

"That's it. Want to see a castle?"

"A castle?"

"The Hearst Mansion."

"That's here?"

I nodded. "I was there ten years ago with my dad. But we didn't go in because it was crowded and cost money. Majorly touristed."

"Really? Well, we can check it out," she said with decisively, challenging my tendency towards a sanctimonious attachment to my own preconceived notions.

"Definitely, definitely," I said contritely. "If it's not too expensive I'd really like to check it out. Charlie Chaplin and all of the old Hollywood stars used to come party up here. It's supposed to be huge. If it costs too much, do you want to go to the Sierras?"

"Isn't that far? How far is that?" We both know that distance didn't really matter. We wouldn't see each other for two months and after that two years...

"Not too far. We just have to cross the Central Valley. Three, four hours."

We stopped at the next gas station and looked at one of their maps in a cool air-conditioned office. I pointed to a green patch on the map.

"See-we can sleep here in Sequoia National Park for the night, spend tomorrow futzing around, tromping around the park. You can drop me off in Fresno early afternoon and be back in Berkeley by early tomorrow evening."

"Is Fresno far from Berkeley?"

"No. It's close. Look." I traced the path on the map. "You take I-5 up to Modesto and then it's just a hop skip and a jump to the Bay. Easy. Around four hours."

We skipped the Hearst Mansion to save time now that our journey was so much longer and drove east over the Coastal Mountains into the wine country foothills.

"It looks like Napa here," she said.

"It does."

Apparently a few other people had figured that out too. Wineries began appearing all over the place. They all looked new, dirt yet to be sun-bleached in fresh landscaping, parking lots with pale paths of highway dust tracked onto newly laid lot asphalt, crisp new banners flapping on every fence: WINE TASTING HERE.

"Let's stop at one of these," Amber said merrily.

"Sounds good," I concurred. Vacantly, I began spying for a "good one," with no idea as to what the criteria might be. I had a difficult time distinguishing between the entrances and exits, customer and service driveways. Many of the new vineyards didn't even have permanent signage up yet.

"Are you deliberately not stopping?," Amber asked in rising anger, in no mood to allow a repeat of last night.

"No, no," I defended myself sheepishly. "It's just that I can't find the entrance till I pass it. Sorry."

We added our pale tracks to the fresh black tar of the parking lot of the next winery, Hope Vineyards, and went in. I opened the swinging door for Amber and followed her into the building and a wall of cold air.

"Oh my god!," I said involuntarily. "It's orgasmic!"

Hand in hand we walked through the cool room darkened by closed chintz curtains. It was a extravagant tornado of pattern on pattern Laura Ashley-style fabrics and chintz tablecloths on tables spread spaciouly throughout the room, displaying quaintly packaged jellies, preserves, oils, olives, vinegars with weeds in the bottles and all manner of Epicurean delights resting in beds of straw in heavy baskets of woven sapling. Against one wall of the great room stood a deli refrigerator with meats and cheeses and other snacks to buy with your wine. I examined a package of salted ham. It was gray around the edges with a film of oily rainbow over the pink middle. I threw it back into the fridge and we saddled up to the wine tasting countertop of brown marble.

Swanky joint. A few tourist couples had already set up residence there, standing, sipping and chatting easily. Whether it was the welcome coolness of the air conditioning or the wine, everyone was giddy and the mood was festive.

"Hi Would you like to try some of our wines?" one of the ladies behind the counter said with a smooth professional courtesy. She had obviously done this spiel a few times before. She reminded me of an airline stewardess.

"Definitely. Does it cost anything?" Amber inquired.

"There's a two dollar tasting fee. You can either receive a free glass or a credit towards the purchase of any of our wines," the stewardess said brightly.

"I want to treat you," Amber said.

"Groovy."

While Amber dug through her purse I engaged the stewardess in business-like questions. Partly out of a twenty year old's habit for deflecting being carded, partly

because I could tell that she was such a professional that I could ask her the weirdest possible questions and she would do her best to field them. I broke her in slow.

"Are any of the other tastings around here free?"

"I know Southbrook charges a fee and Windy Crag and Twin Oaks. I think Paso Robles might not charge anything."

"This seems like a young wine growing region," I stated, curious to see where she would find the question.

It is," she said tilting her head earnestly. "Our winery has been growing grapes for eight years and began bottling two years ago. The oldest vineyard, Paso Robles, has been bottling for ten years," she said in her stewardess sing song.

Our first glasses were poured, a round of White Zinfandel.

A young man of around thirty in a turquoise polo shirt and blue jeans pulled up next to us at the counter and casually whipped out a small notebook.

"Uh oh! A professional!" I offered, welcoming him to our big happy family, another pilgrim in from the heat.

"Naaaah," he said. "It's just I always forget what each wine tastes like, so it's good to have notes."

"Do you do alot of tastings?" I asked, Taking An Interest.

"Some. I work in San Jose and my girlfriend lives in Napa."

"Napa! That's where my dad lives!" Amber chimed in.

"What kind of work do you do in San Jose?" one of the two older men who had been comparing RV mileage said.

"Computers."

"Oh, Silicone Valley..." the old man said nodding.

I asked the stewardess what they aged the wine in, but she was a new recruit. She flourished her hands at the other countertop lady, said "You'll have to ask Julie about that" and brought her hands back together in a clasp.

"Oh Julie-" I said in gentle mockery of their polished routine. She looked over at me brightly. I'd seen that look before, on talk show hosts and serial killers. "What do you age your wine in?"

She launched right into her memorized spiel, "All of Our Wine is Aged in Fifty Gallon Oak Barrels."

"Concrete lined tanks!" the man with the notepad shouted.

"Oh, no!" Julie said in mock offense, tittering maniacally. I hoped that malevolent hyena didn't have anything sharper than a butter knife handy. There was no telling whether she would offer complimentary brie cheese or lunge across the countertop and go for the jugular vein of a hapless tourist.

Amber and I exhausted the tasting's series of wines and snuck in as many repeats as we could get away with a series of defensive excuses: "We're deciding which one to get," "I just can't make up my mind," "It's definitely down to the White Zinfandel and the Chardonney." The stewardess nodded grimly as she poured us our third quarter glass of sassy White Zinfandel.

When we could tell that we had just about exhausted their patience with our freeloading, we bought a bottle of their cheapest wine, the eminently quaffable, absurd yet flaccid, precociously non-descript White Zinfandel, took our crepe-paper wrapped "gift glass" and left.

We walked across the hot black lot to the car. I pulled the wineglass out of the green paper gift bag and stripped it of its crepe paper wrapping. I put the arm holding the glass around Amber's shoulder, bent my head to put my cheek against her cheek and held the glass outstretched before us as we walked.

"Loook," I said as though it were a child between us.

The Central Valley was a scorcher. A busted passenger window didn't help any, all of that 100 degree heat and dry dust blasting in at 65 m.p.h. We stopped at a gas station for directions across the valley and ice to chill the wine meant for dinner in the

Sierras. I stowed the bottle in the middle of the bag of ice and secured the package well behind my seat.

After long hours of driving in the heat on straight freeways through endless miles of flat brown farmland, relieved only by a blow job ("Can the truckers see? Toot your horns if you can!"), the occasional Big Gulp and dreams of cold mountain streams, the Sierras finally came dustily into view, a dim dark profile in the distance. The sky was still pale yellow but the sun had already fallen low on the horizon.

"Setting up camp in the dark is a pain in the ass. We need to find a place as soon as we can. Somewhere in the foothills. Hit the park tomorrow."

We passed a sign. "Did that say 'camping'?" I asked.

"I think so," Amber said. I slowed down, made a U-turn and turned onto a side street. For ten minutes we drove straight between regular rows of 12 foot orange trees bearing fruit. Surely we would have seen something by now if the sign had really said "camping?" I envisioned desperately plunking our tent down after a five minute walk into the orchard off of the road, in spite of the obvious risks of leaving a vehicle in a prominent place on private property. I was starting to worry that we might have to set up camp in the dark. I kept a sharp look out for anywhere even remotely feasible.

There? Along the aqueduct?

We entered Wilson, a town of small home lots with identical sidewalks and lawns.

(I daydreamed about asking "Excuse me ma'am, but can I camp on your lawn?," like I asked that old lady sitting in her rocking chair on her porch in West Virginia when I was hitching out to Amber from school a few months before, at the beginning of summer "No, I druther you didn't," the old lady said. "Fair enough," I said and kept walking, eventually ending up on the top of the ridge above town. The next morning I found my first and only wilderness tick on me, making me forever paranoid about Lyme Disease.)

After a few minutes and a traffic light we exited the small town, ascended into the rolling foothills, golden grassy pasture lands with a few isolated trees scattered along the creek beds and quickly found ourselves a suitable little hill to camp on top of.

We shouldered our tent, sleeping bags, Mexican blankets, food, camping stove and ice bag of wine up the steep hill, terraced into giant steps for us by thoughtful cows. On top of it all was a beautiful view of the golden foothills all around us, the deep green orange groves below and the sun a few fingers above the top of the hills.

I worried the open car might be hassled by some bored rural youth, or that we would be thrown off of the mountain at gun point by some crotchety old rancher. After a few slugs of Zinfandel on a great rock watching the sunset with my baby in my arms, these worries were consigned to oblivion, not worth the effort on this our last night together for two months, on the last Real Night of our relationship, as we were soon to separate to different cities at the end of summer.

In the magic hour of the light left over after the orange disc of the sun falls beneath the horizon we set about the practical tasks of the evening. I pitched our tent quickly on the hard ground, leaving the rain cover off so we could see the stars above, and cooked up some soup and noodles on my little stove while Amber made our bed. It was an efficient and unspoken division of labor.

We ate our humble repast on the rock of destiny and sipped our wine, sitting there quietly until the sunlight faded into darkness. The few lights of Wilson came out down the valley.

We took off our clothes at the mouth of the tent and slipped in onto our sleeping pads under our blanket of sleeping bags, and zipped the tent shut, closing the dry dusty world out. The night was beautiful and clear and warm. We lay on our backs naked, held hands, looked out at the night sky and talked.

Like a fruit that falls into your hand only when ripe, the conversation turned towards a final deepening of understanding between us that would allow us to spend two years apart with a feeling of Things Resolved and Loose Ends Tied Up.

"It seems like we're always parting," Amber said.

I felt her hand more acutely because she had said something important.

"It does," I agreed, looking into the black sky. She lives in Berkeley, I live in Hawaii.

We've been together at school in New York for a year and a half, each semester seemingly the last, and always made sure to cross paths on vacations.

"But then I talked to Sara about it. She said it also means that we are always meeting."

"That is true too," I told her and the stars. With complete abandon we left an important and vulnerable part of ourselves in each other. I ran my hand slowly over her legs, hips, soft stomach.

"I think it would be O.K. if we saw other people," she said decisively, as though she were using vehemence to convince herself of something she was actually unsure of.

I melted at how cute she was being, hearing how much she really loved for me, infinitely more than anyone except my parents and Grandma Nana ever did. Such pained resolve! Such excruciations she would endure for me! I laughed quietly in awe and admiration and thanks.

"Don't you think so?" she followed up.

"Yes. Definitely. You want happiness for me and I want happiness for you. If that includes seeing other people, we welcome the other person to it."

Amber sighed a fatalistic "yeah" and there was a long easy silence. We lay in the dark night holding hands.

"The first time either of us hears about the other person being with someone else it's going to kill us though," Amber offered.

"Yes. It will," I agreed. Another long sweet silence. Because we have no secrets, she offered me her train of thought.

"I keep thinking that there was a time I loved Toby as much as I loved you and now I don't talk to him at all." She could have withheld this desolate formula but we withheld nothing from one another. In return for this gift of total honesty, we forfeited our rights to be offended. When will I match this kind of depth of communication again?

"I hate to imagine it will happen again."

Holding hands naked on the top of that dark mountain I realized something I had always known: that I have made a complete contact with another human being that will only be matched two or three more times in my life, at most.

I thought of Las Vegas when I hitched through it on my way out to Amber at the beginning of the summer. I thought of the people who walked its neon streets at night, looking for something in that 100 degree midnight heat. I have seen that look before on weekends in Waikiki. People roam the wide sidewalks of both towns, poised ready and alert for the Primal Fuck. The women wear something that shows the shoulders, the men tuck in their T-shirts. They're looking for more than sex. They're looking for that person who will ease their tortured regrets, misplaced longings and secret shames, with whom they can lay down the burden of a thousand empty nights and countless lost weekends. So frantically, so desperately they walk the streets! They try so hard! Feed more slots, drink more beers, go to more decrepit sex shows! Anything! Contact! Action! In Las Vegas they're more panicked but the same show can be seen in any city on a Friday or Saturday night. Men, women, their mutual amusements and benighted pursuit of the outstretched hand. Even in a small town in Missouri, teenagers driving their new trucks back and forth up and down main streets are looking for the same thing.

Salvador

Summer 1990, California - El Salvador

After playing for a last day together in Sequoia National Park, skinny dipping in a cold mountain stream and climbing rocks naked in the sun, we descended back down onto the hot dusty plains below. She dropped me off just south of Fresno. I was suddenly left alone on the side of Interstate 5 wondering if I had made the right decision. Why was I willing to trade our last summer together for a two month spree to Central America?

I hitched through L.A. and San Diego to Mexicali and trained and bused through the length of Mexico in six strenuous days without stopping. Even when I got into Guatemala and started seeing the flowers, trees and fruits that reminded me of Hawaii, I couldn't quite get rid of my frenzied compulsion to stay in motion. Even though I knew objectively that the slower I traveled the less money I would spend, no one city held me for longer than two days. Raw motion became my vocation. Most days found me in decades-old Greyhound mothballs with Jesus and Mary stickers plastered all over the front window packed with peasants and chickens, rattling down a dirt road towards the next small village.

I finally began to slow down at Livingston Guatemala, a little village on the Caribbean that was only accessible by an hour long boat ride from Puerto Barrios. I abandoned myself to the laid back rhythms of the Garifuna, the descendants of Jamaicans who migrated throughout Caribbean Central America. They walked slowly with heads held high and told each other "Cool aja. Cool there. Cool cool!"

Soon, even that tropical paradise began to depress me with all of its hipper-than-thou European tourists who wouldn't even deign to say hello to honkies like me, preferring instead to pretend they were drinking liter beers and eating shrimp and avocado in a land untainted by the presence of other Euro-North Americans.

I traveled southward, obsessively asking myself "Why did I come here? How could I have left Amber during our last summer together?" A good fish dinner or a couple of beers might offer temporary relief. My mind kept coming back to what I would

say the first chance I got to call her. I was finally able to get through at the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador. A small girl answered the phone.

"Can I speak to Amber? Hello? Hello?!" I was afraid she might not be able to hear me although I could hear her.

"This is Amber."

Oh.

I tried to get her to fly down. She said she just got a job house-sitting a three story mansion in the Berkeley Hills.

Oh.

She begged me please please please to come back up. It seemed a waste of time to come this far down and turn around and hightail it back up, maybe even take a plane, but God it was sure tempting! A luxurious pad to lord over as our own! Picture windows overlooking the bay and the creamy yellow light of the afternoon! Sleeping naked together on big beds strewn with thick pillows!

"Guess who's here," she said conspiratorially.

"Who?" I asked nervously

"Austin."

Oh.

I had an image of her slowly pulling the bed cloths up over her bare breasts and casting an involuntary glance at Austin's naked figure beside her in the bed.

An embassy official advised me not to continue south through Nicaragua. Labor unrest had sparked a massive general strike in Managua, which was under martial law. There were even indications that the military might use the civil disturbances as an excuse to stage a coup against the newly elected civilian government of President Violeta Chamorro. I told him I'd go La Libertad for a few days to let it simmer down. I needed to cool my heels and mull over my options with Amber before heading further south

anyway. Besides, I couldn't very well skip what I heard was the best surfing in Central America outside of Costa Rica!

"Look out for the undertow!" the official advised.

I left the Embassy past the hundreds of Salvaderenos in an incredibly long line outside of the embassy gates waiting patiently for the chance to get the paperwork started on emigration to America. I priced tickets at the first travel agency I could find. \$400 to Los Angeles, \$200 to Houston, one way. Not too cheap. I could live another month or two down here on that much money.

I waited at the bus stop for the bus to La Libertad. Three young Australian men that I had traveled with earlier in Guatemala for a few days a few weeks before pulled up in their V.W. van from out of nowhere and offered me a lift. They wanted to surf too.

We settled into our hotel rooms across the dirt road from the beach. I swung open my wooden shutters, saw the waves breaking perfectly and immediately went out to rectify the tragedy of seeing such beautiful waves go surfed. The brown muddy water was far warmer than Hawaii, which surprised me greatly.

I treaded water and took wave after wave from the main peak where they all started breaking, constantly looking back at shore to stay aligned with the open air restaurant across the street from my hotel. I took my fill of thick 2-3 foot waves that never closed out. It was incredibly rejuvenating to be in the water, as always.

