



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Vous le / Votre référence

Vous le / Note de référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

On the Road to Emmaus

John C. Frazer

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in the Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

November, 1993

© John C. Frazer, 1993



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file - Votre référence

Our file - Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-90841-6

Canada

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: John C. Frazer

Entitled: On the Road to Emmaus

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

Master of Arts

complies with the regulations of this University and meets the
accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the examining committee:

_____ Chair
_____ Examiner
_____ Examiner
_____ Supervisor

Approved _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Programme Director

_____ 19 _____
Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

The Road to Emmaus

John C. Frazer

On The Road to Emmaus is a novel which takes the form of a long letter to a lost love. As an experiment in extended fiction, it is part allegory, part lyrical narrative and part confessional poem. Its language is poetic and highly charged, relying on image, sound, symbol and a densely textured interweaving of biblical and classical allusions to drive the narrative. It incorporates elements of both modern and post-modern writing, using what on the surface appear to be traditional structural devices and reliance upon theme and plot to energize the process of telling. But beneath these a variety of devices and processes work to deconstruct the text even as it is developed. These include the insertion of external texts, as well as "internal" texts created by the characters themselves. The techniques of counterpoint and juxtaposition are used to create and release energy and meaning between adjacent and thematically connected blocks of text.

It is a study in the psychopathology of love, by and about a man living at the edge of reality. The protagonist assumes the role of author whose task it is to make some sense

of his fractured life by reconstructing his own past with the woman he has lost. The mental processes he brings to his own history and present create an increasingly complex interplay between time and place, character and event which pose basic epistemological questions concerning the relationship between reality and memory, the knower and the known, which the reader is left to answer.

I dedicate this work to Deborah, my guiding light, whose faith in this project and its author has never flagged.

I wish to acknowledge and thank Professor Gary Geddes for his generosity in helping me see this work through to its completion. He was always there when I needed guidance, support, and that inimitable, folksy wisdom about the craft of writing which so few possess and fewer still can share effectively. Though from the outset he warned me that I was "quite possibly mad" to undertake this project, he stuck through it with me until the end.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

First Words	1
Chapter I: No Kingdom There	4
Chapter II: Étude Pour Une Damnée	44
Chapter III: The Bird of Paradise	75
Chapter IV: Mass During Time of War	108
Chapter V: Immolation: A Monologue for the Holocaust ..	190
Chapter VI: Down from Golgotha	239
Chapter VII: On the Road to Emmaus	259
Chapter VIII: The King Beneath the Hill	301

From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
None shall pass through it for ever & ever.
But the hawk & the porcupine shall possess it,
The owl & the raven shall dwell in it.
He shall stretch the line of confusion over it,
& the plummet of chaos over its nobles.
They shall name it No Kingdom There,
& all its princes shall be nothing.

Isaiah 34.10-12

The Raven had stolen her lover's voice & had banished him to the mountains. He then flew up & away from the town. He waited, perched at the topmost branch of a high tree at the edge of a clearing where she met her lover each day. When she came, carrying a basket of fruit & wine, he hid in the shadows.

Where are you going, my dear, the Raven inquired, his voice now that of the lover. At first she was perplexed. The voice seemed to come from above, out of nowhere. She looked all about but could not see him.

Where are you my love, she called out in a voice as sweet & fresh as spring.

I am over here, he replied, from behind the tree. She heard a flutter of wings.

I am over here, waiting for you, he called from the other side of the clearing.

This continued for some time until, exhausted, she fell to her knees, her head in her hands, & began to weep.

The Raven grew braver, emerging from the forest directly behind her. Please do not cry, my dear, he said in the lover's voice. I have a gift for you, if only you will stop weeping so. But you must keep your eyes closed.

He stretched his wings skyward as he said this, growing in stature to the full height of a man.

She could feel his strength as he embraced her from behind. She felt a new presence here, a softness, a warmth, as though for the first time she were completely enfolded in his love. He rocked her gently until her weeping stopped.

You see, he said, I was here all along, waiting for you. & now, I will deliver what I have promised, he whispered in her ear, laying the sharp, cold curve of his beak along the exposed curve of her neck.

from: Immolation: A Monologue for the Holocaust

They could not silence me. I will speak. With my own voice. This, all of this, has fallen into my hands. It must be kept from those who would use it for their own ends.

So, here, I speak.

& then, they who can, for themselves.

It has survived, here, as it was written. All that was added, out of those latter days, are the title pages & the biblical quotations which came out of those last nights together, urged on by scotch & cashews. This was our only collaboration.

&, as you can see, I have lifted out & placed The Raven story at the beginning. It was something he had planned on doing.

The last section, a post script of sorts, was given to me later.

There is only one truth here which I claim as mine. My uncle did not kill my father. My mother was & is not the whore of Marathon. He's a doctor. She's a high school counsellor. Life was just too dull.

All of this is a sacred trust. For her.

I

NO KINGDOM THERE

Then deep from the earth you shall speak,
From low in the dust your words shall come;
your voice shall come from the ground
like the voice of a ghost,
and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

But the multitude of your foes shall be like small dust,
and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff.
And in an instant, suddenly,
you will be visited by the Lord of hosts
with thunder and with earthquake and with great noise,
with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame
of a devouring fire...

And the vision of all of this has become to you
like the words of a book that is sealed. When men
give it to one who can read, saying, "Read this,"
he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed." And when
they give the book to one who cannot read, saying,
"Read this," he says, "I cannot read."

Isaiah 29.4-6,11

I

I am ready. Ready to go. The openings & closings of steel doors sound at intervals along the corridor. I am ready. There is this time no feeling of interminability. Each time, there has been a last minute reprieve; a message from some anonymous office stays the whispering rush of the blade, the springing of the trap, the tripping of the switch, the unleashing of lethal gas, the cold slipping of the syringe beneath the skin, into the final ache, the quick, cold flush, the hands letting go, falling away with the light, with the last muted sound of a foot knocking against the bed's frame, falling. Inevitability has set in. If not now, if not this time, then soon... or, perhaps, later, but inevitably, death.

II

I work with & have to make judgments about the quick & the dead on a daily basis in here. But you are different from all of them. Not just because you are a forensic case with special status here. At first you fascinated me. You are so young to have already lived so much. & then this business about the sculpture along the back wall. Now I am perplexed, at times even vexed by this veneer of stoic passivity which you have thrown up against the world. You are a dangerous man. Dangerous to yourself. & if the judge & the psychiatrists who served as assessors & witnesses in your case are correct -- & so far our observations only corroborate their findings -- you are also a serious menace & threat to society at large. You are a festering cancer who must be isolated from the larger societal body. Either you place yourself in my hands in a cooperative fashion, & become well yourself, or you will be battered, assailed at every turn of your night & day. This is invasive warfare of which I speak. Chemical. Psychological. Physical. Whatever there is still left of you now will be shattered, broken, ground into the dust, scattered to the winds. Your "illness", shall we say, is, I am convinced, in large measure a matter of human will. Erotic paranoia. Psychotic fixation. Monomania. Elements of all of these mixed in with delusional tendencies. This, of course, from your testimony, before you decided to go

underground, so to speak, to seal yourself off from us, incommunicado. I have dealt with other cases like this. They all succumb...

He cleans the bowl of his pipe with a small jackknife.

I think you are in there, I think you hear me as clearly as I see you sitting there in your apparently selective catatonia. I am giving you a week with rest, increased liberties & a minimum of sedation. During that time, we will talk. Man to man. If you don't come around significantly within that period, we will begin invasive therapy of the most drastic kind. ECT therapy. Insulin. All the usual drugs. Isolation. Restraint. Whatever it takes. But it will take you down one road or the other. You will speak, you will regain the ranks of the living, or you will in fact become what I am convinced you only appear to be: A shell, a zombie, a broken man, one of the living dead.

He tamps the tobacco down with his thumb, then lights it with the silver desk lighter. The smoke is thick, sweet. It reminds me of my grandfather, & of Fireweed Island.

In the end, you will speak. We will in the end have our answer to the horrible riddle whose circuitous path has led you here.

A long pause here. He stands & begins to pace, pausing to look out the window when he reaches the far end of the room.

My sense is that you & I are at loggerheads, that you need somehow to be jarred loose. Familiarity breeds contempt, even if it is in the most incorrigible of criminals in relation to one who might literally save what is left of his life. A new face, a new voice, a new perspective on a case such as this often proves most useful. I am assigning Dr. Vostik to your case. I am confident you & Anton will hit it off. He's new, just this month. He comes to us with a strong background in forensics. If you listen carefully, you may hear him humming snatches from The Nutcracker Suite. It seems to be his theme song. A very dedicated man, I think you will find. Very cultured. Very thorough.

His pipe has gone out. This usually signals the end to our little pieces of intimate theatre, unless he is unusually animated, in which case a second act is announced with the tamping down of a second bowl. He knocks the clump of smouldering tobacco & ash into the shallow pottery bowl at the desk's edge. Another dramatic monologue delivered. Another silent audience of one.

& now, the long walk down the corridor, the full length of the building. To the elevator, with its ornate brass doors into

whose faces are hammered what appear to be Masonic hieroglyphics. Who built this place? Who is in control? Up to Five north. Far away. Locked away from the world.

He calls from the door of his office: I wish you well. This week will, one way or the other, make all the difference.

III

I am more asleep than awake. I can hear Anton walking down the corridor. Footsteps here have a language of their own. His are an odd, arrhythmic stacatto. Usually, as tonight, he hums. Something insipid. Ominous. Infectious. He is the hangman. He precedes me up the gallows, skillfully working the crowd into a blind feeding frenzy as I await, shackled, in the structure's shadow below. Soon, driven by the heat of the high noon's sun, they become manic, hungry for my blood. They rush me. Encumbered by manacles, bowed beneath the weight of heavy chain, I totter up the makeshift stairway... & for what, I wonder, for what thin reprieve... For a minute... two... Let them take me, I decide, let them tear me apart. At the top step I turn, pushing away those who have protected me. I leap high & out, over the tight, milling horde, tumbling as I go, tumbling...

Listen, mother, he says, as he always says, grabbing my nightshirt, no more trouble, see. People die in here. Or wish they were. Dead. He holds the hypo up against the window's pane of pale light. Something special tonight. Very special. My own recipe. A diamond bright liquid bead forms & balances at the needle's tip...

Little lamb, who made thee... he says in a low, thin voice, quoting Blake as he often does in the darkness of this room. Now, baby, I'm gonna light your fire. This will open the doors of experience wide. Heaven & hell. Running together. Ready... Steady on, now, we're gonna mainline this, hotwire you to the Almighty... We'll just loosen the restraint a little. Now! He breathes in a sour hiss, his cheek tight against mine. Here comes the buzz. The rush. The dark revelation...

Speak gently, Spring, he whispers, & make no sudden sound... He moves his hand down, over my abdomen, bending to kiss my cheek...

& I am a rock, falling, tumbling out in space... At the base of these canyon walls is a pool. Inevitability. What moves rushes towards what is still. & I am the pool. What is still awaits what is to come. I am the rock & I am the pool, falling, drowning, assuming... & you are there, there with me...

IV

In those early months Anton had protected me from the impersonal roughness of some of the others, especially Martin. He had shown a particular personal interest in my case, checking in on me outside the regular rhythm of rounds, medication. There was an attentiveness there, a presence, a caring which showed in the eyes, the gentle touch. I began to feel a bit like a budding flower, yearning to open out into the sunlight.