"Watch out for the undertow my ass!" I thought as I went down the face of my thirtieth beautiful wave. "Give me a royal break! What kind of tourist did he take me for? I've been swimming since I could walk! If you're savvy and don't go looking for trouble, it's not that hard to stay safe. Maybe his advice about Nicaragua was as useless as his advice about the undertow? I'd better press on. When will I make it down here again?"

San Jose

Summer 1990, San Jose Costa Rica

The Mood struck me again. I was able to stave it off the day before with an International Herald-Tribune read leisurely with coffee and pastries in a sidewalk cafe. So I bought another Tribune and carted it under my arm to Chez McDonalds, hoping to vanquish the Mood for another day by satisfying my obsession for pancakes a million miles from home. No such luck. Through a giant picture window on the second floor I watched the rain collapse onto the benches and potted shrubs of the minuscule park across the street. How is a love I felt so deeply supposed to suddenly just be a pleasant memory?

Compared to my private lament the precious incidents of world affairs described in the newspaper seemed tepid and trivial, endlessly repeated variations on the same brush fires and wars and top-level realignments. Reading the paper seemed like insipid busywork, a cruel device for the gratuitous murder of innocent hours. As I unfolded it to its full wingspan on a white Formica table bolted onto the floors I boggled over how little I've ever cared about anything I've ever read in a paper. How many articles have changed my life? Who can even remember yesterday's stale news? It is a trade with the paperboy. A handful of pocket change for the dubious relief of overwhelming our visual field with text Text TEXT, delighting in the numbing relaxation of submission.

"It's an amusement as watery as this fucking coffee," I thought bitterly with hateful slurps. "Same shit, different day. Fresh outbreaks of violence! New and improved brutal suppression of internal dissent! Ballistic missiles fucking nuclear assholes faster, harder, deeper!"

I glanced up casually from the outspread paper at the sterile and soulless formica and glass all around me. What sort of laboratory of cruelty was this?! From whence the delirious joy of the Costa Rican locals as they tore into the prefabricated meal components cast in suburban Chicago foundries of flesh paste, gluten and potato flake? From whence their unalloyed delight? Didn't they realize that they jettisoned everything

that distinguished their local milieu from the Bulldozing World Uniculture with every criminal bite? They must not mind...

Who were these vacationing Americans too stupid and cowardly to find any other way of filling their stomachs than with the same meal they might order back home on Thursdays at the McDonalds at the end of their block? What bone-numbingly conventional imaginations they must have. Why the fuck didn't they just go to the Grand Canyon? With the callous laughter of the hurt and betrayed, I went down the stairway to the counter for a second cup of watery coffee.

The fat red-faced Texan sitting alone at a tiny square table staring with such forlorn longing at the desolate shambles of his life in the bottom of his cup of coffee was actually the ambitious young captain that led the aborted coup attempt in Mozambique that left dozens dead.

I stood in line behind fresh-faced young blonde evangelical missionaries on their first trips abroad, as eager to save benighted souls after breakfast as Somali soldiers were to prevent the passage of Kalashnikov rifles and medicine through their blockades.

Swarthy dark eyed firebrands plotted the next day's Young Socialists demonstration outside of the American Embassy over Egg McMuffins and Coca Cola.

The monumental fraud and misrepresentation and insipid will to power on every level of society is too pervasive to be an aberration, too easily found throughout the globe and across time to be anything over than an essential part of our own makeup. I think the impossible: something so resistant to any exorcism must be something we secretly cherish. We are hellbent on our own destruction. The Global Rome is burning...

There was nothing to do about it except order another cup of coffee, bid a hasty retreat back to my table and keep watching the rain through the window.

Absentmindedly I handed the brown polyester uniform my empty cup. He was already in flight and returned in seconds with a depressingly fresh cup. There is

something about this efficiency that is culpable. If only we could slow down long enough to accurately determine the appropriate paths for society to take.

I fumbled slowly for some coins and find them too soon, giving the cashier exact change. The person behind me was already being helped over my shoulder before I even stepped aside. In dreamy bewilderment at the conjugal relationship between speed and cash, I moved out of the way. With my first sip I stared surreptitiously up one end of the stainless steel counter and down the other. Big Macs, soft ice cream cones, french fries, sodas and an entire mosaic of brightly packaged food products were slung with dizzying speed. I focused on the hands making rapid exchanges by sleek cash registers.

"Don't they all know that each additional fillet of fish sold brings a brutal rain of ruin down upon them?" I thought. "Don't they care?!"

I retreated back to my snug harbor on the second floor. I had a glimmer of fondness for the newsprint strewn reassuringly about my seat, establishing at least a moments worth of geographical stability for me somewhere.

The rain had stopped falling. The pavement and grass of the postage stamp park were wet, their grays and greens deep and rich. The light outside was still dim from the thickly overcast sky, even though it was almost noon.

An old Japanese man in a baseball cap and a thin polyester dress shirt sat down alone a few tables away from me. I thought from his dress and very American meal of sausage and eggs, toast and O.J. that he might be from Hawaii. A widower perhaps, visiting his daughter who married a Tico she met studying at UCLA?

"Did I go to high school with his grandchildren?" I wondered.

I decided my fantasy was more interesting than the truth could have been and walked out without trying to strike up conversation. Bits of fruit peel and wrappers and cigarette butts floated in weak streams alongside the street curbs. Thin trees in square puddles guarded the perimeter of a pedestrian mall. It was dim and warm.

"Cambio? Change? Cambio? Dollars?" whispered shady men in sunglasses from doorways as I passed through the money changing district.

The streets were teeming on a weekday afternoon. The locals seemed on the verge of losing their city to a Fifth Column of gawking Americans, far more than I had seen anywhere in Central America so far. All mainstream tourists who came because Costa Rica was "safe and rich," the "Switzerland of Central America."

Blonde families led by intrepid parents congratulated themselves that they didn't go to Florence for the family vacation this year. Wealthy old couples in "casual sports cloths" complained about what a rip off the previous day's tour had been and bickered over where to go for dinner. Hostile young travelers, there for two weeks, prided themselves on being cooler than their friends because THEY went to Costa Rica instead of Mazatlan, "I just got back from COSTA RICA," they would say when they got home, the announcement would be their favorite part of the trip.

All of the westerners that I had seen for the last two months had been overland travelers like myself, off for long-term trips of at least a couple months or more. I could talk to them. Walk right up and start a conversation that might lead to a tip on where to score some weed, sharing the expense of a hotel, or even traveling together for a few days. Here, they were vacationers not travelers, down for a quick week or two in hotels with wall-to-wall carpeting, air conditioning and hot running water in private baths. None of them came alone (like so many of the travelers had) and none of them talked to anyone except the people they came with.

I was lonely walking those crowded streets and seeing all of those islands of westerners within a sea of locals, knowing how pointless even a simple hello was. They were all groups self-sufficient in and unto themselves. Occasionally I would look up from the ground to meet eyes with one of the young ones as we passed. They were always either engrossed in conversation with one of their pack or staring intently at some engrossing architectural feature on some distant building. Anything to avoid making eye

contact with me. If I looked where they were staring, it usually turned out to be a parking garage, a bank building or a nest of antennae on some boring modern high rise.

It wasn't long before I sunk into that mode of detachment myself, looking so glum and dejected that I knew I forfeited even long shots at making contact. I daydreamed about finding that one hip young tourist chick who would see through my gloomy facade and extend her heart to me.

I walked and walked and walked out of the dim gray brown high rises of downtown into the residential areas, past soccer fields, back in and back out and back in again. Created petals of a flower with my aimless loops out of downtown into the suburbs.

I felt fiercely wound up, intensely coiled, resisting powerful impulses to drop to the ground on my knees, put a hand over my face and sit there catatonic. But I knew that wouldn't make any difference. Sit on a curb, don't sit on a curb - what's the difference? The same questions would remain unanswered, the same feelings would rage on unabated. "Why did I come here? Why did I leave this time? What am I looking for in this life of constant motion? Why can't I go back to her? Am I supposed to feel nothing now after loving Amber so deeply? Am I supposed to be content with her memory? Submit graciously to being ripped apart?"

Private Party in Limon

Summer 1990, Puerto Limon Costa Rica

I nursed the Mood again in a small port city with less streets for walking than the capitol San Jose. I spent the morning trying to walk through the Mood, going over the same streets again and again. Although I got a letter general delivery from Amber at the post office, I didn't want to read it until my mood improved. Maybe I could have outrun it with still more travel but the 1:00 p.m. bus down the coast to Cahuita never came. I tried to assuage the Mood with beer at dinner, having two by myself with that famous

Costa Rican specialty, chicken chow mien. There were a smattering of Chinese people up and down the Caribbean coast. The beers helped coddle my sickness a tiny bit. After dinner, I walked further until I thought of a different tack: ice cream.

I sat on a park bench in the dark across the street from the ice cream stand, eating my double scoop without relish. A greasy bum walked up carrying two empty cardboard boxes under his arm. He dropped them onto the bench I was sitting on, mumbled incoherently and motioned the cone towards him.

"SUCK ASS, YOU SHIT BAG!" I yelled at him. "GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY FACE, YOU COCKSUCKING DICKWEED!" I was in a BAD mood and finally FED UP with being tittered at, pointed at and hit up for money for the last two months. He made the same incoherent mumblings at the same volume accompanied by the same spasmodic harvesting gestures. This was obviously one OBLIVIOUS motherfucker.

Impulsively I changed my mind and offered my cone to a fellow lost soul.

"You really want it? Here - take it," I said extending the ice cream. What are the last few bites to me anyway? I wasn't really enjoying it anyway. Maybe he'll enjoy it infinitely more than me. Enjoy a rare pleasure in an otherwise barren life. Hell, one of us should have a good evening. He took a bite and handed the cone back to me.

"What a wholesale jibbering idiot!" I thought, flabbergasted, grabbing the ice cream. "How could he possibly think that I might have even the most microscopic desire for the return of an ice cream cone that had been slobbered over by some delirious Third World juicer with a grand total of two neurons flickering dimly inside his cavernous cranium? I bet he was so far gone that he was asking mechanically for some faintly remembered echo of past pleasures. He certainly wouldn't remember the incident tomorrow."

"We are all brazzers under zee skin," he said. He picked up his empty cardboard boxes and walked away.

"Piss off, asshole," I thought, throwing the cone over my shoulder onto the ground. "I'm in no mood for that international fellowship jazz tonight."

I crossed the street to a corner supermarket, not exactly the most common institution down here in Central America, and cruised through their liquor section. The bottles were all too big. I only needed a modest fix, a pint for the evening. Rum or vodka, something to mix with juice. I couldn't very well cart around a half-empty liter of Bacardi in a backpack. Space in my backpack is tight. It would weigh too much.

I'll get a little pint at one of the liquor kiosks all over town. I knew where every single one of them was after walking the town six times over all day. I'll just get juice and limes here. I skipped over to a great wall of small cans of juice and picked out cans of guava, mango and pineapple to mix together into cocktails. Added a bag of ice and a cup to make this a real professional shin dig, went through one of the cashier counters and left.

I called my mom collect from a pay phone on the street. She had just broken up with my stepfather Jerry. It had been a long time coming but, Christ, it finally came!

I picked up a small bottle of rum at the kiosk on the way back to my hotel room, set up shop on the patio of my third floor room and put all of the supplies down on a short rickety table next to my wooden command central chair. The patio was lush with hanging and potted plants and I had it all to myself. I poured three cans of different juices into one of my small metal camping cookware bowls, stirred it with a plastic spoon and added a little water before realizing that the thick syrupy juices would be thinned out by the melting of the ice. I left the bowl of juice on the table next to my chair, stood the bottle of rum next to it and made another little bowl of ice. I filled my cup with ice, a few fingers of rum and a generous dollop of juice, tasted, added another little shot of rum, mixed it with my finger and topped it off with a squirt of lime.

I sat back in the command central chair to take in the evening. It was a perfect warm tropical evening with cool breezes wafting by occasionally, just like Hawaii. I

thought this might be as good a time as any to read Amber's letter. I tried to wait until I got a little more lubed but couldn't resist the temptation. I turned the light in my room on and moved the chair to the patio doorway so that I would have enough light over my shoulder to read by. The letter didn't have quite the effulgent, overflowing declarations of love I was hoping for. How dare she remain functional without me?! It was pleasant, chatty, at a nice medium boil of longing.

Amber is as good a woman as I will ever find. If I can't make it with her I won't ever be able to make it with anyone, pure and simple. What a long, long life ahead of me. I threw the letter on my bed without finishing reading it, turned off the light and went back out to lie down on my back on the dark patio. The cool evening breeze blew gently past the sweaty drink on my stomach as I lay there too sad to even cry.

Dream

Summer 1990, Cahuita Costa Rica

I came back to the beachside village after a morning spent hiking in the tropical jungle. I milled back and forth down Main Street, a short half mile of crushed coral, looking at the hordes of vacationing Europeans drinking beer in open air reggae bars that all played Bob Marley exclusively. Walking walking walking. Never stop walking. Is it curiosity? To see what's up and where it's at?

I went to the beach and walked up the sand a little ways. It was early afternoon. People were packing in their picnics. Couples were on romantic walks. I passed a hut with a sign saying "Please register with the Park Officials when entering the Preserve" in Spanish, French, German and English. I passed the hut with trepidation, afraid of getting hit up for an admission fee but it was deserted and I passed by without incident.

An unbroken wall of coconut trees grew up to the sand along a great crescent of sparkling white beach sheltering a broad bay of deep blue ocean and an vast expanse of pale blue sky, brushed here and there with bright white clouds. It was a beautiful day.

The beach was crawling with tourists colonizing their patches of sand with beach mats, coolers and chairs. They had brought too much crap to be able to explore anything beyond their little fiefdoms.

"Don't go far Junior!" a British mother said. A French father and son in matching green speedos looked at shells along the shore. Young professional Costa Rican officemates from San Jose enjoyed a quick weekend getaway. A Swiss couple from Zurich tanned methodically.

Settlement stopped abruptly at a shallow narrow stream black with tannin. I could practically hear the various international versions of "Mildred - we can't carry the cooler over THAT!" The broad beach turned into a sandy path through the jungle, beach and water is always in view. Dozens of white folk lost in the wilds of Costa Rican beach jungle trails - graciously charted by smart looking signs - kept streaming by me in the opposite direction.

The end of the trail at the tip of a peninsula was as crowded as the broad beach at the beginning of the trail. I thought my exertions would have allowed me to finally jump clear of people. But no, when you finally get to an isolated paradise, some Germans, Australians, Danes, French, and/or Americans are already there! It looked like a beach straight out of a castaway movie with short, warped coconut trees, roots exposed. I kept walking down the beach.

After two hours of walking I was finally starting to leave everyone else behind, except for a few stray Germans. It was deserted. What a treasure!

I found a road. Nice new rental cars were parked in the sand. Kids were squealing and mothers were guarding coolers on blanket. Cheaters! What took me all afternoon to walk to, they reached by car in eight minutes with air conditioning!

Cahuita is simply a tourist town. No bones about it. It made my blood boil. The callous cynicism of an Acapulco or a Waikiki has yet to kick in but give it time, give it time. I would have liked to have been here ten years ago, before the Cognoscenti

Discovery. Always before, always before. I would have LIKED to have seen Hawaii in the 50s and 60s but I can't now, can I? Why worry then if Hawaii is getting more and more diluted! Cultures have been running over other cultures since the dawn of man. Is it possible that Hawaii could be any different? Hawaii is what attracts the flood of new immigrants and Hawaii is forced to become who it has attracted. If Hawaii eventually becomes a colony of California owned by Japan, than that will be what Hawaii is.

I backtracked to the castaway beach for some semblance of peace. I lay down on the sand and read Gabriel Garcia Marquez' Love in the Time of Cholera I had traded for Bruce Chatwin's Songlines with a limey in Nicaragua. Only one couple walked by in an hour. Not bad. I fell asleep for a few hours on the fine sand. When I woke up I skinny dipped in the ocean to clear out the cobwebs and clean off the sand and climbed coconut trees naked until I was dry and headed back.

The jungle trail was packed hard by the tread of thousands of feet over mud sprinkled with sand. A wave of rustling preceded me, fist sized purple land crabs trimmed with red scurrying through leaves into holes of mud. The ferocious din of howler monkeys screaming like deranged werewolves shattered the rattling fecundity of the jungle. After hearing them for awhile, I finally saw a pack of them. They sure seemed like little harmless buggers for making such murderous and terrifying noise! Naturally a French couple came to watch them with me.

Watching the little monkeys horsing around on thin swaying tree branches, I thought of Amber's letter. I told her to try Limon if she wanted to mail me a little something, but that I wasn't certain I would go there. Did she mail that postcard into the void, half expecting I would never see it? After my fill of acrobatic leaf eating monkeys, I set off for town again. More rustling crabs. Forded the black tannin stream. Looked back at the peninsula. White sand, solid wall of coconut trees almost up to the water. Blue sky, blue sea.