Until that night. He places his hands on my shoulders & says: In my heart you are already mine. You will be mine. You will give yourself to me. Totally. Absolutely. Soon your surrender will be complete. There will be no holding back. You will give yourself to me as you have never done to anyone. You will give yourself in a way that you could not have known was possible. He looks long & hard into my eyes. Suddenly, he breaks the silence, rapping hard on his clipboard. My appointed rounds, he announces. I must attend the sleeping wounded. He rises & turns, growing very large in silhouette against the window. Good night. Sleep tight.

The footsteps of a familiar friend weave into the lurching rhythm of a waking nightmare. Footfalls, now, of the jailer, echoing, fading, from a greater distance, faint...

This'll loosen you up. You'll sing like a bird on this. Confession is good for the soul, my dark little angel. My life, my soul, is bound to yours now. Can't you feel it... You & me. The Tiger & the Lamb. The people upstairs have big plans for me if I crack you. & I will. Like a nut. Then I'll transfer you out, downstairs. Believe me, life will be much simpler when this is all over with. No bars. & people there are more sympathetic. They'll understand your needs better. The forensic ward is a nasty place to spend the rest of one's life. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but you've become something of a celebrity in national security circles. But you have probably already sensed that. Otherwise, why would so many different people come so often, & why would we all be so concerned for your welfare...

Here we go now, hard & fast. Now! Fly, my little angel, fly out, away, feel the lift of your new wings carrying you out, up, into a whole new world of freedom, up into the face of the sun...

Icarus fell to earth, broken, blinded, burned beyond recognition. Icarus. Icarus... I search through the rubble for you. I stumble across the dry, stubbled steppes, across the endless wastes of rock & sand, the dried up riverbeds, struck & reeling beneath the blank, pitiless gaze of the sun. Always noon. Always high noon. Nothing. Not a sound. No

movement. Not a rustling leaf. Not the flutter of a startled wing. Not the longed-for song of spring's flock returned. Nothing. Only this, what I am, beneath the crush of the furnace white sky. & the silence.

V

I have, in the loosest sense, committed all of this to memory. All of this. Every word. I have no paper, no word is committed to any eye, nor ever will be. I dream, I live to be able to speak them, utter them, I pray for a few short hours given, a long afternoon, perhaps a night or two... It is the memory born of blood; it is cargo in my tired veins. Only the extravagant bloodletting of my death has the wanton capacity to undo this text.

They take me away. They wheel me along endless corridors, twisting, rocketing in a sharp clatter down & through a maze from which it is impossible ever to ascend.

& there, in that place of white light antiseptis where no thing can live, the words, the pages are torn from me, the fabric of my being, the life which was & is me, to which, in all of its agonistic cloakings, I cling in such abject desperation... All is rent asunder...

So much has been lost...

& what is irretrievable finds a language of its own, of barbs & spikes, whole landscapes of terror, a new, primal, emotive geography filled with dark copses where events lurk, awaiting

but never finding utterance nor explanation, pathways which rise & descend, twisting & rolling across a half-familiar landscape, the bridge across an unnamed river, someone's hand reaching out in the night, a stone falling into a pool, somewhere, in the middle of some summer's day, in the middle of someone's life... its text subsumed, encoded, locked away deep within the coiled vault of the animal cortex, a whole, illimitable, wholly dark volume, without scope or boundary, a repository for all that has fallen away & appears to have been lost, whose sole task is the continued survival of the individual &, often paradoxically, of his parent species...

By turns, they seek to coax the magic text from me, &, failing, always failing that, I am taken to that Other place...

I am Jesus, I hiss, as they strap me down...

I am Lazarus, come back from the dead...

They will not have it, the voices scream, & across the abyss the Beast echoes here he goes again we will have it, we will have it... I know that voice I think I know it show yourself I scream & the hands now hard upon me, the hands of violent restraint, come back with that voice, hard, treacherous, delivering me into the hands of my enemies...

Volumes. My life is gone. & the weeks & months beyond, a staggering through towers & plains of utter waste, minefields left by the plotting hands of a long forgotten war...

You bastard I'll kill you I scream
kill you

Is it too much to pray for a mother? A family? A heaven & an earth? Love? Something which shall not pass away? Some final judgment, a dispassionate Eye to oversee all of this, some One to say, when it's all over, out of the unmistakable, incontrovertible throat of thunder, wait a moment, please, wait, there is Something here to which all the broad world must witness... &, in the turning of the last page, discover, written in white hot flame: Justice is Mine...

I am the book you will not open me I pray I am the book you will not read me...

Still, for all of that, for all the desperate, unwavering resolve, they split me open, like a pod ripe for the harvest, whose seed they would spill out upon the stone ground...

& there, from me, I bleed, in my black joy of unconcealed triumph, a wondrous tumble of woven, tangled language... the Tower of Babel is my Cenotaph, I am steeled & girded against

their ever cracking This most sacred code, the Gift of Tongues, which He has given me... To reveal, He says, but only to She who has the gift of discernment. But also, & more immediately, to conceal. Let not the jackals of murderous conspiracy wrench & suck it from your pure heart. He has girded my loins, set a seal of safe passage across my breast, He has lifted the scales from my eyes that I may see their treachery, He has anointed me, blessed me & sent me out, His Shadow, into this, the Valley of Death, from which only one Man, my Brother, has returned...

& the word, the single Word, that which was uttered from out of the darkness, the primal template of being from which all of now & the future until the end of the World issues in a pulsing stream, a fecund flow of All, falls like an overripe apple into my lap... &, like Newton, the thunderclap of that as yet unspoken revelation, in its bright, tumescent, shiny newness, bears away upon the crest of its floodwaters the old world, in all of its tried, tired & unproven shoddiness... & I am here, a reluctant stranger in an absolutely other, strange land. I am, am become, the Word. I have been uttered. I am utterance. I am dumb, sealed with the Covenant of Love, commissioned to hold at any cost (my life small price) my silence, The Silence, to be the Fortress of His Will, His Desire, His Love. To be the Man in the Desert, wandering, the Thorn Tree in whose branches tomorrow's ravens

will come to roost &, stick by thorn, erect against the empty
desert sky, the New Jerusalem so long denied.

VI

I am by The River. From somewhere, over in the direction of the cottonwoods, drift fragments of a piano sonata. At the base of an uprooted tree I discover, revealed beneath the usual clutter of egg-shaped rock, a thick vein of pure, smooth clay, grey as the morning's sky, soft & yielding as one lover's flesh to the other, soft & vulnerable & as full of promise & possibility as a young lover's heart...

& I begin. What does one shape out of nothingness... Hands, eyes, flesh, the keen redness of blood, a creature miraculous in the muscle & bone & beating life, there, beneath the straining skin, wrought of sea, sky & stone, straining to be born, a creature exquisite in the beauty of her becoming... I tremble at the task, working now on the fingers, palm upward, as if waiting for a bird to alight, shaping in the detail of nail & joint with a willow twig... & I begin to weep. It is the flood of many years' rain, the dam finally breached. I shake. I stutter, struggling to utter the first words which will, like a new dawn breaking in raw fire through a new garden, begin, speak into being, become the groundstone, the Word upon which the brave new world of my redemption might be built...

But the floodplain is vast, the potency of her stone bed to assume all that has been unleashed, unlimited. Flowers will spring up in this haphazard rock garden: Blanket Flower, Purple Aster, Hooker's Onion, Daisies... & then, the habit of seasons' turning will wither them & plow them under...

Hope lies waiting, the seed of a dream as yet undreamed, cast randomly upon this beach, the barren rock bed of what will all too soon come to be tomorrow... & tomorrow... & tomorrow...

VII

There was a painting. Here. On the far wall. A square of bright colour, a fictional window into another time, another world...

A most remarkable painting. A woman he had come to know had done it, in the days when he was on the upper Srépok. He believed that he had loved her at the time, though, as he put it, very imperfectly. She had given it to him the day before she died. A single gunshot, revolver, at point blank range. To the head. He claimed it had helped him through that period.

& one night up at the cabin, when we had gotten into the mescal & tequila, it came to life, became a window giving out into that other world of horror I had never seen, but which had nonetheless taken on a life & a horror of its own in the telling, the magic of Lonnie's words... & when we left to come down into the valley that last time, he gave it to me. But it was lost in the firestorm of that End Time.

I painted it from memory. His. & then mine. From the bits of rough detail, the fragments at first confused, then finding the dark music, the faded vision now in focus, merging, then, beneath this eye, this shaking hand briefly stilled, again

come together, a sharp fusion, the riotous synaesthesia of a final collaboration...

& one morning, they took it away. Anton. Determined to strip me of everything. & when they, when he couldn't pry me open, couldn't get inside, all the rest went. The clothes. The ring you gave me. The black rosary. & the painting...

But he doesn't understand, none of them do: It's here... inside...

There is a woman. She is standing in front of her house. She is feeding the chickens. There are five of them. The house has one room, one door, one window. In the background rises a steep hill, out of which emerge numbers of angled trees, burnt, with twisted brown crowns. The scene is trichromatic: Above all, the sky, a pale wash of blue into which are riveted two white stylized birds flying in opposite directions; the scorched earthen potter's brown of the aforementioned hills; the trees & huts & the foreground earth upon which the chickens strut & peck in loose synchrony; & the middle ground between the Mother & her dwelling, a muted chrome yellow, the yellow of faded marigolds or old egg yolks. Actually, there is a fourth color: The riotous bloodred of the chickens' cockscombs, without which this Asian pastoral would be devoid of passion's sharp thorn, the locus of this meditation, the

unrelenting barb which hooks & inexorably fixes the eye on the invisible, the unuttered, unutterable suffering behind this little world's frail skin of appearance. & at the edges, just beyond the scope of peripheral vision the frame defines, the imagined deep green of encroaching jungle.

Unseen, behind a second & smaller hut (smaller only to the eye from its vantage point as it hovers in dispassionate contemplation somewhere outside of, in front of this frozen scene), a man hunches over a grindstone, sharpening an ancient machete toothed with the nicks of many decades' use. The sheer heft of the tool is reassuring in his clay-hard hands. Polychrome meteors erupt from the uneven blade's edge as it bounces along the whirling stone, & the pungent scent of stone & steel hangs in the still air.

In the distance, from the general direction of the hills beyond, the erratic chatter of guns answer one another.

In front of the scene (or, perhaps, it is a skin of mucous floating on the eye) hangs a curtain, translucent, almost transparent, taut as a drum, which palpates with every beat of life behind, stretches & shakes to the staccato chatter of bullets out of steel rupturing the warm morning air, taugth to the point of breaking as it strains to contain the long roll

of thunder from the hills washing in building waves across the lowland plains.

This skin, this membrane (which separates the reality of here from the unreality of this otherworldly scene) allows the eye entry into this other place, with its carefully arranged placements & ratios of color & space, form & frozen movement, heightening the total matrix of possibility for the beholder until reality itself becomes but another permutation lost in the vast shuffle & parade of illimitable possibility.

& at once contains all sound of life & death, the movement which springs from stasis & the stasis into which all movement devolves: The rustling of dry leaves beneath the morning's breeze, the cluck & scratch of our five chickens, the call of the child's voice to her mother feeding the chickens, the grating rasp of steel on stone a thin backdrop of noise against all of this... & the quick bursts of gunfire...

& this, this cataract of public vision, which turns the jaundiced eye into a sharp, refractive diamond, brings the world into consciousness, feeding a numbing, diffractive kaleidoscope of dismembered vision down into the hungering maelstrom of incomprehension, chaos & despair.

O god, we pray some Samaritan relief, some tutored horn to
fell the walls of this new Jericho, some cataclysmic meeting
of the human & the divine in the public square of our common
grief...