I looked towards town. Same arching white sand and wall of coconut trees. Lush green mountains stood low nearby. It looked just like Mokuleia, where I went to 8th grade camp, where I flew in a glider above the mountains and sea, where I exited the unpaved Kaena Point road bicycling by myself around O'ahu so many many times. So many places down here remind me of Hawaii. This bit of Guatemala highlands reminds me of Kamuwela. This stretch of Salvadoran rain forest looks like Honoka'a. This Costa Rican frontier looks like the mountains behind Kahuku.

As I got closer to town, the sand grew more and more crowded. The early evening crowd was coming out. The dusk was beautiful with spectacular violet hues. The beach swarmed with Swiss-German couples, white women with their dreadlocked Rasta playmates and Ivy Leaguers taking a break from their senior year fieldwork in obscure villages.

I crossed the small bridge out of the nature preserve and back into town, past mounds of green coconuts for sale. It was the end of the day. The owner has lost interest in selling and is talking and laughing with the friends sitting next to him.

I noticed that the bars I passed were all full as I walked down the crushed coral main street which was crawling with tourists couples. Goddamn couples. So self-satisfied, so self-absorbed, so happy looking! I looked at each pair as they passed by. Most don't even trouble themselves with a condescending glance. Occasionally Germans offered a chill blank stare. I passed the reggae bar in front of my hotel. More Bob Marley! Only Bob Marley! Not even other reggae artists! Only Bob Marley! I made the last final muddy turn to my home of the moment.

I had a sudden vision. I was back at Sarah Lawrence for the upcoming year. Amber was away at Paris. I was without commitment or attachment. Caroline would be back there after a year in Germany. The crush I had on her before I started going out with Amber still smoldered. I saw us having dinner to reacquaint ourselves, drinking a beer or two, all smiles and easy laughter, back in synch.

It still wasn't dark when I got back to my hotel room. I ate some bread so I wouldn't have to go back out due to hunger. What's the point of searching anymore? Every soul out there is impregnable. I lay on my bed and stared at the ceiling, as I had so many other exhausted and futile evenings before.

Ah ceiling, friend of long standing! I have found someone even crueler than you! Worse than your divine bemusement at the desolation and impossibility of making human contact is the cruel margin that remains in the few contacts successfully made. The "ultimate barrier" that brings the tears to her eyes on our loved one...

No hip hop here, no hardcore punk rock, no high wind blasting through rocky crags. No way out. Just a small bed in a small room in an ocean of indifference.

My subconscious took over and tried to manufacture intrigue as best it could. That night I dreamt of walking endlessly through city streets and dim gray brown concrete highrises. It looked like a strange combination of San Jose and Honolulu. I sat on a bench but there was no need to. So I kept on. Is that man following me? I made a few strange turns to be sure he wasn't following me. I went up an escalator into a drug store. I walked the aisles as I walked the streets, endlessly, looking for something. I saw Caroline in one of the aisles, bending over to look at bags of cough drops. I went to her quickly. We embraced feverishly, kissing, spiraling into an endless night as the floor dissolved beneath us.

"Did you miss me as much as I missed you?" I asked.

With trembling lips she answered, "Yes."

Everybody's Friday

Summer 1990, Berkeley California

Being a boy, I'm ready to go long before Amber and wait on the couch wearing blue jeans, dusty bucks and the shirt I got down south. Tied shoes and tucked in shirt equals ready. I sat with my legs extended and the remote control on my lap, flipping

back and forth between a documentary on cheese making and a rerun of a bicycle race through the Colorado desert on E.S.P.N. I felt like trying to get as bored as possible before I left the house so everything would seem fun by comparison.

The shrill wheeze of a blow dryer came in from the bathroom, the door slid open, leather soles walked across hardwood, the phone was picked up, Amber talked. The T.V. informs me that "perfecting the distinctive blue green veins characteristic of fine Roquefort cheese demands careful attention during the aging process and every ounce of the master cheesemaker's art."

I nodded knowingly. Great white wheels of young cheese were being toured through a factory on a conveyor belt by earnest looking gentlemen in white lab coats. These technicians pointed out the main points of interest in the factory to the taciturn discs of aging milk. They began to grow worried that they were not keeping the cheeses adequately amused. They tried to make funny faces and some wore gay hats. The wheels of cheese rode majestically along the conveyor belt, cruelly silent. The panic and abject terror became obvious among the technicians. One tried to run away but was stopped and pummeled by several others with handy fire extinguishers. His white smock was soaked in blood. His battered face was barely recognizable.

This amused the droll cheeses, who chuckled a bit and snorted. One fell off of the conveyor belt straining to get a better look. He was pounced on suddenly by the young technicians and thrown with a vigorous heave out of a distant window, smashing the glass. The cheeses realized that the tides had turned against them. Paralyzed with shock and fear, they continued riding even further down the conveyor belt, as though nothing had happened. The technicians sensed the tide of battle turning in their favor. They knew that they would surely win the day if they would only act with prudence, vigor and coordination. The whole pack of them walked quietly alongside the rolling cheeses, whistling with their hands behind their backs before pouncing on them in a sudden attack, knocking all of them off of the conveyor belt.

The technicians stacked the heavy wheels with great labor one on top of the other until they composed an awe-inspiring stack nine feet high. The column was very unstable and quickly fell over, splattering technicians with crumbly young Roquefort. As though a terrible poison had been released, they scattered and fled. The cameraman dropped his camera and went running after them, a selection of various lenses bouncing wildly around his neck. The last image before the transmission terminated in a blizzard of gray static sideways picture of everyone pushing each other frantically out of the door. I didn't know P.B.S. did so much live programming!

Bits of crumbly Roquefort cheese fell from the lower left hand corner of the television screen onto the plush beige rug. I turned the set off. This kind of realistic interface is most exemplary. I'll bet those technicians didn't wear white coats when the camera wasn't around! Nothing like an industrial documentary to get your blood running on a Friday night.

I left to hug Amber from behind. She was still talking on the phone. I held her long brown hair back with my right hand, kissed the soft skin of her neck and rubbed my cheek against it with closed eyes. With my left hand I rubbed the down of her lower stomach, just inside the elastic of her skirt. I let her hair fall and caressed the top half of her left arm gently with my right hand. The inside of my forearm just barely grazed her breast with silken stroke. With my left hand I unhooked her bra and with my right hand I caressed her left breast with three fingers. Talking into the phone she organized the evening.

"It's opening night so it'll probably be crowded," she said. "Uh huh...yeah...it'd probably be easiest if we get the tickets and then get you. They might be sold out. Be ready, OK?! Bye."

I smelled the back of my hand, a combination of Giorgio Armani cologne and marinera sauce. She replaced the phone to its cradle, kissed me over her shoulder, threw an arm back and swung around to face me.

"Hi!" she said.

"Hi!" I said.

"Ready?" she asked dropping her arms from my neck to my waist.

"Let's went."

We drove the car through the dark streets in eager anticipation of the possibilities of the early evening. We swung by Faith's apartment and honked. After a long quiet session of holding hands with Amber in the dark car, Faith came out, waving and smiling at us from the third floor patio. I leaned my seat forward so she could get into the back seat. We sped off to buy some weed from some friends of theirs.

It was a backyard efficiency, a trashed out nest of bachelors. Defunct lawn chairs and cardboard beer six and twelve packs cases and bottles littered the muddy porch. Faith knocked and opened the door when she heard a "come in!," launching the Faith and Amber Show on the unsuspecting Nintendo players.

The girls chatted up the black half of the integrated house, sitting in a chair a few feet away from the large screen television, at bat with the video game. The white dude said quietly to no one in particular, "So you guys happened to just drop by, huh?," as he began playing, staring at the monitor. Either I was the only one who heard it, or he was being politely ignored.

I don't think he meant the comment rudely, more like a quick humble joke on the long-suffering intricacies of selling dope to friends. Both parties have to act like old buddies reacquainting even though this may be the only context they've seen each other in for the last six months. The delicate dance must be danced. There must be smiles cast and talk made of mutual friends while the green buds are being weighed out on the triple beam scales. A period of gracious unhurried chat must follow the exchange of cash and stuffed ziploc sandwich baggies.

Back in the car we all took turns smelling the weed before we pulled out onto the road.

"This is good. Green."

"Real green."

The bag was left with Faith in the back seat to roll.

"You can't roll, Boyce? " Faith asked.

"No. Never learned. Always had Amber's pipes."

"I'm kind of the corrupter in this," Amber offered.

"He didn't smoke before he met you?" Faith asked.

"I smoked, just not four times a week."

Staring out the windshield, Amber shrunk her head into her neck with mock sheepishness.

Shit! Look at that line! It goes around the block! It was the opening night of the much anticipated new release from the latest hero of the avant garde who, with a popular new T.V. show, was just starting to cross over into the mainstream and win high pop cultural accolades like appearances on the covers of Rolling Stone and Time.

"Faith and I will get out and get in line and you can go get Sara," I proposed.

"O.K.," Amber said.

"And if it's sold out, we'll just figure it out from there," Faith said.

We got out and walked slowly to the ticket counter to see if it was sold out before we got in the endless line, in mild shell shock at the size of the crowd. The counter and entrance to the theater was set deep inside the building through a long mirrored hall. The hall had as many people in line as we saw from the street, where the line twisted around the corner!

We walked up to the ticket counter. I asked the lady behind the round microphone in the thick bulletproof glass it was already sold out. She said it wasn't. I stepped out of everyone's way to confer with Faith.

"With this line our seats will be shitty." I said.

"They will," she agreed.

We were mulling over our next move when who should bounce up beside us but Caroline, the woman I dreamed about two weeks ago and the last person I expected to see in Berkeley. We hugged hello and beamed at each other. She looked gorgeous. Tall and thin, long brown hair, thin arching eyebrows. She wore an earth mama outfit of an old navy blue sweater too long for her arms, cut off jeans and Birkenstocks. I never figured her as the crunchy tree hugging type but I guess the influence of Berkeley is inescapable.

"You were the last person I expected to see in Berkeley!" she said.

I realized that for all she knew, the beautiful girl next to me with such enchanting lips might have been my date. She had never seen her before. For all she knew I was in Berkeley on my own recognizance, totally separate from any connection to Sarah Lawrence.

"You too!" I countered giddily. "I had a dream about you a few weeks ago," I said with a false lightness.

"Oh really?" she nodded, graciously showing polite interest but apprehensive about probing the loaded admission until a future moment of repose which offered more discretion.

I introduced the two women. "Faith Caroline, Caroline Faith." Was there a whiff of competition in Caroline's weak polite hello? How could I hope for that? I share my bed with my doppelganger and I'm still looking? What a dog! Or is the writing on the wall?

Faith and I buy tickets for our delegation and cut in the ticketholder's line where Caroline's new beau, an American she met during her year in Germany, is waiting. Are her eyes equally keen for traces of competition from me? I avoid the piercing stares from people behind us mad at us for cutting by losing myself in conversation with them as I take my false place in the que.

"Where in Germany did you go? Are you going back to school?"

Blah blah blah. Banal questions caught us up on the year we hadn't seen each other and on each other plans for the immediate future. Faith went to meet Amber and Sara down the street with their tickets. Soon, mundane inquiries fell away and we got to the questions that showed us we still cared a little.

"So where did you meet Faith?" she asked.

I dropped what I fancied was my bombshell: "She's a friend of Amber's"

"A friend of Amber's?! You're still together?! I didn't figure you for the settling kind!"

"Sure. Didn't I tell you? Amber's pregnant..." I said laughing.

After some more indifferent chatter she said "So tell me about the dream," wearily, as though she were a babysitter reprimanding a misbehaving child.

I told her the dream, reigning in the fraught sexual tension and demoting the spiraling kiss to a twirling hug.

"Of course there had to be a twirl," she said sprightly, graciously making it lighter for both of us.

"Of course! You know it had to be a melodramatic film noir dream!" I said, doing my part to keep it light too. I was so overcome with emotion that I bit my lower lip coquettishly with my top teeth to ease the tension. Did she think I staged that little nibble? No, she knew I didn't. We were always pretty frank with each other. In any event, I wouldn't have let the juicy tidbit of the dream fall if I didn't like her and trust her.

Eventually the ticketholder's line revved up and we went inside. Inside the theater, I threw my jacket on two seats to save them for Sara and Faith and reserved one next to me for Amber. The interior had an hyper-baroque Arabian nights motif in midnight blues and gaudy Easter and Mardi Gras colors, bright pinks, greens, magentas, purples and golds. Glittering stars crowded the ceiling above us.

Before long the Power Trio of Amber, Faith and Sara came waltzing down the aisle, bumping into people seated in the aisles and laughing. Amber made her hellos to

Caroline with a hug of propriety. Sara looked at me and flung her head towards the street, indicating that I was to come along and get stoned with them.

"Excuse me," I told Caroline as she retracted her legs for me to pass. "Apparently I have an appointment to go get stoned."

"Don't let me stop you."

On the streets, we ducked around the first corner we passed and lit up right there on the sidewalk, not even bothering to step into the night shadow of the nearest building. All three of them gathered around the joint to make a communal effort of lighting the half smoked joint. They cupped their hands around it like it was the glowing knuckle of a saint.

We went back inside to our seats. The theater was packed. People were sitting in the aisles and standing against the back wall. The weed made me self-conscious during the many sex scenes, sitting between my present day love and my erstwhile object of desire. How should I hold my head? At attention? Cocked sideways? How should I sit? Leaning back in the chair? Sprawling towards the ground? On the sidewalk after the show I told Caroline significantly that I would see her before she left town.

The girls took me to a party being thrown by a friend of theirs in the Berkeley Hills. I didn't know anyone there. I soon found myself where I so often do at parties, in a cool quiet margin a few discreet steps out of the line of traffic, in a dark recess where I can take stock of the surrounding scene.

I moved to a railing on the dark patio. The broad plain of orange Berkeley and Albany streetlights ended at the black water. San Francisco lights sparkled across in the distance across the Bay. It reminded me of Honolulu seen from the mountains at night, orange lights and black water, but on a much larger scale. I thought of all of the people out in the lights below me and tried to think of their lives. How many in that flood of orange are being charmed and fulfilled? How many were happy tonight? What were the figures per acre?

I looked over my shoulder at the party. I saw it framed by four corners through the sliding glass patio doors. It reminded me of many parties I had gone to in Honolulu. Thick clean carpeting. Framed prints on well scrubbed freshly painted walls. Potted palms by the doorway, very much a borrowed "parent's" place. I admired the ballet of the movement of the partygoers, the instinctual and unthought balance of physical motions throughout the room.

The clots of conversation were evenly spaced. One person came down the stairs from the smoking room upstairs and, seamlessly, one person left for quiet talk on the patio. With flawless equilibrium two people came in the front door and two disappeared into the kitchen. People stepped up to the table of food with the bowl of red sangria, people stepped away from the table of food with the bowl of red sangria. The organism of the party maintained an even distribution of charming and well-dressed people.

That we're all here proves that we're looking for something and that this might be the place to find it. Looking for what? Contact, Life, Sensibilities Matched. Something stirred up, something off-kilter. Religion, Art, Love. Everything.

Finally, only the charm of departure was irresistible. The sole sweet token of the night was the desolate drive back home through dark and deserted streets to our waiting bed. My bed is not vacant yet but the season will soon be over. Two years apart. We are sure to be different people by then. Is this the mortgage on our two years of felicity come due? Her to her way and me to mine? I was facing the hard news would soon inaugurate the barren and oft-futile cycle of "cherchez les charmants" all over again.

I leaned forward from under the bed sheets after she fell asleep, slipped a cassette of Son House playing country slide guitar into the ghetto blaster and played it very quietly. I heard an aggressively gentle music that redeemed and relieved the countless hours lost at bars and parties, the whole insubstantial fractured off-balanced unscripted ritual of mating. Men and women arriving with exactly the same needs and leaving with exactly the same moody befuddlement at losing yet another chance at love and

connection. I heard the regeneration. I heard the means of surviving exhausted moments in late night bedrooms, bereft, before the welcome death of sleep comes to snap the neck of another day catalog of failed episodes.

Phoning Caroline

August 1990, Berkeley California

I had two 40 ouncers of Mickey's malt liquor left over from the three I bought for Amber's going away party last night at Faith's. Amber was gone. She left at 6:00 in the morning. I was housesitting for Amber's mom and stepfather and spending the evening drinking at their place out of a heavy pint glass I stole from a cafe a few days ago.

I walked slowly around the empty rooms of the house with my shoes on and my glass in my hand. All the lights were off. I smoldered, caged. Worse than caged. The door was open but there was no reason to go out.

Filled up my glass. Screwed the top back on. Replaced it in the paper bag in the refrigerator door. This is the sensation of house arrest. Restless. Any bar any club any cafe: the single man goes in alone, enters alone, sits unnoticed and exits alone. Nowhere to go. Nothing to do. No dust to unsettle. This even happens in my own town. How much more so here, where among the millions of lights I don't know a soul.