VIII

O my love, my most beloved, you who are lost, most lost, stop your ears against the praise of the multitudes. This day you descend from the Mountain aflame with the caress of your Mother's Love, transfigured by the first Moment of the world.

They shout your name. It comes to my ears in a rhythmic chant. They run in chaotic waves up University, McIntosh, Peel. But a glimpse, they pray, all they dare to hope for... Oh, the intoxication, the purblind yearning to be a part of, to become one with the sacred, anonymous horde, to be caught up in that infectious energy, to lose oneself in this larger body, this surging, chanting, joyous multitude which senses itself at the very edge of greatness, having discovered itself, suddenly, inside, part of the accident of this singular historical moment: She is coming, they cry, arms outstretched. Here is Love, finally, amongst us, our Mother, our sister, our daughter so long lost, our Lover, whose promise to return is now fulfilled. & you, you for whom we have waited so long, burning brighter than those thousand rumoured suns in their midst ...

O my most beloved, you whom I have loved since that Moment before Time, you who are the Fire of Love, you who set the world aflame: Beware...

Eros, Eros, they call, come to us, come into our midst, Eros,
come dance with us...

O my love, you, the unnameable, whose silent name is a sacred
seal set upon my lips, my heart, stop your ears, avert your
eyes. Take wing. Flee... All of this can only end in
disaster. They will try you & find you wanting, strip you &
cast you out naked into the street, they will flay & stone
you... & in the end, they will bolt you down & stretch you out
against the sky, then abandon you for the promise of any next
coming attraction. Blood cannot slake their thirst, nor gall,
nor wine
soured on her withered vine...

O my love... beware. Tonight the arrow of history flies
straight to the hungry Heart...

& later, they play the blues for you on Rue St. Denis... So
quickly gone, so soon a legend in your own time...

I watch, powerless, from my isolate tower, looking out, down
upon the inflamed, clamorous horde... fire, running through
the streets... swollen tongues of fire stolen, weaving through
the streets... They call your name, out into the night, your
name... Eros, they call, Love... Death...

On the street corners & in the smoky blue jazz clubs they tell stories of your singular, heroic life. But nothing can hold back the darkness now. Their torches flicker, bright points of anguish... Against dawn's breaking they pray, like brother Prometheus, for deliverance, for the gift of death.

Hold me, Eros, hold me, Love...

The dark wings beat, crowding out the stars

Come to me

Their wings beat at the window

Secret

Their fists beat at the door

In the night...

We are running along the South Beach, along that vast stretch of white sand, through birch & scrub willow, running in the heart of heathaze summer, beneath the white brand of the sun, beneath the stark, pitiless sky... & nights there, all that long week, we slept naked, sunburnt, shivering beneath that other, dark world of the dying, borning, new moon...

I give myself back to Mother, you said, beneath that new, absent moon, stirring the ashen embers, back to the stardust whose miracle I am, back to that place the incense smoke of this beach fire seeks, back to Magna Mater... & the great round wheeling world whirled vast above & the great round

groaning world moved slow beneath us, tilting us into the rust-orange bleeding of tomorrow's birth...

Mad, I was. Mad. For you. Mad for life. Sick to taste it all, to feed upon it all, to have it all, sick to not have it, sick with wanting not to want, sick with knowing in the blood that betrayal was the way of all humanity, for each & all of us... & you wondered why I wept that morning...

Mad for you. You were the stars & moon & sky & the cool, gritty sand beneath us, & the cool, night-black pool of fractured stars upon which we floated in the willow-rimmed lagoon... you were my birth, all that I longed for... & then, again & again, my death, my resurrection...

against the casement the black wings beat...
& soon enough the rain with fists,
the rage of poison in the blood...

& like brother Prometheus fastened to the stone of inevitability, I will pray for deliverance,
I will pray for death...

IX

We are the universe in her reflective mode, as though, suddenly, the very eyes of God glimpsed for the first time the black, star-studded vault of night's sky in a quiet forest pool... & how much more powerful, then, when eyes meet eyes, hands grasp hands, the very souls of being dare to touch & embrace... We are the Divine dancing beneath the star-strewn skies of Her own hand... we are all bound by Love, in Love, in this miracle of life; & more, ever more, this, that the Miracle of Particularity is always, where it erupts, like a forest fire raging in the seeming dark night this cosmos, a Fire that rages, that Illuminates, that dares to contradict the illusion of cosmic entropy...

X

Down the cascade tumble of seasons in their endless round I have waited for release. Now it is upon me. Now what... The world, time, the potency of a past in ruins, undecipherable, all presses in upon me. The dream of freedom which I have kept alive, which has kept me alive through these dark years inside, now stretches & flutters like a bird uncaged, unaccustomed to light, noise, movement. For a moment she pauses, stretching her wings, head now tilted as if to catch some song beyond the range of the human ear... & launching from this, is fast away, into the tangle of branches, into the trees, is soon lost in the soft flush of spring sky...

I am out. Almost. So close. So hard to trust what seems to be happening. My mouth is dry. I shake, but no more than is normal, given the time of day, the level of medication. Dr. McIntyre guides me to a chair. Green leather. Clawed armrests. His voice is at once gruff, polished. Not there. Over here, where we can talk. His hand grips my right elbow firmly as he steers me into something plain, straight-backed, less comfortable. He has seated me near a bank of high windows, but facing away from them. I gaze across the broad oak table, beyond him, to the full wall of books behind. I can make out gilt-edged pages, leather jackets, a blur of embossed titles. I have trained myself not to focus. It is

the first giveaway. Not that it matters now. The whole charade is up, even if only on the fragile hinge of a legal decision. Still, it is something of a matter of principle. I will hold fast.

You are to be freed, he says, as though it is good news for both of us. His forced smile fails & collapses into a grimace.

Your protracted stay with us here has been under rather unusual circumstances. But all of that will soon be in the past. Here is all of the documentation in relation to your mother's estate. It has been held in trust these last few years, pending such a development as this. He rises & crosses the floor to retrieve something from the drawer of his desk. His pipe. As he turns away, I look at the signature beneath his on the release form. I cannot make out the name, but there is something familiar, if vague there, in the eccentric set of loops & vertical lines...

Burnished brogues. Dark brown wool socks. Tan, cuffed trousers. Brown mix Harris tweed jacket. The real thing. Real as the thick Highland accent. White shirt. Starched collar. School tie. Edinburgh? McGill? He must keep the jacket hanging here, in this front office. Always, behind the other doors, inside, the jacket is longer, professional,

white, but the faded white of hospital, institutional laundry. The white smelling at first of chlorine, then, by shift's end, of vomit & spittle & urine & faecal matter, the white which brushes up against you just before something awful, violent, unexpected breaks like a tornado inside, outside, & the world is all needles & blue fire & the deafening hum of electricity breaks everything open, bleeding, inside, outside... I must contain the shaking, take this all in, must not so late, so close to this, to you, succumb beneath the Wheel...

Our network of concern, let us say, for your safety & well-being reach far beyond the walls of the Institute. In a sense, you are about to become what one might call a medical parolee. You are to live at the address provided & must check in here twice weekly, Tuesdays & Saturdays. In addition, there will be regular calls made by staff at your residence. You must understand that your course of treatment has been very lengthy & extensive, & cannot simply be brought to a halt when you walk out the front door. You leave here a free man, in one sense, but it is our duty to see that this newly gained freedom of yours blossoms into wholeness. Dr. Vostik will continue to follow your case. He has your file & will keep me posted regularly. The assessment team feels that while you have made progress in recent months, your release should be viewed as not being without risk to you. Your failure, refusal, or inability to communicate verbally with the staff

& other patients here leaves some cloud of doubt over our prognosis for successful reintegration into society. For your own good you have been kept from all that has gone on out there, which will only make it more difficult for you. I must advise you that you are being released contrary to the better judgment of the team. Unfortunately, legal authority has finally taken precedence in this matter.

& a final few words of advice from one who knows you in some respects better than you are able to know yourself. Let sleeping dogs lie. I think you have the capacity to appreciate this concise aphorism in light of your circumstance.

You have one more night with us. Tomorrow, we will have one final little goodbye session, or, perhaps I should phrase it as the French do, in their own inimitable, poetic manner, we shall not be saying "goodbye", but "au revoir."

& without another word to me, he pivots in his chair & hits the intercom button. Nurse Callas, we are through here. Have Martin show the patient back to Five North.

XI

I dream my name is Cara. I find a child in the desert. She is to mean all the difference to the world. I am not worthy to untie her sandal strap. In the escalating violence which pushes dream into fear-drenched dawn, they wrench her from me at gunpoint.

Here, in this aged city, they put me to the test, each body subject to the weighty whims of the wrecker's ball. We lie prostrate beneath the Pendulum of Chaos which undoes the fragile lattice grace of meaning & with each purposeful swing announces the end, the End... & so, swaddled in tenuous rags of memory & rocked by the trembling hand of uncertainty, I sleep to wake, to wake in this frostrime night. There are no names. There are no words beyond this generic landscape. There is but this searing litany of pure pain building & collapsing upon itself again & yet again, like some ocean longing for her dry bed.

I long for spring. Is this not at once a yearning for our lives & a longing for our deaths, the death (each our own & which we each must claim absolutely, better sooner than later) which will so soon undo us all... I wish away a little piece of my life to see the flowers prove the miracle's persistence & thus Easter. I long for spring & at once quietly, fiercely

court the corollary of my mortality. Indeed, we are born to die. But the light is for the dancing & the dark but a place to hold us as we dream of these bright green worlds to which we wake. Irrepressible, the race persists, & I, a mote, a glyph, erupting within the briefest nanosecond in this void, dance on.

XII

The morning of the last day I awake early. It is still dark. Unmoving, I watch, I wait, I listen to the far, spare noises of the city in her turn awakening. Slowly, imperceptibly, the engulfing darkness of my room yields to lightening shades of grey. A thin horizontal strip of sky is visible through the single, high window. Grey. Perhaps a late snow. I can feel it. Cut off from all outside news, one learns to listen to the body, to read whatever thin patch of sky one is proffered as an observatory. It faces north. No direct sunlight. I follow my daily regimen. First, the abstract exercises themselves, as taught me those many years ago. Mnemonics, he called them. Then, a review of the texts, fragment by fragment. I have numbered them carefully. The system of titles did not work well, they could not tell me when something was lost. Over time, the damage has been very extensive. ECT is the worst. Also, some of the injections, especially when combined with isolation... & then, the sensory deprivation. & those experiences themselves become fragments, files, chapters, each numbered, each committed to memory, over & over again, as I silently chant the litany of my life. &, as was explained to me by the Master, it is possible to forget the meaning, the reality which gave rise to their original utterance, but the words remain, a constant, enduring echo of

what once was. & always, well before the first round of medication, I begin with the Epistle, with you.

Epistle

& why do I bother with all of this? As you will soon discover from the contents, the outpouring of many years which is to follow, this is a letter. An epistle. To you. Whoever you are. Whoever you may have been. For whatever there may still be for you. For me. For us. Even if, in the end, you prove to be the fiction of a desperate man struggling to survive in these desperate times, you will prove no less a miracle. Wherever you are, I pray that you wait, as I do, for some word reaching out from that anonymous, as yet unnamed yesterday, pray that these words will find you, & in turn, somehow find their way, in some improbable miracle of synchrony, back to me.

I dare in this desert of anonymity to believe that we once loved, that there once was a brief garden in which we played & sang & laughed & lost... a time & place where we dared to risk what lovers must if they are to be, to burn with the full, self-consuming brightness of that Moment... & I have the audacity to believe that somehow you must have survived, as I have, as I am, as I will, that you persevere, that whatever it was that happened & is now lost is not beyond redemption...