Absolutely burning for Something to Happen, I whipped the number that Caroline gave me at the theater out of my back pocket and pressed the numbers. Just an answering machine, his voice. I hung up without saying anything. He sure laughed real hard at the psycho parts in the movie. I hope he's just strange like the rest of us and not a vengeful or violent type of crazy.

I called again later. It was still the same. Same as it ever was. A bad habit of mine, this. Calling people drunk, writing letters loaded. Interface! Interface! I'm not even calling Caroline, I'm calling my conception of Caroline. Who can I talk to that will

save me from myself on a rough Saturday night? Phantoms, that's who! Who else would conspire to give a swift kick to the bone grinding tedium of 2:00 a.m.?

"Why are you doing this?" one finally asked in deep anguish after I had made one too many such late night phone calls. Jessica had a crush on me once. These errant calls were torture for her now.

"Well...I, I...Take a drink and I..."

Until then it didn't even occur to me that I might be doing anything cruel or untoward. Jessica is in the Hari Krishnas now, suckling young babies under gauzy saffron robes. I'm sure I can't take all the credit for driving her into a cult but Lawd! It does make a boy think! The music she asked me to play one afternoon, the sweet harmonies of Crosby, Stills and Nash, at my house before we went out has ever since reminded me of how guilty I felt and how sad she sounded.

I called Caroline once more and it was still a machine. I walked over to the record player, feeling this side of explosive and put on "Sweet Judy Blue Eyes," the song that always made me feel the most criminal. I sat on the couch with my drink in my lap and listened to it in the dark.

I've listened to it enough times, not in conscious mortification but inadvertently, when friends put it on, that it has grown weak in its power to indict and provoke old memories. The singeing remorse it could once engender has faded with time. I can't even picture her face anymore and have no desire to try. All I see now are her thick shoulders and wide spongy waist, hopping barefoot on a crowded Waikiki sidewalk in an orange robe to the rhythm of the bells.

Alone in the City

August 1990, Berkeley California

I was footing it alone through a residential neighborhood infested with trees, sunlight and delightful architecture when I felt her skin, the gentle ridges of the stretch

marks on her ripe hips immediately palpable under my empty hands. I emitted a curt involuntary moan without opening my lips and my steps faltered. I collapsed with my shoulder onto a fat lamp post and wrapped my arms desperately around it.

A young well dressed couple walked by. Wretched couples! Successful in love! I looked up at them smoldering from beneath my brow and followed them with my eyes until they disappeared from my sight. I closed my eyes and listened to the sound of two busy lanes of traffic. No one saw me. No one offered more than an indifferent glance.

We are all alone in the city.

I drifted dreamily away from my buoy, letting my finger tips be the last part of my body to touch it, and continued on my merry way for morning coffee and chocolate croissant. What did it matter if I ate them or not? I imagined myself disappearing as I walked, fading, losing my opaqueness as my lumbering profile blended slowly and inexorably into the shrubs, bushy trees and front porches behind me, until I was nothing. One might notice my mysterious disappearance into thin air, maybe two. They would think it was something they didn't see and wouldn't even mention it to their friends and loved ones at dinner that night.

I thought of how I cried intensely and noiselessly in the shower last night for long minutes, crouched in a ball on the floor beneath the warm cascading water.

"Go on," I told myself then. "Cry. Cry harder. Cry as hard as you like. What is there to stop you? You are by yourself. In every way."

I walked down the sidewalk, pulled my sunglasses out of my pocket and put them on to regard everyone from behind a my shield of dark green plastic lenses. When the cute bohemians ones walked by I stared forward with my head but stared at them intently, following them with my eyes, haunted by my desire for shapely minds and narrow hips.

In my mind, I asked each of these momentary love interests in turn, "Will you find your perfection, your ideal, your love? Have you found it already? Is your step

guided by the sovereign indifference of fulfillment? Is it something I can see in your eyes, in the way you walk, in the carriage of your head?"

A pack of sorority girls giggled their way towards me down the sidewalk wearing \$100 Ray Bans, thick tidy T-shirts tucked into sprightly khaki shorts, their feet shod with white tennies of immaculate conception. Their love vision was clearly reserved for the eyebrows of Beautiful Boys in Calvin Klein perfume ads. Failing that, they'll settle for a specimen with bulging pectorals and a short sharp side part, preferably a Greek from water polo or crew.

I saw a puck rocker across the street. Her strict obedience to the dress code of non-conformity certified her non-conformity. She wouldn't be a rebel without her black leather jacket, plaid skirt, long sleeve plaid shirt tied around her waist and Doc Martin boots. Maybe if I shaved my head and bought some suspenders I could be a rebel too. I been a rebel all my life. The fucking punkers think I'm a preppy and the fucking preppies think I'm a freak! I've never been trusted by either side!

I came to a corner and waited for the light to turn green. A young hippie couple, neither of them even born in the 60s, wait on the opposite corner. He had long frizzy blonde hair and a billowy ethnic print shirt. So many uniforms out here tonight! So much fossilized, pre-digested self expression! Passing them on a sidewalk they smelled like the classic hippie mixture of pungent sweat, falafel and patchouli.

There's a cute one. Carrying a bicycle pump, wearing black lycra biking pants and a T-shirt, black hair tied back in a bunch. She smiled at me from beneath her own sunglasses. I'll be in excellent temper for an hour. Happily, I bought a small coffee and a chocolate croissant and took them to a small formica table outside of the bakery to continue my studies of the human beast. It is better to be in a good mood than a bad one.

I thought of Amber's dawning life in Paris and became jealous. She's not going through the same funk as I am. She has the first hectic weeks of school to throw herself into. Offices to run to, registration slips to get signed and lines to stand in. Every crack

of every hour filled by the novelty of a fascinating new city whose foreign language she knows. She is left with no time to stew in her own juices or fall against lamp posts feeling MY ribs.

We are murdering something here. Snapping necks to break lives into two distinct sections. "When We Were Together" and "After." So nothing get too sour or complicated. We're taking precautions now so that the memory of our year and a half together remain an esteemed one. Killing the living "is" so that the dead "was" will stay cherished. Convincing ourselves that "as inexorably as we drifted together, we drift apart."

This planet can put alot of space between two people who love each other. Good thing I'm a Traveler. I feel her body again...my hands on her breasts...empty air before me...I gather some fabric from the shoulder of my shirt, lift it to my nose and inhale deeply. Her scent is fading, rapidly becoming more and more a projection of my own imagination. What impossible murder we commit!

I sit at my little formica fortress and brood, intense and catatonic. I feel like a black hole my surroundings are collapsing into. I watch the shadow of my shirt flapping loosely in the breeze dance about on the sidewalk. I smell her perfume faintly. Paper defines our interface now, our minds and bodies are only connected via little slips of paper put in envelopes My testes retreat at the thought of it. It disgusts both of us. I think of her beautiful long hair and its smell when I used to grab a great handful and bring it to my face.

We have to do this to stay functional for such a long separation. It's the rational thing to do. A thousand such obscene voices rush through my head.

I see the lovely blonde that poured my coffee. She is on her break now, sitting on the ground outside her cafe, leaning against the wall. Her boyfriend is with her and has his hand gently on her knee. A sudden wave of nausea comes over me, my stomach

instantly unsettled. That's how I held Katrina's knee last night at the party. Jesus! What have I done! The things we do to Make Something Happen.

Ommigod I kissed her cheek! Ommigod I fondled her shin! She retracted it beneath the long white folds of what she called her "fun dress." God, how embarrassing! What was I thinking?

"You make me feel self conscious," she said as I sat behind her taking these strange liberties with a stranger.

"Sorry," I said collapsing onto my back.

"No, it's not bad."

It was a "what do you do?" type of party. It is always so cute to watch kids play grown-up. A roomful of hip young artists, mostly from the California College of Arts and Crafts, all wanted know each other's specialty. I wondered which one of them I could put a show on with, some progression of the multimedia environment/media sculpture/happenings I did with my "48 Hours" and "Seizures en Mass" series at Sarah Lawrence. Maybe I could collaborate with some of them on my second issue of my Stone Fruit magazine. It had been awhile since I put on such performances and published my collage are. I missed it. Talk about "soul food!"

It had also been a long time since I had been to a party where I heard the question "What do you do?" asked so often, which was the first party I went to at Sarah Lawrence, just a day or two after arriving on campus by myself in that "limousine" van from Kennedy Airport to campus where everyone was a writer, dancer, actor or painter. I was thrilled to be a part of such a large community of committed, motivated, serious artists my own age. This certainly wasn't Hawaii! And yet - was it just me or did everyone try too hard to sound jaded and world weary?

I guess I thought that some type of connection with Katrina might have been possible or I wouldn't have made such a fool out of myself. It was hard to tell if she was

casting me Meaningful Glances or if we were just staring at each other alot. We seemed intrigued with each other.

"Do you know where I can get a cheap acetylene torch set-up?" she asked.

Why, how precious and irresistible! If that wasn't the mother of all arty come-on lines! I was smitten. She was a short little blonde number with high cheekbones and an upturned nose. I felt a soft midriff when I hugged her from behind (Wincing and cringing now at my embarrassing liberties as I recall them!) She went to Peru this summer. I went to Central America. Could we trade stories about how cool our travels were and count them as billowy cooing seductions?

What did she feel when she kicked my feet goodbye with her hands full of stereo equipment at the bottom of the apartment building at the end of the party? Disgust (ew - he kissed me), delight (finally, someone sane and attractive) or something-in-between (nothing, no impression, no thought one way or the other).

What does she feel now the day after? Disgust, delight or something in-between? Something-in-between, I'm sure. Indifference, the cruelest. Girls and boys, girls and boys. What mockery we expose ourselves to trying to make some connection in the starry inferno of the urban American night! But then such self abuse is rarely necessary. People forget. Nobody cares.

I heard her in my mind's ear appraising last night's adventure with me with brutal contemptuous laughter. I needed to walk it off. I gulped the last lukewarm sip of my Kenya AAA coffee and took to the streets again, letting the rhythm of my steps become my mantra.

Got to Keep Moving

August 1990, Berkeley California

The evening of the last Sunday before school started at U.C. - Berkeley I put on my Walkman and went for some coffee, mostly as an excuse to step into the giddiness I had been hearing all day through my solitary apartment room window.

It is a sad thing to walk through the streets of a city alone, with no hope of friends to bump into or people to meet. Guys running up the stairs into the frat houses in howling packs, girls laughing as they walk, absentmindedly making room for me on the sidewalk without even establishing eye contact, abstract acquaintances giving each other the requisite and already fossilized renditions of their vacations.

The Robert Johnson on my Walkman made this a moody pleasure. I could slip into oblivion with the next foot fall, just passing through this sea of wistful gratification.

"Reach up into the cupboard baby
Hand me down my walking shoes
Reach up into the cupboard baby
Hand me down my walking shoes
I believe I got them mean old walking blues."

Six upperclassman spilled into a Toyota pick-up truck. Three into the cab, three into the back. They peeled out from the curb. The three in the truck bed yelled in approbation and threw up their hands.

Other writers of my temperament (which Stendhal identifies as the shy, melancholic type) may identify that as "forced levity" or "artificial glee" but I think that would miss something. It is not hard for some people to be satisfied by a ritual. For us shy and melancholic types it would be "forced levity" but for them it's not. They are not deceiving themselves. If they are, it is so deeply as to not matter. More power to them. They've got a sturdier constitution than I do, a very practical gift. Their pilgrimage will

be easier than mine. I don't begrudge them that although I may be a tad jealous. Just a tad though. I want to feel everything, even suffering.

The coffeehouse is packed. Each of the small round tables on the patio is occupied. There isn't a free seat in the whole place. That's fine. I was just checking. I wouldn't have stayed even if there were one. A man alone could get hurt in a place like that, threading his way between the sharp tables, withering glances and practiced looks of jaundiced disdain (helpful means of completing their ensembles, like a few brass bracelets or a splash of perfume).

In line for my cafe latte (to go, naturally) I tried to remember where I had seen those looks before. Oh yes! On me! It was the look I used to give the beautiful girls in high school. God, when will I ever escape myself?

I took my coffee and retreated back out to the sidewalk through the tables. Poor fools. I felt like blowing a whistle and giving orders to disperse. Of the hundred of them out there earnestly pursuing fellowship, romance or even just having a cup of coffee, five maybe ten, if I'm feeling impossibly generous maybe twenty will experience the love I just experienced and mine imploded anyway, due to the effacement of separation. Get out of here! Pack it up, people. It's not worth the trouble! Why should I bother warning them? Let them limp along. Who cares? Life is so short and death so much longer.

I walked down a few steps, onto the sidewalk and passed two blondes with their hair tied back in ponytails. They had so exactly the look of practiced contempt that I had just left in the cafe that I had to laugh or go crazy. I thought for sure they would look back at who was laughing. They didn't.

Back on my block I saw people from all directions streaming into a house across the street from my student ghetto slum. There were already dozens of people on the patio holding cups in front of flashing colored lights and the silhouettes of dozens more inside.

I watched everyone arriving at the party as I continued home. They all looked the same. The guys all had on Stan Smith or K Swiss sneakers, faded jeans or long Bermuda

shorts, and rugby shirts or long sleeve oxfords. Half of them had baseball caps on, the rest had short haircuts. The girls had a little more variety but definitely tended towards low heel pumps, short skirts, sleeveless tank-tops and long hair tied back in pony tails. If there was anyone in Berkeley that night not dressed like that, they weren't going to that party.

Just in walking home I inescapably joined one of the streams going to the party. Someone looked down from a lit third story window. Ah watcher! Your eyes have fallen onto a comrade, another veteran watcher. But don't you know, greenhorn, you have got to turn your light off so you can see out without being seen. That's the way to do it right. Unless you want to be seen. I don't know, dear. That doesn't sound right. Maybe our relationship wouldn't work out. I followed the crowd drinking my coffee past my house to check out the party and see if it was crashable. They're streaming in from all four corners now.

For some the demon is the sexless weekend. That's the challenge. To reel in a fuck like a feisty trout with no resources beyond cologne and cunning. Others, my beautiful lost comrades, will walk away at the end of the party bemused, perplexed that an intelligent and reasonably good looking person has managed to fail to meet one intriguing person when so many members of the opposite leaving the party are thinking exactly the same thing.

"Anyone say the worried blues ain't bad,

"Must not have been the same blues I had."

Just let me get out on the road and out of my mind and don't let me stop until all of the regret, longing and humiliation are burnt out of me. I feel like an atom. The tighter I'm held in the faster I vibrate.

"Got to keep moving
Got to keep moving
Blues falling down like hail
Blues falling down like hail

Got to keep moving
Got to keep moving
Got a hellhound on my trail
Got a hellhound on my trail"

I rewound those lines and listened to them again. I rewound it and listened to them a second time before turning it off to collect my thoughts. I let myself into my room, closed the door and lay down on Amber's big futon. I had heard those lyrics a million times before but they never struck me like that before. Of course! God I've been so close to this thought so many times before!

Now I know where I've been going all of these years with all of my compulsive wandering, those thousands of restless miles across interstates and international borders during my burgeoning career as an expatriate. I was heading back towards my point of origin, formulating the terms by which I could return for good, searching for the true nature of my relationship to Hawaii, lessons I could not have learned if I had stayed. I wanted to write the passport of everyone who felt like they were born strangers in their native land. The self-conscious go. The unself-conscious stay.

I see now that I have been wandering in the valley and can't return to Hawaii until I learn what I need to. It is a race against time. Can I learn what I need to before so much of what makes Hawaii distinctive place is lost? Will I return to a homeland I do not recognize? Can any of us ever go home again? My mandate feels significant because Hawaii is such a potent laboratory to study the effects of the Homogenizing World

Culture on a distinctive and diverse local culture, lessons that are only going to get more and more relevant throughout the world as time goes on. Even if the peculiar ability of the market economy to destroy those things it loves by the very act of loving them finally succeeds in destroying Hawaii, its obliteration will still be an important manual of what other cultures under the gun should avoid.

Suddenly I'm bone positive that I can not go back to Hawaii until I've figured out absolutely once and for all exactly what it is that Hawaii is in the process of losing. If I go back now I'll blow it and Hawaii's lessons and contributions will be lost to me forever. I have two more years of school left. Can I stay away that long? Sure I can. I've had intimations of this feeling before and have always drifted sheepishly back (but only for weeks at a time).

Letter from Amber #1

September 9 1990, Paris

There is a running letter to you in my head. Constantly I am talking to you, telling you everything. Like Faith's best friend, Faith. "Do you want a cig? Oh, yes, thanks!" The memory of you is that part of me, the friend who accompanies me everywhere, who I tell everything to. But I have had the hardest time putting anything on paper. Maybe because as I write I necessarily limit what I tell you, what I express to you. I wish so much for you to see and understand everything. Also, I have been keeping my pain at bay by only allowing fleeting thoughts of you. I am crying for the first time as I throw myself back into nostalgia.

I have finally arrived in Paris after a week of going from relative to relative and eating huge delicious meals. It was awkward and tiring being paraded around ("Les belles filles Americaines de Rene.") but also fascinating for me. For the first time I could understand what everyone was saying! My grandfather's stories about when he was a boy in Turkey, my aunt's explanations of her paintings, my cousin's orthodox rhetoric,

and above all the force of their Jewish identity. Stories about the war, discussions about religion (most of them are not very religious), the jokes about being Jewish, pointing out who is Jewish around them. Being Jewish is the center of everything they do and say. And I must say, I am drawn to their pride and solidarity. Yet it is very strange to me.

I am now sitting in an apartment of a friend of my cousin's - in Paris! I can't move into my apartment for another few days, which is very annoying. For the first time I'm alone. My father has taken Dana to the airport. She's sick. Poor girl, she's had such a hard time. I'm really glad I got to spend this time with her. I realize it's the most time we've spent together in years.

Last night I dreamed you were outside of my window on a butterfly painted road! Sleeping in my bed, do you dream of me? I wonder how things seem in your new place. How is your Berkeley life unfolding? My mother told me that Sara drove you to the airport. For some reason that made me so happy - but how strange to think your lives unfold without me. How was it to be in Hawaii? Oh yeah, you have to send me your new phone number because I might be able to call for free. This guy whose apartment we're staying in now works in some government office. He said that whenever I want to call I can use their phone!

I went by my apartment. Not inside. Mixed feelings. It's on a wide busy avenue right below the Arc de Triumph - but it's more busy with cars and tourists than artsy Parisian students. Pretty grand looking buildings! I saw something yesterday that made me realize that if there was a way you have to come here. In front of a museum in a large open cobblestone courtyard among tourists and all types of profit seeking "artists" doing their thing, a tiny Chinese woman with incredible muscles was dancing to spacey music. She moved with an almost painful slowness in and out of a clear blue plastic garbage bag. Obvious birth and rebirth symbolism. It's hard to explain but, aside from the fact that her dance was really beautiful and bizarre, there was such a lack of pretension! There was something really pure about it. Not at all the like the "I am an Artist doing my Art" thing

at Sarah Lawrence or New York City. I don't know. Her dance came across like what she had to do, not what she wanted to do for glory or money. Get it? And the crowd's reaction was great too. Of course there were a lot of no-comprehending "what a trip" expressions but a lot of people looked genuinely involved and fascinated. It just seemed like the perfect place for Stone Fruit pages to be littered on the ground and plastered on the walls. Paris during Spring Break, my darling?

I love you baby

Je t'embarrasse mille fois!

Walking Berkeley

September 10 1990, Berkeley California

Walking Berkeley and walking Costa Rica are turning out to be pretty much the same. Spend my time going from one seat to another. You can never escape your own mind. Mine has been about the same in both places. It shows in the way I walk, to cover ground. You're invisible in the city. Especially with sunglasses. I traverse town on meaningless time-killing errands tracking down jobs that will never call me back. But it's not what I do while I walk, it's how I walk.

I'm pretty deft by now with the catalog of what makes life shitty for me. My room is square and lifeless in a squalid depressing hellhole of an apartment complex. I don't have a job. Etc. etc. But what does it mean when I walk? I walk as though crushed, ready, willing and able to collapse onto any random doorway at any time and stay there. What would it matter if I did? Unless there was traffic, nobody would even move me.

I walked and looked into the eyes of some of the beautiful young ladies, especially the shy off-center looking ones. Could they rescue me? Could I rescue them? No. No one could rescue anyone. We were all doomed to walk the narrow paths and negotiate the rigid structures of our lives ad infinitum looking for a hope that would never

be there. Maybe it's a uniquely early 20s affliction to look into everyone's eyes in a state of buried crisis, hidden by sneers and sunglasses. Maybe not. Either way, there is no way penetrate that facade, no way to save the dear soul behind.

"Excuse me ma'am. Let me live for you and I'll let you live for me." Impossible.

I generalize from my experience, I'm sure. Frat boys and people with magnetic genitalia fuck what they can and it is enough. More power to them. I'm congenitally incapable to either do or be satisfied by that. (Ask me that again when I'm a famous writer and everyone wants a piece of me.) Couples loomed everywhere. That left the rest of us, looking for our better halves, the sane and delightful side.

Quandary: will we actually find what we are looking for in love? Will we ever be rescued and redeemed or is an endless cycle of pain? When a problem comes up, how often is it ever handled with good faith and honesty? I'm in no position to judge because I've only been with one woman but I hear stories. Even when an affair goes perfectly as my first love virtually has, that very perfection can be a killer.

After six months of celibacy that look will be back in my eyes, all the more obvious because of my efforts to hide it. If you're hungry, the problem is food. If you're full, the problem becomes something else. If you're poor, the problem is money. If you've got a fat wallet, the problem becomes something else. If you're lonely, the problem is love. If you're involved, the problem becomes something else.

If and when Love fails, what does that leave? Art? Travel? Work? Substance abuse? The choices are few. They don't always work. They are not always dependable.

Letter from Amber #2

September 13 1990, Paris

Beginning this letter by writing your name makes me think of the way you used to say my name. Writing letters is still difficult for me for two immediate reasons: primarily because it feels like such a superficial way of communicating with you and secondly

because I am so fucking busy. But when I got your letter today (and the cool books - thanks!) I realized there's nothing better than getting a letter that's traveled across the seas. Well, okay, there are actually a lot of things that are better but it's pretty damn great. Anyway, it made my day and, if I may be so bold as to presume, I hope that when you get this letter it makes you happy all day! You sound like you could use a great day.

So let me first describe to you my surroundings (immediate, that is) in beautiful Paris. Don't be so quick to call your place a hellhole! Your place is luxurious in comparison. I live practically two blocks from L'Arc de Triumph but a lot of difference that makes when all I can see out of my window is pigeon shit and stone walls. I live in what's called a "chambre de bonne" - i.e. the servant's quarters - at the top (sixth floor) of a windy, filthy (1/2 inch layer of dust), falling apart, black (sans lumiere) staircase. The toilet without toilet seat or lights is down the hall (outside of my room). My walls are a peeling sandy brown water stained mess. The carpet out does the walls in terms of stains and ugly brown color. The mirrors are so old you can't even see yourself in the crappy silver. The bed sucks. There is too much furniture in this room which is, at its widest, only six steps across. Positive points: it does have a shower, fridge and hot plate. But let me tell you that at \$340 per month this is the most scandalous rip off I can imagine. I have lovely Sarah Lawrence to thank for so expertly finding me a place in Paris!

Solution: move into Faith's one bedroom, one kitchen, shower, toilet with Beth as well as pay all of Faith's rent and utilities (altogether around \$450 - 500 for three months). Beth would also pay Faith \$200 per month - so Faith would be making out. Granted she could really use it because she needs to get it more together before she can find work. Only major problem with all this is, would we drive each other crazy? Anyways, that, if it happens, will occur in the beginning of October and last until the end of December.

Aside from my apartment nightmare, I am incredibly happy here. God, what an adventure! Paris is everything corny they've ever said it was - enchanting. It already

rivals ma belle Berkeley in my heart. I am truly in awe of everything that happens to me here.

I say this as I light up a hash cig. Plenty all around. Haven't had to buy it yet. Unfortunately no pot and everybody smokes it with tobacco. I am suffering from cig head rushes and its gross taste. I'm starting to get used to it though. The hash here is not very strong at all but it gives a nice light short munchiless stone. This hash is from Beth's new boyfriend, Lorent.

This town is alive at every moment. The cafes and bars are fantastic. The Parisians are "tres cool." They really have a way of convincing you that they know how to live. But I also feel more American than ever - and, not to get out of hand but I even feel proud of my Americanness. The French hate the Americans but you can't help but sense their dumb-founded awe of us. I am constantly comparing the two cultures, trying to stay open and absorb everything. It's such an intellectual and emotional high because I don't stop learning for a second on so many levels. As we explore the streets, Beth, Faith and I can't stop analyzing our lives here, the French, the Americans, the food, etc., etc. And the language!

After the initial shock of being immersed within a culture I didn't understand and not knowing the language through which to understand it, I am now thriving in this gray zone of semi-comprehension.

I feel so independent, out on the world on my own. On a monetary level, however, I don't think I'm doing so well in the adult world. Money is just flying through my hands. You would not believe how expensive it is here! In an attempt to counteract my wild spending habits, I ate at a student restaurant last night for 10F (\$2). Yet Paris beat me once again as Faith and I got sucked into a cafe on the pretense that we could do our homework there - and, besides, you need a coffee after dinner.

After the coffee and homework came the wine and after the wine we were sucked into a bar with live music after which we were sucked into a cab and deposited at Faith's

with literally no money in our pockets. But that's how it goes here. There's no way I'm going to sit in this disgusting apartment all day and night just to save a little money!

You may have noticed that I haven't really mentioned school. It has started but I'm not really admitting that it exists yet. I have classes from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and homework for the rest of the evening. It really takes up my whole day from the minute I wake up until the minute I go to sleep. So far it's been easy because right now it's only French. Beth said last night that I went off for about two minutes talking French in my sleep!

A couple of days later. 10:30 p.m. Well now I have to pay for my partying. I'm sick! I haven't been sick for a long time. I need your jasmine tea and kisses to make me better. No such luck. No vitamin C either. In fact, there is nothing in our fridge at the moment. I look ahead in panic: no milk for my morning coffee!

I went to the flea market today. It's huge and jam packed with people. I bought a cool suede jacket and a wool winter coat for \$35 together - pretty good deal. I realized then how much of a BIG CITY Paris is. So many people it was like a concert crowd.

Later still. I hope that the tid bits of this letter don't seem superficial or boring to you. I'm trying to reveal the big picture through the details, I guess.

Last night I had a really erotic dream about you. The first really intensely sexual dream I've had in weeks. Too hard to explain - but ooh!

I keep asking myself why do I cry sometimes when we make love. Maybe because at the same time that it's the closest I can get to you it also reveals the ultimate barrier between you and me. Like a line in space whose dimensions can be diminished infinitely without ever being diminished ultimately.

9/19/90. Darling, darling. I can't seem to finish this letter!! So I'm going to send it after this last bit.

Your letter...Boyce, you have too much time on your hands! No school, no job, in a new town without good friends. Of course you're going to get lonely and feel trapped.

Your instinct to fly - isn't that just the need for motion and activity? You of all people can't sit idle. This all sounds repetitive to me because I know you've already thought of it. It's just that I sure can tell that my elation in Paris has a lot to do with the fact that I'm so goddamn busy I never stop - and when I do have time to get depressed (which I do) it's never for very long. It's kind of like the endorphin rush of a runner's high.

Anyways, I'm always there nuzzling the back of your neck.

Talked to my mother. You've definitely won her over. She gives me news about you in the same tone as Sara or Faith - one of the kids. So, you rebel you, you tried to pay the landlord in pennies, eh? Can you see me laughing and shaking my head? It's these desperate acts that make me wanna say, Boyce, I love you!

It doesn't surprise me about how it was with your Dad on your trip around California. I don't even know why we thought it would be so traumatic. But I guess the shit could always hit the just when you least expect it. Is he staying in Hawaii? Is he dishing out any \$\$\$? My mother says you had enough \$\$\$ not to need to work?

How are Lynn, Maka and Jerry holding out? What was it like when you were there with them? Give them my love!

Random questions. Where/who which publishers/distributors/etc. have you sent your Stone Fruit books to? What's up with U.C.-Berkeley, Sarah Lawrence, Laney Community College etc.? Why couldn't you have gone to school this semester and started U.C.-Berkeley earlier? Details please!

New news. It's almost certain that I'm moving in with Faith (for \$600 for 3 months). Beth's moving in to another place. I have reservations because I'm a little hurt by the way Faith has been about it. She'll be making \$\$\$ off me. She doesn't think of it in terms of helping out her friend (me) but rather what it's "worth" for her. It leaves kind of a bad taste in my mouth. Oh I don't know. It's still a good deal for me!

Have you heard the sounds a pigeon makes? Well, the family of pigeons that live under my window have been driving me nuts with their cooing! I can't sleep at night. It's so annoying.

Did I tell you I visited Chartres, the cathedral? It's so fucking beautiful. I've been to the Musee D'Orsay, Musee Boubour, Palais Royal and there is still so much more left to see.

Hardly any of the same products in this country. But one thing remains the same. They have the uhu glue sticks here just like the ones you used to use to make Stone Fruit. Shall I buy you some uhu glue sticks with French on them?

It's time. I love you love you love you and I am waiting for your next letter.

Letter from Amber #3

October 4 1990, Paris

I miss you. A lot. I miss our life together in our little dorm room, our music, our routines, our bed and pillows, reading side by side, waking up in the morning next to you, making coffee, steaming milk, renting movies. O.K. Buster, this nostalgia is your fault. Well, being on my period all alone listening to Crosby, Stills and Nash may have something to do with it too. I just got/read/relived our Big Sur trip. Oh darling, you brought it all back so vividly. Somehow I forgot that you too record every detail, every nuance of every detail. And did I ever tell you how high I got off of the electricity of that pink Zinfandel, atop that glowing hill, feeling the softness and heat of your leg pressed against mine?

Yes you know.

You hear every reverberation, you comprehend every meaning of my words - sometimes better than I do. What I would give to be in that tent right now, not to have to pick and choose the words to put down on this page. Tell me, you who loves to write, how can I get past its barriers and limitations? How can I forgive this page that denies

me so many ways of communicating with you? How can it carry the sound of my voice, the look of my expression, the haze of my half-expressed thoughts, the weight of my hand touching you?

Ah, you see! This temper tantrum over the limitations of written language has caused me to stray from what I wanted to say. It would not have happened had I been talking to you face to face, my sweet.

My thoughts are all tangled up now. How shall I start again?

Oh I'll just say it and not worry about sounding trite or stupid. It just hit me so hard after reading your story. God, you love me how I want to be loved. You never stop re-reassuring me of it. Constantly proving that we've got it, babe. Best friends, best lovers. Nothing you could ever do would be incomprehensible to me, nothing could disturb the truth of what we have revealed to one another. And so continues the dialogue within me. How can I have run to Paris and turned my back on someone so magnificent? (Yes, you). But, I haven't...

As with my other best friends, time and distance can't destroy the connection. But what if it does? But it won't. What about being on my own in Paris at 20 years old, with comprehending a big bad incomprehensible world my only challenge? It still seems redundant writing this to you because you already know how much I love you and you already know I wouldn't give up this experience for anything. I keep pinching myself. Is this really my life? How did I get so lucky? At 20 years old I have "everything a girl could want." An incredible boyfriend, incredible friends, an incredible adventure, freedom, energy, confidence - oh the corn goes on and on - but how to express it to you? I am truly in love with everything that's happening to me (even the sweet pain of missing you). I am fascinated down to my toes! And tres philosophical!

What a quirky love letter this is!

So good night ma cheri

je t'aime

P.S. O.K., one last thing (you know I always have a hard time shutting up). Please keep writing as your heart dictates. No worries about how it would sound to me if I had some Jaques waiting for me! No, I don't have any dark handsome Frog spud on my arm. But, logically, if anyone happens into either of our beds (either of my beds I should say! ha ha), just think what they would have to compete against. I seriously doubt that any rivals in the near future could eclipse what we've got. D'accord? (Look it up.)

After the phone call. I want to try again. You have to trust, you have to know that I love you. I notice your absence. I feel the hole, the empty space. How could it not hurt being away from you? I can't imagine that you don't know how it is for me. We are the same. Can't you see the pain of each reminder, when a letter comes, a song you like, when I see something that you would appreciate? It's all bittersweet. Missing you reminds me that what if I didn't even have you to miss? But I have learned throughout these two years of separations and reunions how to live without you. It doesn't dent my love, doesn't even come close to touching it if I am happy in your absence. I expand. I used to get so depressed when we were apart, even if it was just days when I would hardly see you because you were studying. I would sink low. But gradually I got used to it. As I grew more and more attached, more in love with you it became easier to live normally when we were apart.

It doesn't sound logical put this way but I learned it from you - and it is logical. The deepening of our relationship strengthened me on my own. I used to think your independence (when I depended on you so much) meant that you didn't love me as much as I loved you. It used to kill me some nights to think that you could want to go traveling without me. Even the minutest detail hurt. That you would want to study in the library or go work on one of your art projects away from me. Finally I understood (not just theoretically but in my bones) how much stronger and beautiful your way of loving me was with this independence. You "laughed quietly in awe and admiration and thanks" of me? No. Truly, it's the other way around.

So don't you see how all this applies to me living in Paris without you? I am finally doing something I've wanted to do for years. It's finally happening! And living up to all my dreams and expectations. Missing you, loving you is hard and painful here but it doesn't drag me down. Because I know how to deal with these emotions on a practical level, from day to day. Rather than dragging me into depression, they free me, inspire me and push me forward in the intensity of what I'm experiencing on the whole. This "Paris experience" is momentous for me, it's HUGE - it's an "historical Event" in my little life's history. And it's such a thrill to do it all on my own. I feel beautifully and happily independent not because I don't miss you or don't love you but because I DO! And because I know you love me this way too.