I reach out, I cling like a drowning man to some passing bit of flotsam, I fix upon this detritus, the thin promise of your existence, that you may, by the intercession of some most unlikely miracle, deliver the scattered fragments of my life, our lives, to this far shore. I pray for you. I pray for our wholeness. I pray for us.

XIII

He goes on at some length, getting more agitated as he speaks. He gets up, takes a cigarette from the silver case on the table, lights it & begins to pace along the dark Persian rug, all the way to the door & back. It is the very excuse I had hoped would present itself, for now I have to turn about in my chair to face him. He moves across the room like a caged animal. I have this morning decided that, as a final, parting gesture of victory, I will in these last few hours show him how alive I still am, though that most solemn vow of silence will not be broken until the world at large has been gained.

Beyond the windows stretches the West garden, closer now than I have ever seen it before. So close. & the anger, the hate, the loathing well up within me like a fountain of vitriolic poison... I recall seeing him there, down here, in the garden, watching him from my place of imprisonment high on the sixth floor, watching from my high, barred window.

Now, only moments from my release, I can see it, most of it, clearly, in detail. Too early for all but the crocuses & snowdrops, all lavender, yellow & white, poking through the trailing windrows of dirty snow. How I had hated seeing him there, pruning, preening, his pipe going, bent over a flower, a bush, a shrub, with those scissors of his, & those shears,

clipping, shaping, moulding his little world until he had it just so. Get away, I would scream inside myself, the world is not yours to do with as you will... How I prayed that something awful would happen to him there. Perhaps that the ragged old birch rooted in the loose rock against the stone fence would catch the wind on a particularly blustery afternoon & come crashing down upon him, crushing the breath & blood of his sour life from him... Or that perhaps later, on the way home to wherever that was, that he would step out in front of a bus, or that a fatal patch of ice would find him, sending him in his expensive little foreign two seater skittering wildly out of control. Paralysis. Dismemberment. Disfigurement. Coma. Extensive burns. Immolation. Death. I wished it all on him. I wished it all for him. I prayed for it, longed for it, paced in the night & in my silent prayer of longing to my own personal god pleaded for it, demanded it as retribution, ranted & plotted in my drug-induced dreams that vengeance might be mine.

But now, as I watch him in his turn rave & pace, I see that he is only a man, perhaps as much to be pitied & benignly despised as to be hated with such a burdensome passion. I have, in a perverse sense, won, in that they have not prevailed over me. The text has survived, at least partially intact. & they have not succeeded in wrenching a single word of any of it from me. Nothing.

He raves on in his studied way, his voice now fading, melting & merging with the background noise coming up from Pine Street below. What day of the week is it? Where would they consign me to live? What measures are they prepared to take to keep me on the short tether McIntyre obliquely refers to? & what of the medication?

II

ÉTUDE POUR UNE DAMNÉE

My beloved put his hand to the latch,
and my heart was thrilled within me.
I arose to open to my beloved,
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh,
upon the handles of the bolt.
I opened to my beloved,
But my beloved had turned and gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke.
I sought him but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
The watchman found me,
as they went about in the city;
they beat me,
they took away my mantle,
those watchmen of the walls.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my beloved,
that you tell him
I am sick with love.

Song of Solomon 5.4-8

I

We would go down on Sherbrooke Street, past Mountain, Crescent, Bishop, down along the Golden Mile to that bronze Rodin casting... most beautiful when a luxuriant, soft, clinging snow would fall: All the city's voices spoke in muffled tones, everything seemed to slow, & the sharper, more sinister edges, the toppling, encroaching angulations of the threatening architecture which so often rose to crush in upon us, dulled, retreated into the vague pointilliste background (how we loved the French impressionists, especially Monet; from them we learned to see the world anew)... yes, most so when, along the top edges of his arms, his shoulders, his bared head, the snow added its own thick strokes, its own natural relief. I was fascinated by the eyes, or rather their suggestion, made by those two shallow, round caves there, as though scooped out by a round soup spoon, those empty sockets, always filled by shallow pools of impenetrable shadow, even, & especially, in the bronze blaze of summer's high noon... like King Lear, like Oedipus, strong, silent, defiant, enduring... & you, I recall, by the power in the patient, fettered hands, the sinew frozen forever, speaking silently of what is always about to be, to erupt, but will never come to pass...

Yes, you the hands, you the accomplished pianist who now, soon, in those few years, under the tutelage of other masters, were to become a surgeon. That was the dream. Another one... this one yours...

& we would play, (in turns, by turns, in voices tragic & comic, as it must be played), we would play at saying... Rodin, Rodet, Rodot, & then try the lines before & after, after the real lines, that is... Godin, Godet, Godot, in French, then in English, your Vladimir to my Estragon, your Didi to my Gogo, then around...

& around & around we would move, describing a deepening circle in the deepening snow, arms outstretched, then raised, then letting go, palms now up to receive the damp flakes, a circle of two there, all the world there contained... & then we would draw towards the centre of our circle, our world, & reach left & right across our cold, bronze Rodin, & embrace as best we could with his cold, massive bulk between, & swear that no one, no thing, would ever come between...

Once, very late at night, a cold, blustery pre-dawn, I tried here we go round the prickly pear at five o'clock in the morning, & you became so upset, tears welling up in your eyes, & said please, don't do that ever again, & I didn't, & you made me promise never to sing the German round song Didi

sings at the beginning of act two, & that, too, I promised... each day then was bound by promise, each minute, each breath, spoken & unspoken, a touch, a glance, the very act of keeping silent in the silence...

We are each the keeper of the other's solitude, Goethe says, you whispered to me, your breath warm & damp on my neck, that this is the essence, the nexus of love... & you wrote it months later in a plain indigo card, in that tight, leaning, passionate script of yours, with a single buttercup pressed between (you had found it in the first bale of hay from the first crop - you would not pick flowers, they were inviolate, or should be, you insisted, it was part of what you believed, then), & sent it to me, that first long, hot summer... when you abandoned your studies, your apartment, & had quite simply, utterly, vanished, & I went there that night, & let myself in with the key, that key... it was the first thing I noticed, there on the top shelf of your makeshift bookcase, there, where I had placed it, beside that buttercup yellow card, the one I had painted & given you those few short days before...

Inside, there was no flower, only words... all only words:

Eros' Garden
 is the world,
 this place & time
 transformed &
 made new, each moment...
 simply, inexorably, unbidden,
 by the power of Love,
 caring,
 concern for the Other

...The Keeper of your solitude

...the saddest night was when we once dared to do what we said
 no one or two of us could ever dare to do, there... we played
 the end lines, as we called them... what was it made us do it,
 profane this sacred place, what drew us so inexorably, with
 such finality, to invite chaos, & thus, the first shadow of
 the End into our small, magic circle... so soon later, a first
 vow broken...

& that night, when the snow fell deep & we circled you asked,
 begged, implored me to fashion, to shape from that thick
 ground of snow, a snowman; we were so full of love & brief
 winter-spring & the full-running wine of our youth that I
 agreed...

...emerged, Lucky for his Rodin, his Godin, his Godot, his
 Pozzo, a squat man recoiling in abject fear beneath the
 dispassionate gaze of his master, who himself stood there,
 forever in chains... & you insisted, a crown, not a hat, for

Lucky, the Christ-figure, & ran off down McKay Street & bought a dozen scarlet roses (with the money you had saved for new winter boots), returned, & weaving them deftly together into a wreath, crowned him... it was the most touching thing I had ever seen you do... &, standing behind the bronze statue (of Pozzo, it was, from that night on, he was our poor Pozzo, King dethroned), mouthed the powerful invocation: Speak, misery! &, after a fashion, behind the snowman, behind our Lucky, I did... & there, with Lucky, we danced, improvised, the Net, finally falling exhausted in a sad, defeated tangle at his feet...

& we made love in that sacred, bittersweet place, in the hollow of those stairs leading down from the sidewalk into that shop entrance, well below street level. It was late & we buttoned our overcoats together as best we could manage, I in my grandfather's racoon & you in my p'nt's, for some reason, in a man's style, buttons on the right - exquisite historical synchronicity, I said as we fumbled feverishly with the oversize buttons - & you smiled that shy, quiet smile & fell against me, your wet mouth finding mine... you pulling at my belt buckle & my hands moving up under the warm woollen pleats of that blue tartan dress, that outrageous, erotic piece of most functional fashion, with its full row of smallish buttons, full along the length of your front, knee to throat, waiting, begging & now ripe to be harvested beneath my

hands... up along the high black woollen stockings, & peeling them back down, over those hot, silk-hard thighs, & you so very warm there, & soft & yielding & wet, that wild, natural musk scent that was you, only you, blending with the luxuriant animal warmth of our coats... & we sat there, on that broad, backless bench, & rocked... & the snow fell, weightless, & we were weightless as the air, & all the world, our world, was contained in that vague, diffuse, muted sphere... & just at that moment, you arched back, bearing full down upon me, eyes closed, against the city this time, & the flakes fell in unrestrained luxury upon your face, your loosened hair...

& when we returned the next day, between classes (late morning, I think, we had sandwiches), there it lay, his humble crown, forlorn & shabby on its cold block of stone, battered & worn by the hard night's rain which had followed... & nothing, nothing of the man, of our Lucky... (Frosty, the snowman, I had thought to sing - I don't think I ever had the heart to tell you that - but didn't, couldn't)... released, you said, from his misery, his despair... the utter abjectness of his total, consuming poverty, his wretchedness, I said... Nothing to be done, we said together, looking down into the depths of the street's wetness, as if into a grave, as if at the funeral of some lost, loved one... (astride a grave, I thought to say but didn't, couldn't bring myself to, it was suddenly too much, all too much... so many things are left

unsaid, fall into the backdrop of silence & forgetting & all this at first not so serious as all that, more in that serio-comical tone of Gogo's, but with that undertone of imminence & finality... but then the words stopped, & we stood there, stilled, still in the warm rain, & something happened, some silent bond of synchronicity, some higher sense of theatre... Your hand, my hand, reached down, in a single movement, your right & my left, to pick up that crown, now largely stripped of its petals, a scattering of small, bright, shiny stains, in small, flat pools, glistening on the stone... like drops of blood... like blood, I said... like blood, you said, lifting your pricked finger to my mouth... in the warm rain...

& we stood there forever, in the rain, the rain on your face, in rivulets along the inner creases of your cheeks, the tears... holding hands with this mighty work of Rodin, Rodet, Rodot...

& I, still amongst the living, began that evening with a fresh block of clay. Like lightning. Conception. & so, I threw myself into that intoxicating, primal space with total abandonment, dancing, struggling with, loving & equally, loathing, trying to dominate & eventually succumbing to the will of what was to emerge as The Transfiguration. It was to be you, & it was to be, first of all, in the eyes. There must

be bottomless shadow there, in those shallow recesses enough room for all of the darkness of deepest space. The viewer had to be, must be drawn inexorably by the dynamic of that composition to the inevitability of fixing upon the eyes. In the end, those many months later, it was you, there, as you had been that night, so many nights, fully arched, back, except that your body defies the laws of physics; the entire body, my body, which is implicit, there, in that stilled movement, is not there. You arch back, but my hands are not there at your waist, my fingers part way around the small of your back, straining, I am not there beneath you, your arms are fully extended and your hands form a graceful semi-circle, fingertips barely meeting, touching, as they would, as they so often did, at the back of my neck... & it cannot be anyone else, for only I, I alone, fit just so, there... like Michelangelo, I had sought in my own way to liberate the angel from the stone... & so you are there, your legs forever partially emerged, the outer thighs fully formed, strong, silksmooth in stone as in flesh, the inner thighs forever part of that world of dumb, inert stone, aching, I still dream, for release... & so, I am not there... you are alone in your ecstasy, emerging from out of, straddling, bearing fully down upon, riveted in, straining to be free of, that very clay of your birth.