Does this make sense? Does it, does it? Please say it does. Because I couldn't stand the hurt in your voice on the phone. All I wanted was my happiness to spread across the phone wires to you. Does this glimpse at the train of thought behind the telephone words make any difference?

I love you.

Letter from Amber #4

October 17 1990, Paris

I have written so many letters for the wastepaper basket! You'll have to excuse my writing because I am sitting in a metro car embarking on an hour long ride to the airport to pick up a package of my winter cloths. I'm broke Boyce. I don't even have a centime to pay my way back from the airport! I'm trusting in fate. Come on sweet lady luck, don't let me get busted!

I've received three letters from you in the last two days. While it's not quite fair, I know, I was waiting for those letters before writing (sending) you one. Is it my instinct to allow you the time to sort things out for yourself or just plain old cowardice? I have so much to say. I think about you all the time and I want so much to let you into my mind,

to show you the process of my thoughts. But all of these half letters, and all of these mental letters to you dictated throughout each day (which in other circumstances would be fragmentary but gradually illuminating conversations) won't be able to reach you. So I'm stuck and forced to be articulate when my thoughts are so murky!

Let me begin by telling you that I have been experiencing my first period of agitation and dissatisfaction in Paris! In and out of depression, not wanting to do anything except drive myself crazy with boredom. But I have begun to understand what's going on with me a little better. My thoughts have begun to gel. My impulses have become more confident. I feel calmer too.

You see, my lover, that things are happening in the internal world of your little Amber. Perhaps it's Paris, perhaps it's living on my own, perhaps it's being far away from the security of you, perhaps it's just my age or perhaps it's simply the right time - perhaps it's all of these things - but I've been spending a lot of time thinking...about myself. I don't remember that last time, if ever, that I was so conscious of my every action, feeling, thought. And I see a different girl. I feel different. No, not about you! I'm talking in wider terms about "me" in general. I'm trying, rather unsuccessfully, to steer clear of the "young girl growing up" cliché!!! But seriously it's as if I need to stop and recognize, take account and understand the changes the last few years of my life have brought about in me. For example, all this time away from you, missing you, has allowed me for the first time to understand in conscious terms what you have taught me, what we have discovered together, how much we have changed each other. All of the glimmerings are crystallizing. Oh how much I cherish all you have brought into my life. In this same way I have been searching out the effects of all of the other great forces in my life: my family, my friends, Berkeley, Sarah Lawrence - all so far away from me now but so close inside me.

And then there is the greatest force of all working upon me: little Miss Amber herself. Let's see if this metaphor works! Imagine flipping the drawings of a cartoon

rapidly to create an image in motion. I want to bring all of the separate stills into one image, fixed, solid and defined. Is this making any sense to you? I'm having a hard time explaining it. In a sense it's simply that ever so poignant, ever so cliché, ever so infinite urge to "know thyself" in a stronger way than I've ever felt it before.

I have to see this through, I have to go all the way with this.

Something you said in your letter. Exactly my thoughts.

"I worry that if I go to Paris domestic tranquillity and Amber-love will simmer these feelings down so far I'll lose track of them...they are interesting, profound, common emotions that need exploring."

If we were to live here together. I would turn in towards you, into us. I wouldn't want to be with you any other way because that's LOVE. What I fear is that I would smother this driving impulse towards self discovery. I don't want to risk losing the chance to discover so much. How can I be so self-sufficient? How can I tell you that what I need most right now is to be without you rather than with you? I don't know. I don't even know if it's true. I am amazed at my own strength. There are cracks in this strength. I ache for you. Ache ache ache constantly. And it's killing me to say no to you. It's killing me to know that even if you understand why intellectually - you are hurting because of me. But if I tried to soothe your pain, calm your rage, would it be the right thing now? Could I even do it? Here, in Paris, you in a youth hostel? In the midst of this whirlwind?

And so where does this leave us? I arrive back at the beginning. What was that calm simple truth we possessed that allowed us to part for good so many times and always come back together again?

We are not mere lovers. We are best friends. We think the same - or at least we comprehend each other. I wouldn't want to say that I think like you, you nut! Uh oh - "nutty girl?!" We know the wrinkles on each other's toes. What we have never seems to self destruct, as so many other relationships do. It keeps reviving itself with intriguing,

honest, startling, mysterious, beautiful, beautiful love making. We have not, will not lose each other - in this I have to trust. I'm trying to convince myself and you that change (inevitable right now) does not have to equal loss. Not if we don't want it to.

I'm exhausted. Let me come to you at Christmas. You come here in the Spring (me with my own apartment!) to visit. I don't know. These visits during breaks seem so pathetic, so little to offer you. All I can say is please remember that all of my heart and honesty are still offered up to you, wherever we are.

I love you.

I love love love love

YOU

P.S. I think you should buy a rice cooker. Wise financial investment.

P.P.S. If you happen to make a T-shirt worthy of your one and only favorite sweetheart - SEND IT TO HER!

Pascal's Wager

October 20 1990, Berkeley California

In daydreams walking from class to class across the large U.C. - Berkeley campus I visualized dumping the schoolbooks from out of my backpack, abandoning my small rented room as it lay and walking over the Berkeley Hills to New York City. The Big Apple felt like it was right over the crest of the Berkeley Hills. From that major port of entry, it would be a cheap and easy flight to Paris.

The search for the Romantic Partner, the preoccupation of everyone from puberty to my age and beyond, is always successful in every despicable lying teen dream John Hughes movie, which is not always the case in real life. Occasionally I go to bed hopeful. This thin redhead smiled at me at the party. That short brunette with a bob hairdo chatted with me at the cafe. This Chinese girl in Sociology had an attractive kind smile. A few giddy steps of anticipation and delighted leaps of imagination end in the

solid stinging rebuff or else one of the many various routines like "occupado," "let's just be friend's" or "she's not who I thought she was."

Alas! Even a successful courtship is no guaranty of sustainable love. We all know how fast relationships can devolve into mechanistic affection through the ritualization of what we think our partner (and occasionally beloved) expects. We all know how hard it is to keep the spontaneity and freshness alive and constantly renewed. We all know how sad it is to feel alone cuddling naked in your lover's arms after sex. Dull domestic complacency can easily tempt us to kick down the thin walls of routine, beginning the whole sordid chimerical cycle over once again, which we somehow keep remembering as so much more exciting, challenging and fun that it ever was.

Even if you luck into the "perfect relationship" with a woman who is intelligent, funny, good company, resourceful, ambitious, creative, has an interesting perspective and, above all, knows intuitively when to be close and when to allow distance (as Rilke puts it, "to protect each others solitudes"), even if you luck into finding all of those rare qualities in one full meal deal, you will still be confronted with the ineradicable, final, ultimate, terrifying and delicate barrier between two people, that part of ourselves that remains eternally private and unknowable.

But you could look at it from another perspective. Remember when you convinced me to return to Hawaii and fix the boat, Amber? You said that if I stayed in Berkeley I was certain not to return for a second year at Sarah Lawrence but if I returned to Hawaii there was at least a chance that I could go back to school. We had to bet on that chance.

Likewise, if you believe that a barrier really exists between two souls then you are certain never to cross it. If you don't believe it exists you will probably still never cross it anyway, although there may be a chance that you will. You've got to bet on that chance, as the French philosopher and theologian Pascal suggested in his famous wager on the existence of God. If you lose, you lose nothing. If you win, you win everything.

Letter from Amber #5

October 24 1990, Paris

Sitting in our ONE room. It's me, Faith and Faith's new beau. Yes, it's a tad awkward. I'd rather not be here in the way but where am I going to go? The kitchen?! Beth is out with her Frog at the movies. So moi, je suis toute seul - sans toi, mon amour. As I was walking home I was suddenly seized by an incurable desire to feel you nuzzling my neck...it comes back to me now...that physical craving for you made so much more potent by the emotional craving.

Sting (your favorite I know) is singing S.O.S. to me. I can't help thinking that I am turning my back to your cry of S.O.S. I feel guilty. I'm telling you this because I must tell you everything. I feel guilty but I feel fine. I feel it's right, what I have said to you about coming here. I only hope I don't lose you because of it. I want to tell you about my enchantment with Paris, about the spell I am under - but I don't want you to resent it. I want to tell you how I miss you - but will you believe it? I guess it's basically that I keep wondering how/if you are accepting this separation I have enforced. I don't want you to resent it. I guess I really just want you to feel the same way about it as I do. To be in love with the moment with all of its complex ambiguity, raging emotions and bittersweet extremes.

"Can I tell you about my weekend in Normandy."

"No. I'd rather you didn't."

Tell me when I can write to you about my adventures here. I know you are afraid that the "grocery list" type of letter, recounting all of the little events, mundane, quotidian, will slowly transform us into bored long distance lovers but I don't think so. Personally, darling, I love hearing about the Top Ramen you ate last night! For one, because it brings you, the daily you that I love in my bones, before my eyes. And for two, because these Frogs haven't heard of Top Ramen yet and don't cherish it as a pure

and authentic American experience - an Amber-Boyce experience (chili and ramen! yum yum!). But truly, if you don't want to hear about my French onion soup experience, I don't know what I'll do. Or, more accurately, a story about my millionth croissant.

Which brings me to another problem. I'm too fat to see you. You'd be grossed out! I wasn't even skinny enough before. Well, I'm digressing. Don't really want to tell you how fat I am because I don't intend for it to remain that way.

Tomorrow I have Linguistics and Laundry. I will be thinking about the T-shirt you are laboring over for me - no, no, don't rush. Take your time, I don't mind.

Ummm...I send nibbles on your lower lip.

P.S. Don't think that just because I am mentioning it as a P.S. that I am not furious that you shaved your head. My only consolation in this very grave and upsetting situation is that I don't have to see it. Grow little hairs! Grow!

After the phone call. Oh my darling, why didn't it ever appear in such extreme terms before? Were we just ignoring the reality of our bleak situation - or have we now lost hold of some calming and simple truth? I am tired out from seeing searching for solutions, interrogating myself, grasping after that ever retreating "right thing to do." I am sitting next to the heater trying to fight the cold that has invaded my whole body. How fucking miserable I feel.

I feel the smarting of my battle scars from the first time I ever loved someone: cynicism. You are not willing to accept the circumstances as given. You are ready to sacrifice so much to be with me. Never has anyone offered me so much. Never has anyone loved me as you do. Never have I loved anyone as I love you. And so why do I hesitate at this cliff? Because of my practical rational (irrational?) fears which I can't seem to let go of? Because cynicism tells me that love does not conquer all? Even if this year went well, what about the next? Yes, yes - these are all factors. But I have to recognize what is at the heart of it all.

The intensity of this terrifies me, Boyce. I could not stand the weight of you changing the course of your life for me. What if you ended up unhappy here or if something happened between us? But stronger than my selfishly not wanting to hold this responsibility is that I don't think it would be the right thing for you. You have had to fight so hard for your education and you cherish it so much. Give up the chance to go to U.C.-Berkeley?! You can't throw it away so easily. And, as I said on the phone, more terrifying than us failing is us succeeding.

Letter from Amber #6

November 4 1990, Paris

A quiet weekend all alone is coming to a close. Faith and Beth went "to the country" with some friends. I chose to stay here. You know how I hate to be alone but I had an experimental impulse - let's see how Amber copes. Besides, I had a week full of frustrations, arguments with Faith and general depression. I needed to be alone for a block of time, not just a few hours or a day, to get back inside myself.

No letters, no words from you. I won't go into the question marks that this presents. It sucks I can't call you.

I've hit a bit of a rut. Low motivation. It's cold now and so going out is more of an ordeal. I'm losing all my study habits. The course are too easy and so instead of pushing myself, I just get more and more lazy. But today I studied all day! I look back to my Sarah Lawrence weekends of studying non-stop. What a contrast! Of course there is the true-but-quickly-becoming-an-excuse fact that even watching television, going out, etc requires alot of mental activity. God I want so much to be able to speak fluently!!! The longer I am here the more entangled I become. You know how when you learn a new word, all of a sudden you hear and see it everywhere? Imagine that happening non-stop. And there are so many angles revealing themselves. I'm starting to learn and understand slang. Big insight into the culture. And I'm starting to become aware of how

the French "use" their language and what it says about them, all of the different expressions used by people, the different intonations of expressions, all corresponding to different circumstances. One of the hardest things is learning to see through or past the language in order to judge somebody. What a bizarre state. At the same time that lack of knowledge of French robs me of the ability to judge and understand others, it also forces me to reveal myself in the most direct, simplistic and truthful terms. It's impossible to be subtle or nuanced let alone tricky or indirect when you can't even conjugate your verbs with any naturalness!

Hey, have you heard the Sarah Lawrence gossip? Well, if you have, too bad, because I'm going to tell you again. You know how Clark and Piaf were going out last year? Well, near the end of the year they were having problems and therefore sleeping with other people. So Piaf and Malcolm fucked. So when Clark found out about it this year he got totally drunk and barged into Malcolm's room while Malcolm was in the process of fucking some other girl (identity unknown) and pulled him out of bed and proceeded to beat the shit out of him. He also hit the girl and Ari (who tried to break it up). Malcolm was so fucked up that he had to go to the hospital! He pressed charges against Clark, who went to jail for a few days. Now he is expelled from Sarah Lawrence.

Ooh wee. Quelle scandal!

Actually, it is rather tragic considering Clark was a senior and now what'll he do? And all over that wicked witch Piaf. I'll bet she loved it. And this news made it all the way across the seas to us Sarah Lawrence students in Paris. Gee, I don't feel so far away after all!

Have you heard from Austin? I haven't. Sara hasn't written me either, so I don't know what's up with them.

Boyce, I feel strangely shy in writing to you right now. As if I'm babbling. I guess it's that I don't know what's up with you. How long has it been since I heard from you? I don't even know if it has really been that long but it sure feels like it. I'm not

ragging, I'm just anxious. Without anything concrete in which to ground your image, I feel my words disintegrating into the void. I don't want to babble. I just want you to know how much I love you. Everything I write is just an attempt to provide the context for those words. I know that no matter how well we describe our lives apart to each other, we won't understand each other until we see each other again.

I dreamed last night that we were together - reunion. Very erotic. Eclectic, hard to sort out...but you had come to what was alternately Sarah Lawrence and Berkeley. We made love. It's very vivid in my mind - me kissing your face, your eyes. I had a job which you would come to with me. You played me a jumbled tape of revelations you had had. Something about me and another girl. I couldn't understand. It didn't seem to bother me. I was holding your hand.

Oh my darling, I miss you. You float around with me in my mind.

I love you.

Impressions of a Phone Call

November 20 1990, Berkeley California

Just got off the phone with her. It was our least anguished and most good-spirited conversation. This very easiness convinced me that it is unrealistic to assume our relationship has any chance at survival.

By prophesying such do I call it into existence? Likely.

What we had was so rich and so rewarding that there would be something profoundly squalid about me washing my hands of the whole affair and saying "That's it" and yet there is something equally squalid about me wasting my passion on a memory of the past. I suppose the only appropriate attitude is to say that "it would be nice if it survived but I don't expect it to" - and not to mourn that lack of expectation.

Something curious has taken place though. Time and space, insipid banal destroyers, don't work that fast. It's only been three months and I'm already gone Daddy

gone from her heart. It must have involved an effort of will on her part. How dismal.

Do I call her a coward or a pragmatist?

I think that the longer we are apart the more afraid she grows of the intensity that our love had. She had visions of us spending the rest of our lives together. So did I. We never shared them when we were together. At twenty they terrified us both. All we saw were the vast and varied worlds of interesting and inspiring experiences that would be closed off to us forever by such a faithfulness.

A Week on Death Row - Monday

December 1990, Berkeley California

She is halfway through a junior year abroad in one of the great cities of the world, independent and at liberty in the homeland of her father, exultantly regaining her strength and selfhood after years of passionate abandon and mutual interdependence.

I feel as though I am walking to my doom on this trip to see her in Paris. In fact, I know I am. I have already bought a new snowboard and a hundred and forty dollars worth of 1950s Blue Note jazz cassette tapes, previsualizing the healing power of solitary journeys off piste schussing through foggy forests. Instead of being able to entertain the possibility of our relationship's survival, I know I am walking into the certainty of its demise. We are mirrors. Does she feel this too? Or has the slippage already begun?

A Week on Death Row - Tuesday

December 1990, Berkeley California

I'm rushing towards a place where I will learn something I would rather not know. Almost as though I would be better off never having known for sure. Skipping "that city" on this little junket and never seeing her again. Keeping her an eternally equivocal image so that I won't have to witness the majestic destruction of our love.

On the phone I said, "I'm following your cues."

"I don't know what my cues are," she answered.

10 Rue la Providence.

Fifth floor.

First door on you right. Oh this is so hard. I've already got my pithy answer to the Expected Question ready.

"You're not mad are you? (At me dumping you.)"

"Oh yes but skiing is so much more fun bitter."