II

We hear the muffled explosion of shotgun fire as we cross the last meadow & ford the creek. Three shots, spaced some seconds apart. More trouble with that chicken hawk, I shout over the metallic whine of the engine. We catch sight of him through the trees, shattered in the flickering dapple of sunlight, disembodied fragments of darkness & light, shade & colour luminiscent behind the arched tangle of elm branches & leaves, a figure in a high stained glass window. He is there, at the top of the slope, framed in the wide door of the hayloft. Waiting. I am driving the tractor, with the loaded haywagon behind. We have let the horse come ahead alone. You stand behind me, straddling the axle, hugging my shoulders. As we swing wide of the stand of elms, he comes into full view. He stands there, legs planted far apart, with the shotgun in his hands. He swings it crisply in our direction & fires a shot, well over our heads. He glares down at us.

I hear you whisper something, in a hoarse, desperate voice. Your fingers dig into the muscle at the base of my neck. Jump, I urge you, in that same desperate whisper. Jump!

He is screaming about you, his daughter, the whore. He is screaming about me, the sonofabitch English bastard. Much of it I cannot make out. It is in German. Schnell, he yells,

then again, gesturing violently with the shotgun. A flash. A crack of thunder. We run. For our lives, we run. & never look back...

You said it would be this way. You said that if he found out it would be this way. You lived inside a fear that I could not fathom, your speech, your gestures so guarded in his presence, your eyes always averted.

You come to me fresh from the garden, still wet with the benediction of morning's dew as you crawl beneath the thin blanket & find me there. I pull you to me with the ecstatic desperation that marks all of our days. You are bathed in a bright, glistening sheen of dew & sweat. You draw up, swinging your long, muscled leg over my hips, straddling me. The sun pours unrestrained through the window, the rich honey sun of full summer, splashing across you, kindling you, enveloping you in a susurrus of golden flame... your arms cross beneath your breasts, your fingertips move under the elastic of your peach halter top, & in a single movement, strip it, like an extra layer of skin, from your body.. this same infectious flame moves down, through me, deep, there, within. Your perfect breasts tumble loose, bouncing resiliently... O, my love, I have loved you so, all this time, all of the little time we have been given, together, & now, this gift, so freely given...

In this silent cathedral of laughter you look down upon me. All of this... in the pervasive silence of our laughter. You smile that smile of deepest innocence & passion, a woman, a child, fresh from the garden, fresh & salty & smelling of brown earth & the round, green world, & as I rise & press my lips there, my hands at the base of your rib cage, my tongue pressing in at the hollow there, at the base of your neck, I feel your breath on me, I feel you breathe beneath my hands...

I am struck, shaken, moved by the miracle of life, of Love hovering over me. My hands move up to trace the shallowing slopes of your breasts. I lean into you. You throw your head back, gasping, then throw yourself full upon me, a bewildering mix of passion & playfulness...

Your eyes are fixed in mine in a kind of ecstasy I have not seen before. This, the first time, like this... there is something new, a sureness in the hands, the lips... but especially in your eyes. It is there, from a newly discovered place deep within you, that I see that you give yourself to me this day, completely, without reservation of will, nor desire to hold any last little thing back, nothing left there to cling to, only the other, only the giving of all in the crash & surge of this undifferentiated sea.

& it has to be this way. It was never for me to name the time, to say yes, now... It had to be you, in the fullness of your innocence, to come to this morning &, in the fire of this Annunciation, bring me in deep within a place, this place, some magical garden where I had never been... yours was the only door, the only key... &, had I known, then, the cost of giving, & being given, so completely, so utterly, at what cost the price of these few hours, those few months, would I have sacrificed myself on that altar of longing, of that love... & know & wonder what it might ever have, could ever have been

otherwise... my Love, my lost, these events, these moments of imminence are the workings & unleashings of Eros' heaven upon the innocent, the unsuspecting, who, in the hubris, the blindness of their trust, court the inevitable, the unavoidable... & if we had known, would we, could we have been any different, lying naked in the brilliant slant of sunlight in the front bedroom that morning, or in any of the hours, the weeks & months which were to follow in the tumble of desperate urgency out of that moment, that day...

All things, the rising & setting of every sun, the movement of each cloud, each note of each bird's song sung, every step, every motion, each touch, the uncounted sighs, the excruciating burden, the agonistic joy of waiting, anticipating, all these & more conspire & focus in upon this time, this day, this moment, everything before & after lead to & move out from this... & not only for this time, this, the place of here & now in morning's streaming light, between the front bedroom & the garden of the upper meadow, but for all the years before this, before we had ever met, before we knew that there could ever possibly, even in God's most generous dreams, be such a place as this, the Garden of our Love... In that brief flash of time I am drawn, pulled under, lost deep in the riptide of this ecstasy, the window's bright green world beyond a floodgate suddenly swung open... & I float & drown in your arms, tightly pressed to you, clutching you with

the mad desperation of a drowning man... & as our eyes meet, there is this sudden new recognition, that we are tottering at the edge of some thing as yet unnameable, unspeakable... a new kind of death awaits, a single death which will claim us both, the death of an old world, our world, where we fed on the thin air of yearning & possibility... how did I know that it would be you, it had to be you who would take my hand, take me like this, falling into my eyes & smiling that purest smile of unrestrained joy, mirroring mine, &, nodding ever so slightly, say, now, yes, my love, now...

& like a drowning man my life blossoms in a flashing tumble before me... I am suddenly filled with the years, the seasons, the events & people that have brought me, delivered me, us, here, to this: All things have conspired, I see in that flash, all things, the minutiae of time & circumstance, bear & press in upon this moment, this diamond hard, diamond bright & clear instant fired to a pure white light in the crucible of our communion. It would be enough to die, here, now, in these, your arms...

Come, you say, holding me tightly, come quickly, while he is gone, before he returns... Now, I ask... You look deep into me, into the stripped nakedness of me, down into a place beyond knowing. Now, you respond, your breath hot & wet on my neck. You tumble in grace from the high bed, your nipples

hard, the skin along your arms, your legs, the curving slopes of your breasts alive with a lattice of raw, white welts... you take me by the hand & pull me towards you; then, looking full at me in my nakedness as I rise from the bed, you laugh, this time aloud, & kiss me, with excruciating passion, there. Now, you say...

We took the grey workhorse your father forbade anyone to ride. Eva, Eva Braun, he called her, der Fuhrer's whore, finally put to an honest day's work, he would laugh in that joyless way of his, slapping her hard along the withers. Horses were for work, he insisted, not for the frivolous pleasures of the idle class. I clung to you in the pure animal joy of midmorning's lingering coolness, tight against you, my hands moving along your hips, your stomach, your breasts, our legs straining in rhythm against her flanks. We had to leave her at the base of the final hill, tethered to that ancient crabapple planted by the first settlers, at the foot of that vague, ascending trail. Why did we take the horse, why did we have to take Eva, we accuse the smoke blue air of the bus depot hours later. Why... why all of this, why has it so suddenly come to this...

It's the war, you say, shaking, sobbing in my arms for the second time that day. All that stuff about whores. God knows what happened back then. My mother said he lost his sisters to the Russians... O God, O God, you sob into the wet hollow of my shoulder. I clutch our tickets... one way... our life, our lives, are now, irredeemably, one way, away, a flight from, a staggering towards, out into an uncharted desert... You cling to me with a new desperation I have never felt in you, in anyone, before this, all of this. I hold you with a fierce, protective numbness, my nose buried in the grassy,

harvest scent of your hair, looking out, beyond, to the small town hustle of Sutton, this gateway of exile, fearing that at any second he will break through the door, firing. But he does not come. Except for the letter, he is through with you. With us. & my heart breaks for you... What about my mother, you say, shaking, what about my sisters... my Love, my life...

As we wait to board, the skies break open; the rains continue through the following night.

Like a metronome measuring the pained throb & beat of your breaking heart, the windshield wipers slap at the rain in their shallow curves. The sun is gone, the world is drowning, you say, over & over, the world is drowning... I cannot bear to love you so, for I would take this agony & carry it, & so release you from this... I would die for you... O God, the crush of love to see you there, hanging broken in the trees, fixed, bleeding there...

He sent a letter. A brief letter, which arrived two days later. He would know where to send it, where you would go. No salutation:

I saw you there. In the high meadow. I saw both of you there. I told you not to ride the horse. I told you not to go there. Whore. You are not my daughter. Your mother's heart is broken.

Neither a signature, actually, more like a gash, a violent scar of ink slashed in a straight line up across the page, like the anonymous signature of some functionary who in his haste has dashed off & signed a death warrant.

O love, my love, I break for you...

We go to Cara's place on Aylmer Street. She always has or makes room for you. & me. You still have the key. These steps we have climbed so often in recent weeks in our passionate innocence, at lunch, after classes, for coffee, creak, as always, beneath our feet. But here, now, there is no solace, as I had hoped, in the familiar. Quite the opposite, for what this day has brought taints & poisons the world as we move through it. This is how it is. This is how it must be, as though it had been foreordained. This is how it will be: We stumble out from the loss of Grace into the

dying world of exile, pain & the shadowfall of impending death. Standing in the hallway, taking in the familiar, I realize the gripping depth of my shock, & can only guess at your horror. Now, the experience of love weighs full upon us, burdening us with the cross of our looming crucifixion... We, who had waited so long for so much, All, so quickly undone, this joy snatched from us, wrenched from us with such unprecedented violence, cast down from our ecstatic mountain, into these, the other flames of love... All about us, the furniture, the books, walls, floor, the windows in their opaque greyness, all is transformed in its mute reproof. What have we lost, I think, not daring to say it, running my hand in my numbness along the table at which so much had been shared, upon which we had broken the sacred bread of our mutual promise, a betrothal... What have we lost...

I am afraid to leave you alone, but you insist. I want to wash it off, you say, rubbing at your arms, I want to wash it off... over & over as you rummage through the linen closet. A towel, you say, I need a large towel... I'm all right, you say in a raised, strained voice from behind the high white door. I'll be okay. I hear the water run & smell the cooking mix of steam & flaking paint. On the other side I can see only a razor, the avenging blade of grief, glinting there, in the room's harsh light, a straight razor, wielded in a sharp, downward motion, a quick, decisive stroke... & a rising sea of

blood in which you drown... It is an ambivalent act of faith I make as I sit, hanging onto the seat of my chair in the kitchen, rocking away the minutes, rocking until I can stand it no longer...

All that night we lie in bed, close, listening to the rain. My life is yours, I struggle to say, knowing, finding what I mean as I struggle with the words. & I watch you there, stretched to breaking in the straining web of your affliction. Something died there, that day, that night. For a few hours you drift in & out of a shallow, fitful, tortured sleep... I watch as your eyes move beneath their lids, as your fists clench & pull at the bedsheets, as muscles twitch & strain, as you mutter & call out, delirious... O God, I drown in the unstemmable floodwash of your sorrow... I pray at the edge of the bed to a now absent god... I would take it all on, I would cloak myself in your grief & walk out into this night without morning... Yes, I will die for you, I tell you, so deep into that dark night that there seems no possibility of ever emerging... I am yours, my life is yours, anything...

Anything.

III

& then, that night, when my tortuous ramblings delivered me to that crooked house, to that brief spring of my youth, my madness... there, another universe converged, the broad cosmos of memory, & you, the only goddess, angel... shining, burning at its core. I watched us moving silently behind the high, thin window; I watched you slowly turn, the twist of your neck, golden flesh beneath golden hair, & you gazed out over the garden, now tangled & wild with weeds, to where I stood. & I looked out too, my hand on the nape of your neck. We were talking, I recall, about the future, a future which would never come to be. You were wrenched so violently from my life, my being. This wound of love, this garden of weeds & stone, is a private, separate place deep within. & in its midst I stand now, invisible, unseen, as I watch my hand upon your face, & I strain to hear what is said but cannot... There is too much time & space, too many years, people & all the vast cataract of human event between, which drowns it out. A sudden urge erupts, to climb the now-faded green fence of that far-gone spring, to try the boarded door, to force it, to climb those crooked stairs & grab you, seize you, never let you go for all those long, lost years. To see your face again. & again, those eyes, the eyes of the face of god, again to lie with you & know the lessons of human, of cosmic history now forgotten & which no one, none can ever evoke

again; to know you in that garden, to fall asleep against you, ecstatic in our own unique, tortured way. A sudden urge to say yes, to stem the unstemmable tide of all those years, which even now surges & breaks & claims all of this. There is seaweed in your hair; small, diamond-hard bubbles percolate from the corners of our mouths. We move ever more slowly. I rise, stretching across the bed, reaching for the window's clasp. I cannot stop what you are to do, there is nothing to be done, nothing which can make any difference. I watch your hand, your wrist turn; the vertical panes swing wide, your right hand against the clear surface of one, my left against the other. The tide is unleashed. I am crushed beneath the sudden force of years, a green wall engulfs me & assumes this world & now. Somewhere far above, the sun, a pale, wobbly, watery green, shines. I climb & claw my way upward. I surface, gasping, into this sudden, alien landscape, another man in another garden, in another place & time, with all of its pressing gravity & circumstance. There is nothing to do. Nothing to be done. What does it mean, to turn my back as I do now? What purpose to return here again & yet again, to engage in this pilgrimage of obsession... what is to be gained... &, still, I come, I must, for you are there, waiting, we are there, expectant, unknowing, leaning out at the window's edge, looking out... & I cannot reach out to tell you not to dare to dream, to believe, to tell you that it is not only the brief spring of our love, but the broad universe

itself which is unseeable, unknowable, unfathomable...
irretrievable.

You would not have told me not to come, not to be faithful,
had you known, had we known that it would come to this. Would
you? & so, I return.

IV

All of these seasons so close, just beyond the west wall, & I, when a walk down the right corridor allowed, would risk a furtive glance down, out there... they must never know, I thought, they would take it all away, the past, our past... & a year later, to the week, perhaps even to the day, I return to this place, to this city of stone & glass: Here, at the foot of the mountain, this place of stone, as I set foot upon the path, that path which we so often trod & which we, you & I, helped in our small way to wear & form, as I set upon the path, I see at a distance a woman there, part way up the stone stairway, a woman with dull blonde hair, there, reading from a hardcover book; I stop, &, at the margin of long grass along the high stone wall, watch; she stops reading, eyes focussed now at an indeterminate distance; she hugs her knees & begins to rock ever so slightly, almost imperceptibly... the rhythm of her own heart... & what beneath... the ache of the flesh over these intervening years... I screw up my courage & approach. Step by step, more & more, detail by detail, focus, filling in, until the sun is directly behind her, the frame of reference encompassing less & less, the centre of vision's edges peeling, dropping away, until there is nothing but her, there, on the stone steps, rocking, then only her head & upper torso, then, just the face, the hair... & the face is eclipsed in shadow, haloed about by a fiery corona of hair. It is not

.

you, it cannot be... you are older by some years, & perhaps a broad continent away. I cannot dare hope it is, but I do. I spend many long minutes, circling, almost like a predator, a voyeur, though it is not that, not that at all. It is a world a lifetime away.

& up the stairs & around again & I still do not know & still dare to believe. Not because I want to, but because I must. It is an act of audacity, a pure act of the heart which knows, which remembers as it remembers the sea of life before birth, knows & is transfixed & must return, a criminal, to the place of crime. From this new & slightly different angle I can take in the profile of your face. I am torn. This feels like an act of violation. Of you, a woman I surely have never known, will never know... but the heart insists. You are perfect for the part. You, these years later, slightly more mature, your willowy presence now more solid, the brilliant, wheaty iridescence of your hair now tending towards harvest straw... but the nose there, the giveaway, & that sad, preoccupied, pensive way you always had, plunged so deeply in thought, your brilliance rocketing down god knows what uncharted corridors of thought at the speed of light, & I would come up behind you & embrace you, my forearms across your neckline, hands grasping opposite shoulders, as when I would meet you between classes at your locker, or for lunch, as here, on the Mountain, & if alone, as here, but in & beneath the trees, no

one else there, those hands, these hands, these foolish hands, would find &, as gently, squeeze those firm breasts &, as quickly, we, & the world, our world, were ignited, engulfed in fire, soon consumed in shaking sheets of flame... the sheets of flame... the blue sheets... shaking). My body would fit so perfectly against yours... I would bend, my hand moving up under that brilliant flaxen hair, moving it gently to the side, & would lean to kiss you there, where the streak of fuzzy down tapered to a nothingness, a perfect, outrageous, erotic nakedness exposed above the simple cotton collar, & I'd want to bundle you up against the world, all of you, could not believe that every man was not moved by you as I was, always, even five minutes after I had come inside you, & still lay there, half hard & wanting you, all of you, more than I could ever have in a lifetime, over & over... again.

& so the heart leads the man, & he heedless of the fool he must become for it...

& so the heart leads me here to engage in this pitiful act of washed out desire... & when you rise from your reverie & close your book & hurry down the stone pathway to the street below I can see that you are some inches too short; not broad enough across the hips; not enough muscle on the calves; complexion a bit too sallow; & your face... your face... what... drawn... haggard... like it had seen too soon a lifetime

filled with desperation... though the latter could have been, could be, could well be, from the way things were for you those last months... All over, I thought, & now, still, these years between, I am driven as a hound hot to the scent of some panicked hare... & I recall, suddenly that film we saw together. Alan Arkin in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter. We stood in the rain & wept. The world was only for us. We walked barefoot that night, from Montrose, down cobbled streets & stone stairways, down to Greene Avenue & the colors of the streetlights, the neon signs melted & fused, melted & poured in streaks into the streets. Just for us. & the world was a mystery, a mystery so full of pain, just for us. & the joy. & our laughter & our dancing there in the street beneath the haloed lights announced our love, our joy to the world, & the earth, the grass, the pavement came up through the wet nakedness of our feet (& later I kissed those feet, your perfect feet, after we shared a hot bath & were snuggled together, warm & dry & safe in bed), & we wept, overfull with the joy, the tears & the rain melted & fused & ran down our faces, our necks... & I remember my tongue against your cheek & kissing your eyes & knowing that this what the sea must be like (not having yet seen her nor ridden on her back nor been there, lost, breathless inside her), the sweet salt taste & your eyes so diamond bright & full, that full, filled brightness I have never seen in another woman's eyes. Only yours. Only you, when we held each other there, so close...

& when, later that night, we lay in your narrow bed in your narrow, dark basement room, I was so deep within you & you were all, all around me, there, & your arms, your legs, those long, hard, silksmooth, golden farmgirl legs, I looked into your eyes, the eyes of a wounded animal, the most naked, unbearable communion... & I remember now, you reading me a poem of Eliot's, drawing attention to a line, a phrase: "the ecstasy of the animals", & remember, after all of these years, us, there, rocking, eyes upon eyes, unaverted, fused in the light of that single blue candle, flickering, painting the walls, the ceiling, us, with shadows of flame... Always, always, it was the most erotic act, the most intimate, like gazing upon the face of god, & you would cry out & call my name, & I you, as if we had for that suspended moment the power, the audacity to name the unnameable... & we would cry out in a commingled litany... the World Now, only for us... the World had no beginning & no end, there was only now, only us, now & forever. But there is no amen, only this fool on the hill busy dreaming, busy wishing that someone else was you, that you were there, here, that all that later came to be could somehow be undone, or, failing that, this: That once again I could touch your hand & know there is a god & angels & Love in the world, personal love, personal salvation, that there is a reason to be, to continue, to endure...

V

Étude pour une Damnée. That was it. I still have the notes: Figure (woman) on back. Genitals obscured in folds, knees drawn up, slightly left. Arms left, twisted radially, clockwise. Right arm across left breast, left arm out from body. Mouth wide open. Large. Deep. A Pieta without a Mother. A woman. Alone. Utterly abandoned. In the dust, the dirt. No Didi for any Gogo, no Pozzo, no Sisyphus, just that woman, there, broken on the rack of the human condition, cast down, out, away... It is here, at the end of these long years, when all I now dare hope for is a glimpse of your face in the crowd, or that someone will mention your name & I will know that it is yours, & all of it & you will return... it is now the realization comes, not with a wobbly glimmer, but bursting forth from within, a fullblown, all-consuming firestorm of awakening which in an instant spreads & fills the small gallery room with a new, dizzying, transforming luminescence. The old longing, so long unignited, returns, the deep, sharp ache which the incense of fall's first burning leaves kindles within me, a longing for the world as it once was, & you...

I turn & walk those few carpeted steps to a high, narrow bank of French doors looking out upon Sherbrooke Street, a framed balcony view of that ancient stage below, with all there ever

was of set & resident props to work that old, lost magic...
&, almost directly beneath, downstage right, somewhat larger
than life, that other figure, that other Rodin cast in bronze:
Jean d'Aire, Bourgeois de Calais... how many years, the
uncounted days, the seasons dropped away... That was then, &
this, you, broken in the dust, is now...

III

THE BIRD OF PARADISE

My dove, my perfect one, is only one,
the darling of her mother,
flawless to her that bore her.
The maidens saw her and called her happy;
the queens and concubines also,
and they praised her.
"Who is this that looks forth like the dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
terrible as an army with banners?"

Song of Solomon 6.9-10

I

I can see it at the window sometimes, more nebulous, less focused, a face, a shape, something floating, suggestive, a sudden flaring which as quickly fades, like an amorphous shadow blossoming suddenly, taking shape, suggesting yet evasive, hovering like an exotic bird, its feathers flickering, ephemeral tongues of fire fading in the air, neon blue, then at once the yellow of far stars, then aqua green of winter aurora... then, fading to nothing, nothing but yawning night, & it is at once gone... Still, something at the window, which waits until night, then, unannounced, launches itself from the branches of darkness to play across the bare panes of this room, pressing with the fairy touch of light itself, & we, within, so hungry for any news of the outside world, some sign, a cipher, a message from that far, undreamed of heaven signifying the continuance of some cabbalistic debate, the flaming crumbs (at least) of some far cosmic feast whose joy at finally being reaches the straining, iritic shutter of this hungering eye, this deep well... I can see it, at this window of the imagined soul... sometimes... a bright, exotic bird, hovering...

This is not the place where God hatches himself out from under the rocks every morning & flutters up into the bright branches of the trees; rather, it is an Inquisitional landscape where

assiduous inquiry into the curios & vagaries of the landscape & her inhabitants yields up occasional glimpses of a god who, when seen, assures the beholder that the universe is prudently steered by a tight fist & an iron will.