There is nothing left to say, nothing left to write, only the arrival. I know I won't be able to sleep. The resolution I don't want to occur will occur soon. Whether it is worth fighting for or whether we should pack IT in. God, when am I going to get into a situation again where the problem is that we can visualize spending the rest of our lives together as a happy couple? Well fuck it - I'm getting sick of worrying pointlessly when in a few days I will know.

Maybe it is erroneous and presumptuous to have written myself off in her mind. Maybe she still cares for me? As you can see, I am a man consumed by doubts...

A Week on Death Row - Wednesday

December 1990, Berkeley California

For a second it looked like I might have to go to Hawaii over winter break instead of Paris, to take care of a court date. When I learned of this during a phone call to my mother I began hyperventilating at the prospect of not being able to see Amber. First time I've ever done that over anyone. I'm starting to lose control of my will. Why am I so desperate to go receive the emotional beating of a lifetime? I am certainly really in for it.

But I have got to go, right? I have to cross a continent and an ocean. There is really no other option. This is the coup d'grace that we both need to begin our journey

onward to adulthood on our own. The blank slate, upon which I have been projecting all of my fantasies, will soon be covered with unchangeable words.

A Week on Death Row - Thursday

December 1990, in flight to Paris

What will it matter how concerned she will be about my feelings when the practical result will be the same either way. She will be dead to my touch, emotionally and physically.

A Week on Death Row - Friday (The Execution)

December 1990, Paris

I rose out of the subway from the airport onto the dark overcast streets of her neighborhood as though on an escalator to the gallows where first love must die, toting a newly purchased used snowboard with flashy graphics. A single mattress on the floor consumed all of the space of her dark and dingy walk-up flat. Lying on it with her, I begged her not to stop kissing me and caressing me. I did not delude myself that we were making love. I knew that it was the ultimate in mercy fucks but I didn't give a rat's ass. This last outburst of physical intimacy was the final impediment to a great tide sweeping away from me the only thing that I had ever loved, until with one word she leveled even that last pathetic barrier.

"Shit!," she said with bitter disgust and stormed off to find a rag with which to clean the wet spot on the bed that she shared with her roommate. In my mind, I composed a modified haiku while she stomped off, stomped back and scrubbed viciously.

"The wet spot
of Parisian darkness
unleashes terror."

Cafe Desolation

Saturday, December 1990, Saturday, Paris

Hopeless.

The word says it all. But for you, dear reader, to understand what I mean, a context is needed.

Hopeless.

Staring out the window of a Parisian cafe onto an intersection. What is there to do? What can be done? Nothing. She doesn't want me. She feels what she feels. Nothing can change that. Her consideration for my feelings doesn't change the facts.

"I don't want you to not write or call me, especially if you need me."

Need you?! What the hell are you talking about? Just another twist of the knife, proving the total decimation of our relationship. Do you even realize the gruesome irony of what you said? What I need, you'll never again be able to give me again.

I must begin to destroy you in me as you did me in you and with an equally relentless lack of mercy, selfish one, avoider of pain.

I'm permeated with a desolation so all encompassing that it is almost tranquil. I stare numbly out of the window onto the street life, unable to form any coherent thoughts, not even around the pain or sense of loss. It's just blankness, total stark mental and emotional exhaustion.

An image may sometimes be used to focus thoughts. I see her returning to this smoky dive from her classes at the Sorbonne, her long brown hair bouncing on her long black coat to the rhythm of her walk to find me gone.

"Don't cut out on me," she said when she left for class. It was a valid concern. She knew I was capable of it and she knew I had a motive. Why would we ever need to see each other again now? Of what use are the good manners of waiting for her return?

"Paris has stolen you," I said to her once on the phone, months before.

"It hasn't stolen me. Only physically. Only for a moment," she said. I didn't contradict her because I knew it gratified her to believe this but I knew this day would come.

I'm bored, dead, sitting in a cafe waiting for someone who is taking a long time. A waiter brings a buttered roll and an espresso without being asked. I flip him a few Francs as he hovers with his plastic tray. I chew the bread but can't swallow. I drink the coffee.

Oh yes - my newspaper...

Parent's Flat

December 1990, Andorra

I look from one end of the room out of picture windows overlooking the huge mountain valley at a little square of the Pyrennes mountains and listen to the Cowboy Junkies. She played it our morning there. It seemed to express all of the tragedy of the dim flat and those fateful hours. Was it the morning or the evening? My memory of light is moody. Dim days, buried flats, illuminated nights, it all blurred together. My mind was in a haze.

It is beautiful music. Beautiful. Doubtless she thought so too or she wouldn't have put it on. So much has been lost. So much in fact that it is not even worth mentioning. The emotions are all irrevocable. I almost said "it is not even worth feeling this poignancy - listening to this beautiful music - being lost deep inside myself" But it is. Unavoidable anyway.

After father, step-mother and half-brother went to bed, I flipped on a cassette of moody and meditative Debussy, mixed myself a vodka pineapple cocktail and settled into a chair by the window. The lights were all off. It suddenly occurred to me how similar this was to my mechanism for coping with the loss of Europe four and one half years ago and [REDACTED] a semester later, evenings spent sitting in the dark looking out over

the light bejeweled plains of Kahala. I had to laugh at the unintended similarity and the shock of recognition.

"Well," I said aloud, raising my glass. "Here we go again!"

Looking at the beautiful mountain across the way, with the music and a little calm after a long journey I become appraised of one thing. Our sensibilities were so exquisitely matched. I used to play everything extremely close to the vest. With Amber I finally opened myself up to another person for the first time in my life because she gave me reason to believe that my emotional investment would be safe and unviolated. I don't fault her for falling out of love with me. People are not masters or mistresses of their own feelings. They change. I will still be able to open myself up again after this but it will be with the knowledge that love is a house of cards that can fall at anytime for no particular reason. Despite a gracious exterior, I will be cynical and callous inside.

This is just too discouraging. No one packs in an intelligent, passionate love affair just because they're not up to the wait. It just doesn't add up. And she froze herself off so thoroughly. I think she has an idea that after these two years the rockiest parts would be over and it would be smooth sailing to 80 and that's what she was afraid of.

God, she'll never know what she's lost. Paris for six more months. Busy summer. Work work work at Sarah Lawrence. She might notice on Fridays or Saturdays - unless she meets someone new. We had as near a perfect love as you're allowed to get in this imperfect world and it will never be a piercing regret for her. Just a wistful and pleasant memory. Fuck her and fuck Paris for making it easy for her. I'm almost disgusted.

She sold us out to save herself. That's my favorite formulaic rendition of it. She sold out an intelligent and passionate affair. Rare! Precious! She sold out two years of slow emotional investment that moved from early deep reserve to eventual abandon, abandon so complete that I no longer felt the compulsion to maintain myself wholly as a separate atomistic person but was willing to leave some of myself in her. And she, cold

and business-like, knifed those parts out. When I got to Paris I saw them bobbing in some water in a bucket by the door.

Amber goddammit! No personal transpersonal intimacy can exist without that happening - or else you remain two, separate. Amber, when you murdered me in you, you murdered that possibility. It's almost as if you had the idea first and were seeking to prove it. It is like your occasional tears when we made love. Of course there'll always be a gap between two souls if, instead of losing yourself to me (and whatever our future life will be), you abandon yourself to self-conscious tears about how futile it is to really make absolute contact with anyone.

Why try and express myself as accurately as I can? Who cares? If I can't inflame you Amber I don't think I want to ever hear of you again. You're not someone I could bear knowing halfway. Naturally and unimaginatively, it would just be a remainder of what's been lost. A disjointed correspondence, pure pain. Maybe that is why you took your evil steps. Letters from me, vacations - just remind you of what we have lost? All or nothing. No no no. All would have been yours soon enough with just a little patience.

Yeah well fuck it. She has made her choice. This is just squalid indulgence. The most beautiful heart wrenching image I could conjure would be nothing but our epitaph, another piece of our own death. That's what it is so hard to pick up the pen.

When Amber cried in that dim flat of destiny and told me that my kiss felt different and I let out that primordial animal moan I will never forget, I felt something I never felt before. God, how it defies description! As though I was alone in an accidental universe of endless night, bewildered. As though I was at the moment just before drowning, with lungs full of water. As though my abstract flesh was torn asunder in the ultimate spiritual hernia. Although she merely expressed what I already knew, it was still devastating. Maybe that's why she killed the "me in her." Because she never wanted to get treated like that. She preferred to kill the relationship on her own in controlled doses.

I dreamt of making love to Amber with her sitting on my lap wearing a skirt and no panties deep underwater at the bottom of a pool. Just as I shot off I realized I was in an alien bed and held the sheets high enough to give room for the jism to land on my stomach. I left the warm bed and walked through the cold apartment to the bathroom, cupping my hand over the wet spot on my pubic hair to prevent any of it from falling to the floor.

In the bathroom, I snapped some tissue from the dispenser and wiped the rancid yellow brown load off of my stomach and threw the soggy mess into the toilet. I smoothed out a shining drop of cum on the tiles with the sole of my foot and settled back into bed to await the welcome death of sleep. I had almost felt its chilly embrace when the Voice began to chant Amber's virtues like a litany of familiar street names. "Sensibilities so exquisitely matched...She loved me for truest self...We brought out the best in each other...We protected each other's solitudes..."

"SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!" I told myself hysterically. "I am so GODDAMN sick of your fucking WHINING! You'll never understand why she did it, so quit pining for what you'll never have again. You're enlarging her virtues because you know you'll never need to check your idealizations against reality again!"

That tactic didn't work. Through no effort of my own (reminding me that there are things much larger than the will) the litany resumes. Since rage didn't work, I pleaded for silence tenderly and asked for the images to gently fade.

"SSShhhhh," I told myself. "Grow quiet. Find sleep." Even this strategy was ineffective. A strange phrase began to repeat itself in my mind.

"God you big cheat. You misplace dish rags from their accustomed places by sinks and misplace the passion of women for the men who love them. If you are going to destroy my first great love then you owe me rest at least or I cannot say that you are a

kind God." What if there really is a God and I have just blasphemed? I saw that jealous temperamental God destroying me utterly for having done so.

"Ah," I thought. "Then You would be a kind God after all."

Ski Resort

December 1990, Andorra

Cafe on a ski slope in a huge valley, brilliant blue skies.

Now that I have paper, what the fuck was it I was thinking of out on the slopes?

An icicle drips in the brilliant sun to the time of the Cowboy Junkies tape I'm listening to in my Walkman. Amber would like to see something like that.

Most relationships die because there was something that couldn't be worked out, some basic incongruence. With Amber and I, none existed. Did she exhaust all of the possibilities of keeping our relationship alive, the first rule among fair lovers? Not by a longshot. She betrayed "us" to save "herself." She didn't feel like suffering. The interestingness of Paris made that a plausible option. In fact, suffering would have been "turning her back on Paris." Well fuck her! But alas even my anger is futile. We are simply lost to each other, lost to each other for all eternity, beginning now.

Perhaps I might find it gratifying to hear her say in ten years after a string of unrewarding affairs, "God - I broke up with Boyce when there wasn't even a problem." But those words will never grace her lips because in ten years I will be a dim memory. That is why we are lost to one another, because she sold us out. Time will do the rest. Pussy.

See - I have to give vent to my spleen. That's how I will survive. Defuse her virtues, deform our best memories, emphasize the occasional monotony, even tell myself that the sex was predictable, even tedious at times, anything, just to get her out of my mind!

See what you have unleashed Amber?

"That's O.K. - if that's what you need to get over it."

Don't be so understanding you bitch. You say you won't fall in love anytime soon because even the most perfect one may evaporate at a moment's notice?! What gall!

Unexpected Civility

January 1991, Paris

In January, I passed through Paris again after a month in Andorra with my folks. I had to go through there to catch my return flight out of Europe. But I was not at all sure I wanted to contact Amber again. After a lot of thought during my last few days in Andorra, I telephoned her. Intellectually, I knew there was no reason to ever see her again. I justified it to myself by considering all of the hassle and money I would save by avoiding the need to find and pay for an overnight stay at a youth hostel. I was clearheaded enough to see that for the ruse it was but I couldn't help being curious and torn, in spite of the absence of any real expectations.

She kissed me tenderly at the train station when I arrived. She had a new apartment, which seemed much more modern, bright and cheerful than her previous one. She was kind and solicitous. We even made love sweetly. It was almost as though nothing had changed, as if the devastating events of a month before had not even happened. Clearly it was all a lie, but it was a polite and welcome lie. Although unexpected and confusing, it still felt nice. I was far too exhausted to refuse it. All of the fight had been beaten out of me. A pleasant evening passed together. She took me to the airport the next morning. As we parted she handed me a poem which I read on the plane.

Poem from Amber

January 4 1991, Paris

Silence drew me to you

At first I wanted to smash your silence

That barrier between us became an obsession
But somehow I knew no words were strong enough
Searching up close for the cracks in you silence
A silence of my own fell
That's when the dialogue began
I started talking to you, silently, in my mind and in my dreams
All of my silent thoughts were dedicated to you
Running on and on all of the time
And the beauty of it was that I could hear you - understanding
Silence couldn't be smashed, so soft and tender
It embraced me as we smiled at each other
Silence, our silence, was a magic spell

Letter from Amber #7

February 26 1991, Paris

Fighting depression, couldn't get out of bed but then I put on a little music and voila! Music is so tied to you for me - especially music in the morning...recalling our room, our rituals. I'm not used to living alone you know (even though I have a roommate, she's never here and when she is she's not my first choice in company - so it's like I live alone). But I guess I'm learning to like the "aloneness."

So I hear you're doing pretty good from Sara and my parents. I'm writing this letter without knowing where to send it. Somewhere around 65th and San Pablo? Is it good to be back in school? Is it challenging enough? Any new people? Any new doors? You know you've really won my parents! They think you've "changed so much" since they first met you!

Well, for me, things are slowing down in Paris. Stupor. I would almost venture to say the word "boredom." It's not exactly true. I think I've sunk back into inactivity

because the action I've got to take is particularly distasteful to me: looking for work. I'm looking, I am! But the money is almost gone and a job is nowhere in sight. I don't want to work. Whine!

There are other things pulling me down too. Like the war. Reality is sinking in in deep sharp jabs. Last night as I was waiting for the last metro train, drunk, I got one of those stabs of reality. Earlier in the evening we had seen hundreds of crew cut boys with bags over their shoulders, taking the metro to the war. One was lying flat on the ground, drunk off his ass, obliterated, making weird high pitched groaning noises. We pushed the whole thing out of our minds, went out and had a good time. But on the way home, standing alone at the metro, a boy came up to me and asked if I had somewhere he could crash for the night. Of course I said no. He explained that he had just deserted from the army, that he just couldn't go, just couldn't. He wasn't from Paris and didn't know where to go. Small town boy. I couldn't let him come to my house. I'm a girl. I can't take that kind of risk. Can't be trusting. But oh it just killed me not to be able to help him. He'll go to jail if they catch him. It's so damn cold now too. All I could do was wish him luck. How pitiful. What an empty handful. So I went home and cried a little. Hope this war ends soon.

I don't think of myself as a moody person but sometimes reality contradicts my self image. The last few words I wrote were squeezed out of a tortuous few hours thinking of you. An invisible hand at my throat, it seemed impossible to send you something of me. But now it seems so simple. No complicated searching for of words. As if I had lost sight of the essentials and on this first day of warmth and sunshine mental debris has been cleared away. What I hold in my heart (and what I want you to know and hold in your heart) is that I see your face in the face of others, that I see your movements in the movement of others.

The only value of these pages is as a symbol that I am thinking of you. And to go deeper. I can't seem to find the words. Can't seem to break my silence.

Do my lonely nights speak to yours?

For these few words how long I have sat with you in my mind...

Well, now I know where to send your letters.

I love you, my Boycer...

Felt up by the Wind

April 1991, Berkeley California

This housesit of a beautiful upper middle class joint in the Berkeley Hills is paradise. There is alot of blonde wood everywhere, an expansive deck, a miniature Redwood forest to look through towards the Bay and creamy golden sunsets. Their collection of classical, jazz and Afropop compact discs is superb. I have brought herb, gin, ice cream and books. What more could I want? After these long months of celibacy and all of the late 19th century aestheticism I've been into lately, I find I have an expanded delight in my sensory impressions. Something like, "If that's all I've got to play with I might as well enjoy it as extravagantly as possible."

Touching with my fingers - running them sensuously along the railing of the deck, caressing the rough trunk of a tree, tracing designs in dusty ground - this I have. Being touched. This I do not have. Perhaps we should add being touched as the sixth sense. Seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, touching - and being touched. You know what they say - when one sense goes slack, the others take up the extra rope.

This expanded delight in my sensory impressions does not extend merely to quotidian reality. I also cultivate bizarre fanciful visions. Actually, they begin, and I don't bother to stifle them. They are so much more interesting than everyday life. Last night at the theater before a show I saw in the stage curtains a dark Russian forest of tall pine trees at night with a campfire burning brilliantly that bathed all of the trees in a bright golden light.