You cannot expect me to stand idly by & watch the cosmos unfold at the hands of such a mean-spirited overlord. I will fly in the face of hell to oust this imposter from his pompous throne. God must fly, in turn, up from the rocks into the treetops; He must mingle with the squirrels, the pine cones, the birds of the air. If he's hiding from me, it's a shell game which must stop. So, here I sit, reproachful, in this dendritic latticework of branches, quietly prayerful, daring whatever god there might be to love me, torch me to a crisp, crush me with the arm of gravity and particular circumstance... to be something, to do something, to shed the multifoliate cloaks of paradox, irony, self-contradiction, to at least visit, if not to stay, to desist from being this absentee landlord, a ruse worn so thin over these millennia, why we are so threadbare for want of explanation, reason, some patch of evidence that things are other than they seem. We know that hell is not below but here. Equally, we sense that heaven, not being here, cannot be elsewhere or otherwise.

Yet, no more can the squirrel plot against the sparrow than I map the uncaging of this unseen, hovering bird. It is a pure

act of faith that he is not the eagle of the thunderbolts nor the carrion bird of passion's carcass but the bright jewelled songbird of unrestrained spring.

II

My resurrection is at hand. I gather these blankets around me. The dried seed-pods of the Bodhi Tree rattle & scrape at the window. A full moon descends at the edge of the world this morning, softening the outline of the city's stone & brick & glass crown which hems in & chokes every vista of horizon. I gather the blankets, one hand clutching them about me as the other fumbles for pen, paper. The word, I pray, the Word will deliver me from the tyranny of this desert of silence.

They have brought me to this place under guard. Soon angels of the morning will greet these incredulous tenants in the lobby as they head out to church, fumbling for keys, change, a brush for the children's hair. Soon the joyous news will spill out into the streets. But the address will be mislaid, will prove to have been copied down incorrectly... Following the heart's hunger for poetry, they will search for me out in Nôtre Dame de Grace... By sunset, the Word in the street will transmute into a million false witnesses. They will all proclaim: We have seen him. He is alive. He walks amongst us again... He was seen getting off the bus at Sherbrooke & Atwater... He has been seen at McGill, in the Student Union coffee shop, reading to some undergraduates from a book of his poetry, eating with them. At first they did not recognize

him, but, over lunch, one said, it is you, it is you, isn't it... & the morning tabloids will put out an extra run for Easter Monday, & as dawn breaks red over Rougemont & Mont Ste. Hilaire & all the vast floodplain to the southeast, from every street corner the Good News will be proclaimed...

But it is all only for he who comes before, he who in the desert foreshadows, proclaims the Good News, that You are to be amongst us, that You are to be the River of Life which springs from the struck rock, that one day soon Love will break & blaze at dawn, transfiguring the Face of All Creation. All of our lives depend on this. This crumb of hope is the fragile fulcrum from which the ponderous cosmos will be moved. & yet, I fear I am no Atlas, no true son of Jupiter, to set myself to this task. Am I then become, have I not always been that bastard son, that other half-brother, Sisyphus, driven & eaten up by his own petty preoccupations, too busy despairing within himself to turn out to the world... &, if I fail as your witness, your Prophet, mad & busy at the River's edge, if I forget, if I mislay the script, if I go out & get drunk & fail to make it opening night, are you then doomed to become a soon-forgotten, tarnished icon of pop culture... Someone must be there to say, Yes, she is here amongst the living, yes, she is in the desert, awaiting her hour... To say, No, there was no body, because there was no crime, at least not of the sort which anyone who was not there could ever imagine, no

corpus, because She lives... & what if, as they did so relentlessly, so thoroughly, at the trial, I am once again pressed for proof...

All future presses in upon the present, down out of the wildness of this night, down through the wail of sirens & a small baby's crying across the courtyard, a disconsolate chorus rending the night, posing its question: What dawn will break... will cities burn, will the bodies of the dead, the dying, litter the streets... will babies tumble from a sea of blood into the cold world only to be swaddled in the tattered wrap of yesterday's obituaries... O sanctimonious Philistines, worshippers of war, pestilence & death: Keep your eye fixed upon the descent of your red star. Tomorrow, a New Dawn breaks, washing away the old order...

& of yesterday: I have, though there is no forgiveness to offer, no reconciliation possible for the living nor the dead, heard & made mine the Warrior's confession. They bombed the innocent. Death fell silent from the skies, guided by the divination of his numbers. Week upon week the fires of death rolled up the green valleys. He attended the wounded, anointed & absolved the dying of their imagined sin, commending their spirits up through wreaths of black smoke into the Hands, the Arms of the Father, praying, Forgive them, they know not what they do... & in the collusion of his

silence, facilitated the slaughter of these countless
Innocents...

III

Vostik comes to my door. With a gun. All that is past, he says, the flat chrome gun lying between his hand & his suit trousers. All of that stays in there. Locked inside. No talk. No memory. Not a word. Nothing. He fidgets with the gun, flicking the safety on & off, as though he isn't sure how it works. Understood? He doesn't wait for an answer. He knows me well enough to know that he won't get one. But I give him the eye contact. This is my victory. & if you break, if you run, they will be hot onto you. &, since you are my personal responsibility, I will take it upon myself to hunt you down like a rabid dog. There can only be one outcome to such a foolish act.

& if you speak of that time in such a way that I might not approve - & I have no doubt that you will regain your voice very soon in these new surroundings - you risk it all. Everything. What I did not succeed in accomplishing inside is quite within the realm of possibility out here. People die in the streets every day. Even in their apartments. This city is a dangerous place, full of desperate people. Stay low. Stay cool.

I look straight at him, straight into his eyes. I have to make sure he can see the hate there, the contempt, the

loathing, the defiance. He has to see that I remember. At least some of it. He has to see that I have survived. & I can see that he hates me for that, for I am out here, in the world, the ultimate reproach & proof of his failure.

IV

The blues rain down in the streets. Blue water weeping. Time tightens, closes in. No space. No air to breathe. Blue water on the blue roofs, spattering in circles upon circles colliding across the face of blue-black asphalt.

The grey clouds drive on forever, scudding low, ragged along the black horizon. I stand in the courtyard of barren trees, beneath the racing sky. I stand here, in the midst of my life. I call out for you, bound to you by the wound of these long, uncounted years, by the uncertainty, the bitterness born of loss & longing, of despair & hope conjoined... our history is the smell of the ripe, bare earth, waiting, the bare, aching, songless sky, the abandoned branches without leaf, without bird... & all there is for the emptiness is this, the foolishness of the single heart, the single voice, at prayer...

We have been here before. On this street. Along these streets, in the spring rains, your face warm, cool, in my hands, your hands on my neck, my fingers upon the soft, firm seeking of your wet lips... we turn, we drown in the overfullness of life, of grace, wet with kisses, turning in the garden's wet greening glistening in round haloes of light

beneath the soft globes of streetlight... & now, the sharp dagger of the empty years running deep, hungry, severing...

A steaming bath. A single candle. Papers on the floor. Scattered. A life, lives, reduced to figures. Signatures. Statements of property. Worth. Father. More papers. More words. Mother... Beyond the window, out across the courtyard, across the boulevard, they watch. I know the cars. The faces. They have made their presence conspicuous.

I am the mad, slavering dog whose blood & life they long to let in a generous outpouring upon the street beneath my window... They long for movement. If only I would start. Bolt for the clear sky, for tomorrow. If only, they dream aloud, chain-smoking in the drab Ford sedan...

If only, I dream. & soon. Tomorrow. Up to the roof, over, across & down the fire escape, dropping, then across the walled alley. Then a bus, a taxi, downtown. &, from there, to the lake.

I finish my preparations. All of the papers. Food. Flashlight. Sleeping bag. Backpack secured.

I pray. I sleep fitfully. I begin the litany of numbers...

I hear your voice in the hallway, faint but clear. & the perfume, yours, crushed flowers, mountain air, a field of wheat bending beneath late summer's sun, a tree in a high meadow ripe with yellow apples...

A siren wails, red in the night...

Be with me. Now...

Dawn breaks. A little juice. Another cigarette. Not today. Tomorrow. There is an ebb & flow. I sleep fitfully into late afternoon. The sun breaks low in the sky, between the driving slants of grey stratus. Branch shadows dance in a wash of pale rust along the far wall, the movement of life, of spring, awaiting its hour... is it the fire of judgment blowing in on the wind, suddenly turned west in a halo of blue sky, rolling in low, following the announcing litany of thunder, finally come in the harvest motion of its two-edged sword, to bring vengeance, to deliver justice, to lay the fields of wickedness to waste before the reaper's blade...

I am ready, I think, for this. Pen. To risk the commitment of text to paper. Ready for that act of presumption, of audacity, that you are out there. Somewhere. & my eyes look west, towards the setting sun...

I prepare myself. Ablutions. Cold water. The first waters of the world, over which the Spirit hovers. I come now to the rude, spare altar I have fashioned, here, on the floor of the other bedroom.

A single blue candle. Bible. Tobacco. A rosary, all in black... There is a river. It flows sharp, muffled, & on canyon wind comes the scent of something with no name, something green, wild, broken in the rain... I raise the broken bread of my dinner up, out, towards the orange-grey dusk, & pray: Forgive them Father, they know not what they do... & I pray: If only there were a face, a name, some place to begin...

In the morning, I rise early. Bread. Cheese. Marmalade. The dark liquor of Russian Caravan steaming in the white bowl. I eat here, on the floor, at the place of my vigil, at the altar of my longing. The last stars fade. Night has worked its miracle. The first sparrows have returned & sing with unforgivable abandon just beyond the window.

Lac des Roches. Today.

I arrive at Deux Rivières a little after noon & take a taxi directly to the marina. From there it is a short walk to the garage & boathouse. My father's car, everything is there,

just as my mother left it. & the keys, the papers, all that I need to enter this world again, tidily stored in the safety deposit box. The boat would be too much work. I swing down the canoe from the rafters & load in what I have been able to carry.

More or less, this is the lake as I remember it. The lake of my childhood. The south bay with its two islands, twin granite outcrops crowned with White Pine, Spruce, Hemlock, Birch. Fireweed. Our jagged island. & La Roche, ragged with the tilt of ancient trees. The Christiansens'. So much begins to come back. The sight of what was once familiar, the sounds, &, like a knife, the smell of lake water, beach, willow, the summer mix of outboard oil, gasoline, suntan lotion, the vague, commingled freshness of spruce & pine... The elements are kind. I cut through the light chop with a feeling of expectancy. Now, beneath this sun-drenched spring afternoon, I dare to hope that the world may yet be revealed to me in its fullness. The movement of silent, wordless prayer is upon my lips...

In the lee of the break of stone & trees the lake is a sheet of rolled glass. I near the wharf, holding in the stillness, listening. Voices come across the water from La Roche. Laughter. Children. Squeals of delight. People at play. A young woman in a bright blue & yellow swimsuit dives into the

cove, clean, long, running deep... Nothing. No one I remember. I am suddenly chilled, seized by the truth of the way things actually are. The tremor returns. Not now, I pray. Not here. Deliver me, Love, from the hands of my enemies...

When I awake, it is night. The canoe scrapes along the ascent of rock scarp near the wharf.

In the dark, my body remembers what my eyes cannot see, feeling the wetness of each anticipated stone, the gnarled, knotted shapes of exposed roots under foot, under hand. A bittersweet familiarity floods in. If anywhere can now be, this is home, even if only to be a sanctuary, refuge, a place of respite for this brief sojourn. Though I cannot see it, I know it is all there, here. This is no hallucinatory phantasm played with panoramic deftness against the walls of some spare, antiseptic, white room. It is no longer simply an act of faith that all of this was once there; more, the earth is sweet, damp proof that the world, my world, endures. The exposed nail upon which I rip open the palm of my hand is the welcome agent of that proof, the pain & saltsweet blood it brings incontrovertible assurance that I have survived, that I have at last returned.