A week or two ago, some friends and I went to the Marin Headlands to look for a wallet someone had lost there the night before. The wind came in powerfully and steadily from the Pacific. I found a bluff extending into the wind and stood there, leaning into the powerful force, taking a few steps back when the wind went slack now and then. I made sure not to tumble down the hill. I held my arms wide and my feet slightly apart and gripped the ground through my boots with my toes when the wind's diminishing intensity required me to stand more upright.

I felt the wind as a physical touching, a caressing without the use of clumsy skin bounded digits. The wind is the only thing that has touched me in a long time. Maybe I will love you, wind. I used to have crushes easily, I know, but still you must take me seriously. People are clumsy and words often fail. Words and bodies. That's all we have to communicate with. How can it ever be enough? Even in sincerity, the skin can't always be placed in just the right place to tempt fate, nor can the words always be expressed in a way entirely congruent with what is meant. We are always unclear, even to ourselves.

Most people live in ignorance of the mystery beyond the realm of the human senses, the beating thump of a universe indifferent to man's paltry 5,000 years on a single ridiculous planet. My phraseology, my sentences thrown up into the air like cats, my dry cerebral sense of humor - in short, my hysteria in all of its forms - may every so often offer moments of lucidity and glimpses of the Great Beyond.

Whoa boy - come on back to Earth. So you got felt up by the wind? Getting felt up by a real pair of hands ought to be enough to cancel these flights of fancy and bring you back home, dreamy little boy. See? I even talk to myself. Will I ever peel away all of these endless voices to arrive at a real ME? No. I am the voices frolicking and leaping about in my mind. Great. Now I see how people go schizo. By spending too much time alone.

Which brings me back to my favorite subject: myself. It does seem true that too long a residence in one's own mind without distraction drives one batty. Batty enough to make one talk to oneself? Right! Batty enough to talk to oneself!

Recuperation Diaries

April/May 1991, Berkeley California

ON LOVING AGAIN

I see myself as a humane, interesting and more or less good looking person. The problem is that I also think there are tons of other humane, interesting and more or less good looking people out there. So why should a woman take any particular interest in me?

I also know that I am extremely unique. In no one are my particular interests, obsessions, perspectives, experiences and prospects combined in exactly the same way. Even those people with whom I do have wide patches of overlap with are relatively few and far between. I don't think I have met even ten such people.

So - in spite all of the serviceable bachelors out there, I know that for a few women, I will be exactly right. And I know, also, deep in my heart, that even the most frenetic perusals of shows, bars and parties will not quicken the attainment of the object of my search.

"Well what shall I say? Do our inner thoughts ever show outwardly? There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passers by see only a wisp of smoke coming through the chimney, and go along their way. Look here, now, what must be done? Must one tend that inner fire, have salt in oneself, wait patiently yet with how much impatience for the hour when somebody will come and sit down near it - maybe to stay? Let him who believes in God wait for that hour that will come sooner or later."

- Van Gogh

ON THE NATURE OF WHAT HAS BEEN LOST

She once said that she knew something was going to happen between us the first time she saw me. She felt the hand of destiny. So did I, eventually. So strange to turn our back on everything now. So much mutual dreaming cast aside. It is as though we sensed that between us it must be all or nothing. There is too much pain in the intermediate reaches. So we threw up ornate and brutal walls against one another to stop everything, suspend animation. How cruel, how exact.

"She is my best and only friend with whom I always find it interesting and important to talk, whether about life, or about my works and plans. Whenever I see something my first wish is to discuss it with her. Only when it has passed through her does what I have seen, experienced and thought become a fact of my soul. Without that it is just a dream and swift oblivion."

- Andreyev

ON THE LIMITATIONS OF FREE WILL

Lately I've been thinking about how biological it all is. I've been a slave to my moods since Central America. Finding joy in life has never come easily to me, in spite of the material comfort of my life. If the composition of my personality were really all up to me, I would long ago have made it easier for me to take pleasure in small and meaningless things. Not a continuous ecstasy necessarily, but at least a geniality, an affability. I have a lot of time left to go on this planet. I need to discover the terms of my long term survival soon, the means by which I will be able to constantly regenerate myself, my hope and my curiosity.

I never want to be one of those people forced to cringe before life, constantly sauntering off to nurse sickeningly petty wounds but those opportunities for growth, richness and fulfillment that I so desperately needed rarely came my way. Is this a fault of my character or the world around me? Joie de vivre feeds joie de vivre, fear feeds fear, and unless I find God's Monkey Wrench soon the negative feedback loop may spiral out of control. I think I'm ready to hear the magic words of love again, on their own terms with only limited internal cross referencing what has gone before.

Why do I look down so much, away from the eyes of people? And yet, as bad as my relations with the "not me" are, the relations with the "me" are just as bad, possibly worse. I would gladly throw off my entire mien like a lizard shedding its skin if I could only figure out what to replace it with.

Women who like the "wounded deer" type may be attracted to this, perhaps rightly sensing a potentially powerful sympathy for their own sense of strickenness. But in what sense can I take credit for something that I have so little control of? Credit for being too hard on myself. That's strange. Well, I guess it is still true. Rack it up to spiritual pride. At what point does frank appraisal and self-criticism become pompous gallantry and self-satisfaction?

But back to this "it is all biological" number. I am just wondering whether or not all of the things that make me uniquely me (and hence give me whatever loveability I do possess?) are largely the result of my constitution and historical contingencies over which I had no control? I wish it weren't so but I think it is! I think for instance of Luther nailing his World Historical pages to the cathedral door in Germany saying, "Here I stand and I can do no other." Exactly! He could not will himself not to stand there! His protest against the Catholic Church was not a choice he made. So how much of his stance can be credited to "moral courage?"

And me - I have tried to live a life with as little constraint, hypocrisy and routine as possible. Admirable enough traits to use to pass from innocence to experience, but

doesn't every action have its neurological equivalent? If it is just my biochemistry, then how can I take credit for it? Isn't it possible that if my chemical balance or physiological development had been slightly different I would be a totally different person today? Perhaps a more integrated personality, with a duller more docile sensitivity. But isn't this is all poorly digested pop science? Who cares if I'm not "ultimately" responsible for my erratic behavior?

"In the midst of this state of barbarism and wholly animal brutality, these divine particles, human souls, retain as it were a vague remembrance of their primitive divinity, and are irresistibly drawn towards their whole. They seek each other, they seek their whole. It is Divinity itself, scattered and lost in the natural world, which looks for itself in men, and it is so demolished by this multitude of human prisons in which it finds itself strewn, that, in looking for itself, it commits folly after folly."

- Bakunin God and State

ON EMOTIONAL POVERTY

The Emotional Poverty of my life is finally starting to seem like spiritual wealth again. It is bracing to slip back into the high dudgeon cynicism of a few years ago and confuse it, as I did then, with "autonomy." As Walt Whitman put it, "Oh to be self-balanced for contingencies."

I'm back. It's a refreshing return to the old amalgamation of disdain, sadness and distance from others as my own very special mission. It's a good friend, my oldest. A high-flown excuse for the fear and disenfranchisement of a shy and melancholy little boy, not sure whether his inability to "fit in" and take pleasure as easily as others do is a fault to repress or an exquisite and bittersweet pleasure to savor. It is both, naturally. It is the process of turning necessity into volition. I am still the only-child latch-key kid who raised himself and spent alot of time in his own mind. Without any other mode of living

available to me, I must tell myself that I am doing it "on purpose." But even the bitch-goddess Success would not guaranty any actual contact with joy, delight and spiritual growth, just millions of people who all want a piece of me.

As Rilke said of his poems, so too are my humble lines also mating calls. I am alone again. No one to share these scribblings with. All the muses flown. How can I create without them? Is that the hardest part? Maybe. To communicate. But it all descends into routinized affection and And AND. Hell, I used to have a bag full of stock responses as to why I didn't need people. Fuck it. I can't remember those damn hermit crab slogans right now anyway. I never really bought into them anyway.

You can only sell yourself a line for so long before you either believe it and lose another little part of your soul or you quit bothering. I'm so sick of trying. So exhausted. I need to stop ruminating endlessly over bygone events and start living again with the assumption that there are no Final Answers. Since myself and my relationship to the world never stops changing, how can I ever freeze it long enough to make a comprehensive assessment? Life is nothing but a series of partial instrumental truths that help keep body and soul together long enough to get us through another night. Hopefully it also makes us a little kinder, a little gentler and a little more patient all the time.

Will I read these stirring lines to Amber when she returns home from Paris in a few short days? I tell myself that I'm "ready" - whatever that means. I'm not going to get hurt like I did in December, that's for sure! Maybe it was such a severe trauma that I can't get hurt like that anymore. Maybe my self defense mechanisms are in control now. Maybe the song has gone out of my heart. Maybe I'll never love again. I sure hope not.

If I get the impression that she is going to sell me out again to save herself a little turmoil, uncertainty and heartache then fuck it, I am not going to truck with it. I deserve better (although who ever gets what they "deserve?" har har). Even so, it is hard to put the brakes on my affection for her as long as I am not exactly sure how she feels.

Dare I say she is using a wistful attachment to the "fickleness of Love's Fate" as a high-flown cover-up for sheer cowardice, a fear of feeling a little pain? I think she might be but if it brings her out of love, it brings her out of love. If it makes her cold to my touch, it makes her cold to my touch. C'est tout, comme ca, rein d'autre. The heart does not write contracts. I believe passionately in the freedom of love's conscience. It seems so self evident. Maybe that is why I've never really been that jealous.

I tell you - all I need to do to get rid of any thoughts of ever loving her again is to keep plainly before me the truly terrible scene of me kissing her breasts as she lay on her back in that dim flat of Parisian doom.

"Don't you feel anything?" I asked.

"I feel the tenderness," she replied.

I have never suffered a more profoundly crushing insult.

And why did I just put on Sly Stone's album "There's a Riot Going On," one of the crucial collections of music with which I reeled from the shock during that desolate month high in the mountains of Andorra, songs absent the ebullient joy of his earlier albums, the soundtrack for an exhausted early 1970s America that had seen all its hope of the 1960s ground into dust by war, assassinations and civil unrest, as ebullient joy was also subtracted from my life now.

"I cry just like a baby," the tape said.

Why this propensity for sticking pins into myself? Am I a glutton for punishment? Well, I'll tell you - I have lived so many lives in relation to her that it is really not a pin at this point. It doesn't remind me of the brutalizations I have suffered anymore.

Oh - but this song does!

Just kidding.

"A certain irreversible temporality is recognized by everyone, in the succession of stages of life, in the consideration of life as a journey, a passage with no return through a world whose meaning is elsewhere."

- Guy Debord Society of the Spectacle

Exultantly Alone

May 1991, Berkeley California

Yesterday I felt again what it means to be alone, gloriously and exultantly alone. Riding my bike deep into the trials of Tilden Park where the Berkeley Hills stand guard against the urban tide of Vallejo. The sun was setting, the air was clear. A brittle and brilliant yellow spread throughout the sky, with the first suggestions of royal blue high above me and orange following the sun. I lay there on the grass, feeling the warmth of the sun on my skin. I arrived there without trying to go anywhere, with no demands on my time and no need for a plan.

I felt this type of freedom for the first time in a long time about a month ago on Spring Break back in Hawaii. I was by myself at Anna Banana's, a biker-reggae-middleaged-burnout bar my Kalani friends and I hung out in at the dawn of our degradation, taking our first tentative steps there towards the downward spiral. Nothing was happening. There was no one there I knew. So I walked out, aware for the first time in a long time that I was completely in control of my schedule and the rest of my life.

The Shoe Drops

June 1991, Berkeley California

To heighten my strategic advantage, I arranged for us to meet at dusk on what I considered my turf, the beautiful hills of Tilden Park behind the Berkeley Hills. The beauty and solitude of the forests and grasslands had been a primary source of emotional

renewal during the year I had spent apart from her. They reminded me of how strong I could be in solitude. They were my friends and could help me absorb any shock.

She passed me in her car as I pedaled up the hill to our rendezvous.

"Pedal harder!" she said, attempting to start off on a light and jovial tone.

We walked a little ways down a path to a small hill and sat down to talk.

"I'm sorry everything has changed between us," she said.

Given the odd way she had behaved in Paris upon my return from Andorra, I wasn't completely sure that it had, although I certainly did suspect it. With the sharp scalpel of a bitter laugh, I cut the last remaining tissues of hope with clinical precision.

I absolutely did not want to argue that one interpretation of that second visit to Paris might have been that everything had, in fact, not changed. If it had "all changed" in her mind, I sure as hell wasn't going to give her the satisfaction that it hadn't "all changed" in my mind too! I held my tongue. We spoke of indifferent things.

Everything was over now. My new life could begin. In an earlier incarnation, I would have probably fled right there and then, immediately upon the acquisition of the only salient piece of information. In my calmer and far more jaded state, I saw in the very courtesy with which I stayed on through the end of our conversation as the final and most compelling proof of the irrevocable destruction of everything we once knew.

Swan Song for a Young Couple

July 4 1991, Berkeley California

Sara finally broached the news - Amber has been with a guy since her first semester there. Pretty big secret to keep for so long.

How do I feel? Frankly I have been expecting it all along. It is not really much of a shock but jeez - eight months - she must really feel for the guy. She also must have been banging him by the time I came through Paris. And she was bizarrely kind and warm when I came back through Paris that second time after a month in Andorra. Maybe

she felt guilty? I wish her all the joy of a new love affair, because I wish the same for myself. Her efforts were successful. Mine were not. Simple as that.

She had just better not lay that line on me about "not putting my life on hold." I have been trying to hang with the 'tang! It is easier for a girl to hook up than a guy. Sure they might have to sift through some chaff but at least they have some chaff to sift through. And of course as a beautiful expatriate, it is even easier for her than for most women.

But let's talk about me for a second.

Is Rilke finally right? "You must change your life."

Look deeply into your life, don't dissimulate and tell me what you see. No strategy, no poses, no romantic attachment to isolation.

I see myself walking alone on a salt flat desert, with a hot wind blowing in slow and steady. I see my body like the watercolor portraits of Egon Schiele, scrawny, deformed and undesirable. And yet I know thorough my love of the individualistic body of Amber, that my loveability has nothing to do with the prevailing standard of the "ideal body" subscribed to by that tribe of women hamstrung by the ideals of image and romance they find in fashion magazines.

If given the choice between communicating and not communicating, I tend to choose the latter. Today is a perfect example. I was walking alongside an attractive woman on campus looking for a building I couldn't find.

It would've been nothing to say, "Excuse me - do you know where University Hall is?" but no. I was too disgustingly and nauseatingly shy.

Obviously that encounter would most likely not have ended up in rollicking sex on the top of some futon with a cool breeze wafting through an open window BUT a minuscule shift in attitude that might have made me a different person.

The years bring radical changes at this age, do they not? A few years ago (not so many, maybe four, and yet such ancient history!) this aloofness and separation would have been held preciously as a mark of superiority, a sign of cardinal distinction.

Perhaps it is merely that Amber spoiled me for solitude. I am 21 years old and I have only fucked one woman in my entire life. I began to ask myself - is there something wrong with me? I am outside of the statistical norms, doubtless. Yet I have a perfect and unshakable faith that profound long term relationships await me yet. For these I wait patiently. But shall I say "no rush?"

For all of my sickening shyness and tendency to trade in my alienation as proof of an elevated spiritual position, maybe I am as Sara put it "a good catch." I treat women well and approach relationships with good faith (here I go theorizing off of one relationship). This is rare, is it not? I am a compelling person, goddammit. I'm amusing, I'm smart, I'm strange, I grapple with forces and demons most never encounter (or simply ignore).

So is there a point to this self-satisfied missive to myself? To thank the hand for picking up the pencil to harmlessly scribble pages instead of punching out windows, and to acclaim my faith. I wish to change and may, slowly, but by now I basically am who I will be for the rest of my years. I don't avoid happiness because I think it will compromise that which makes me so "profound" (har har har he noted with irony) but because the die is more or less cast by this time of my life.

My life will be an intriguing journey, of this I have no doubt. It maybe long, it may be short, it may be illustrious, it may be obscure but it will be compelling, whether Amber joins me for the ride or not. I laugh bitterly to think of the suggestions I made to her in December of world travel together, ignorant of the playmates with whom she shared her love bed in distant apartments.

Were the protestations of love made naked under wool Mexican blankets in the foothills of the Sierras and other similar assertions false? No - they were absolutely true.

True in every fiber of her being. But yet still they crumbled and were rendered meaningless. How then can I trust these claims from different woman in the future?

"As true when uttered and yet eternally fragile and transitory," that's how.

I may yet encounter a love that tempts the transcendence time and space again. Amber and I tried for the brass ring and missed by inches, drawn apart by circumstances, the crippling burden of so many separations and the golden allure of Paris. Nobly did we engage. Nobly did we fail. C'est la vie. That's the way the Roquefort crumbles.