I fumble in the dark for the main valve, open it fully, then light the globe over the kitchen table. How many years? How long? & how long since my mother died... & how are the seasons to be numbered, how can one count, remember what never was, since you stood there, at the doorway, pale in the paleness of dawn, beckoning me in a whisper to join you, clutching, wrapt about in that yellow beach towel...

V

I cannot see where I am going. I lean into the night, I follow along the path of memory, of my heart's yearning...

You descend through the stilled dawn air, plunging clean into the rolled-glass water. The pale soles of your feet disappear as the lake swallows you clean, whole. A good minute later you surface, half way across the narrow strait separating the islands. You dream, & live each morning the dream of staying under & making it all the way across, of emerging along the shallow rock shoal extending out from the far wharf. It is possible, you say to me, it is possible, as you gulp down cool, damp air. We stand shivering in the pale light. Ferocity. This is what I see burning in the morning blueness of your eyes. The way you stand, the way you breathe, the way you love, the way you play a sonata... Race you, you scream, as we run up the rude path to where we cache our towels...

We sprint the stretch of wooden stairs to the side deck, arriving at the rail in a dead heat. We sit for a moment, wordless, at the deck's lip. Wet & cool, you lean your head into my heaving chest. The world begins anew each morning, I think, opening like a fresh, rare blossom. Only for us to seek her out... My hand slips beneath the top step, searching for the cup hook, & there, suspended, the spare key. We keep

our part of the agreement; several days a week we visit, watering plants, sweeping & dusting as necessary. In return, we gain entrance to a private, secret, enclosed world which none but we can enter.

Use my room, Cara said after we had brokered the deal with her parents. The energy of the cottage, the island, the lake itself, I swear, is focussed exactly there. Go, go when the moon is full. Be there at summer solstice; at dawn, sleep with your heads at the foot of the bed. When there is a thunderstorm, sit on the carpet, with your backs against the bed. Look out towards Mont des Aigles. Watch the heavens. Feel the earth. Feel the earth move.

I would never see Cara again.

Without variance, you would turn away from me, untying the lace strap of your bikini top, pulling it away, off your shoulders; then, reaching down, you would loosen the side straps, then drop & step away from the silksheer bottom... & I, by then, was always stripped & hard &, like you, tanned & pale, shivering in a welter of goosebumps. You would make that little scream of delight & abandon as we dove, together, beneath the blue sea of the comforter. Soon the cool smell of the lake, the puckered pink tightness of nipples, of scrotum, gave way to that of a complex, mingled earthiness. Wetness.

I remember wetness. You. Me. Tears. Saliva. Semen. Juice. The taste of you, all of you, the wetness, like a flood, breaking in my mouth...

More pounding hearts. More gasping for air. & the hardness, the tightness, the straining, now warm flesh forgetting now the cold embrace of the lake; naked, flushed, radiant, you would move with ease about the kitchen, making bawdy, tasteful jokes about my nakedness... & from our secret cache of food -- bread, peanut butter, apples, apricot jam, granola -- fashion a meal to complete & round out the gift of love's giving. &, often enough, as the sun burned through the undifferentiated grey world of mist, we would begin, again, to move, growing hard, wet, tight, soft, yielding, your mouth moving wet, seeking along my neck, along the ridge of collarbone, down, seeking...

We will return here, every year, to this lake. Promise me, you would say each morning, on Christiansens' dock. Your blue-grey eyes would look up, imploringly, almost desperate, into mine. Promise me. Then we would plunge into the cove & cut cleanly back to Fireweed.

What drove you so, to be first, longest, best, what impetus of passion or love, through the still water... when you played piano, that first time at Fireweed, that is when my mother

fell in love with you, that single, rare night. Liebestraum. Claire de Lune. Moonlight Sonata. All of her favourites. & you played tirelessly, for hours on end... & when my father came, those few times he managed to get away & fly in for at least part of a weekend, he fell beneath that same spell when you played Scott Joplin, Cole Porter, the Broadway standards... & we would sing... & during & after the inevitable game of bridge, pour & drink broad, shallow glasses of single malt: Glenmorangie. Milton Duff. & the beer & cigarettes. O'Keefe: Cold, with a generous head. Poured full into the throat of a tall, chilled glass. & Player's Navy Cut. A rich, lingering smoke which would stratify like early morning mist in the still air pockets of the living room. No filter. &, late at night, up the path & into the high, virgin stand of white pine, hemlock, & thick-bodied spruce, some good grass Cara had stashed away for us. & a few cans of cold beer, & a heel of bread & some grueyre cheese... & the stars would blaze in the ink-black sky, & the tall forest would creak & groan & the air would be overfull with the perfume & incense of resin & pine needles & the lingering smoke of a forestfire burning beyond the next ridge... & we would dream aloud in the night, dream about what the world would be for us, dream all the foolish, mindless dreams of innocent love, of innocent lovers, high on the promise which Tomorrow's god always whispers into the ears of the young, the innocent, &

especially, those who are caught in the hopeless crush of
love...

VI

She died. It was my mother. The last time. The ambulance. Hurling. & then, the other one. But that was another time... lost... Still, something of death, dry leaves before this late spring wind... I look across to La Roche. Massive grey rock, tall virgin spruce, hemlock... The lake is busy today, furrowed into endless, whitecapped ranges rolling off down the lake towards the South Beach. Winds strong from the northwest. Always with it crisp mornings. Deep blue sky. Deep blue water. Far beaches a stone's throw away...

I walk the island. Those twenty minutes. Endless. & again. & over... something there, beneath the rubble, something, someone... the rock point, where we would launch out, across, to your place... you were laughing. Moonlight, flat on still water... the first time I saw you naked. Pulled it down, standing in the shallow pool of light, one piece, standing away from me in the pale yellow wash, the pale edge of shadow defining the edges of you. The high, plump curve of your breast. The pucker of nipple. The rounded slope of calf. & hair, down, between shoulder blades, dark in the light. & below, the flare of hips... the fire, at first gentle, coaxing, builds...

& the years after, in a tumble... that bedroom, across the water... your room... thin soft bars of propane light lie across the narrow channel... someone moves behind the window... soft light shimmering along the endless backs of shallow waves, soft, coming through the trees... that night... your room... it was there, over there, across the water, in this same moonlight, that summer before university, that wondrous August which finally spilled over into September & beyond... It was you, wasn't it, you...

& I dream of you, there, at the window, framed by the darkness. & suddenly the cottage bursts into full flame... you reach out to me from a core of contracting white light... you cry out... it is lost in the dry crackle & susurrus of the firestorm... the overhanging trees catch & soon the whole island is engulfed in a single, high wall of flame... the intense heat jars me awake. Cold sweat. The smell of something, like human hair, burning...

I light the kitchen lamp & make tea. The house is filled with moving shadow, the past... ghosts. The wind catches in the trees. Voices. Voices assailing... the shaking is getting worse, I can't hold my cup... something batters against the side wall. Maybe the branch of that old spruce, finally come loose...

Monday of Labour Day Weekend we clean & close up for the summer. I leave some minutes behind you. After twenty minutes I have still not caught up. I push the car to its limit on the twisting road. I see the wall of flame erupt in a field outside St. Felix, & am so intent on catching you that I drive by... not sure what it is... someone will see... lots of cars on the road... a beacon for miles... & you there, on the road ahead, somewhere... & on, to Montreal, to Aylmer Street, to that crooked, tilting house, behind...

...music, your love is music, those hands... Liebestraum... a surgeon's hands, moving across the face... a face... & these, mine... life from the clay... angels from stone... my hand on your face, moving along your cheek... that night, that sweetest of nights, & then, swimming back, to make love in my bed, on this, our other island...

& the wall of flame... always, standing there, frozen, & the voice screaming out my name, out across the long, lost years... standing there at the tall, narrow window overlooking that garden directly below, in its wild, luxuriant tangle... standing, alone, looking out, when the phone call comes...

VII

I find some fragments on the top shelf in my closet. The rest I have gotten down from memory, all transcribed on the back of old McInnis Lumber stationery, using my mother's ancient Remington. I have rooted out the overlaps, though glaring inconsistencies remain. How can it be otherwise? But there is still something missing, a great black hole which sucks the meaning of everything else in...

What I do not have is what is essential. The key. & so, I sit. Here, on the front deck, looking down the lake, towards the low rise of mountains beyond, & wait.

I make mobiles from the assortment of detritus that washes up on the rock, & bits of branch, pine cones, broken crockery, anything this little island world provides, all suspended in a cumulative, evolving balance from lengths of fishing line, thread, twine. But always, there is something missing, an element necessary to achieve stasis between all the disparate elements, to make them whole, one...

Every morning at sunrise I paddle that hour of water to the South Beach. I am drawn there by history, memory, by my own sense of incompleteness. But it can only give me what it is, its rock & sand & stands of birch & shore pine, the flowers &

all the rest... & the vague scars, the outlines of where things once were, events which left a mark in their passing. A piece of yellow rope where once we secured a tarp to shelter us during a storm. The outline of the fire pit beneath the sand. I dig with a forked stick - perhaps for roasting hot dogs, maybe a stick I fashioned myself one night, for us - & turn up an oblong stone about the size & shape of an egg. Perfect. A small, smooth, bloodred stone... the words come back... Pick up a stone from that place along the path & bring it to me, the Master had said. Pick up a stone... the words roll over & over in my mouth, my mind, as I turn the stone in my hand...

& that night, another dream, whose content has slipped away by morning. But, upon awakening, I can see clearly where I have to go. To the old tree house. & there, in my childhood hiding place, hidden in the false floor, the missing manuscript.

I read it all up there in the wind, devouring it in a sitting before breakfast. & the time to eat comes & goes. & lunch. & dinner. The light fades. Darkness comes. I awaken & struggle down the rickety ladder with the papers, folded in a shoe box.

I cannot name the feelings, the images which run through me. I know only that I must leave. I pack & make it to the boat house by midnight. During the weeks here, I have licensed & serviced the car, in anticipation of this moment. All is ready.

I have a vague destination. West. You. I take solace in the raw power of the twelve cylinder engine as it revs towards her red line. In all of this vagueness there is a paradoxical urgency, to make sense of my life, to find you, to finally know that so much of what is hinted at in these surviving fragments simply cannot be...

VIII

The cool, green, radium glow of the dashboard lights bathes the inside of the car with a sickly luminosity, my hands, arms, my face glowing from within, a pale, cold fire sweeping in icy shudders through me, consuming, in its half-life logic, all that it touches with its sharp, inner, unseen edge. The odometer ticks away its tenths, its miles, its hundreds, taking, in its dumb, wheeling, mechanical silence, the measure of her pilot, the dumb, blind, unimpeachable arbiter of my fate, until I am whittled away to a mote, a speck floating amorphously in the mucous of my own eye... & as I rocket through the night I am pilot of this, these wheels riding purblind Fortune, hurtling headlong into, through the heart of night, beyond, to something deeper, some Thing which lurks behind the gauzy stage prop veil of blank stars & freewheeling galaxies out there beyond the ink-black hills above Lake Superior... behind, beyond, crouching, waiting... waiting to be delivered at that moment of tragic illumination by the rusted deus ex machina of Eros' rented playhouse.

In the mirror I see a man, a man watching me watching him watching the road, & feel the onset of tipping vertigo, at the mirror's edge, then into, deep into the mirror, at the lip of a deep well, that stone-lipped well, tottering, entering free-fall...

& their dials & lights send me messages: The speedometer's capricious needle insists on edging itself, me, us, this unsure composite of steel, gasoline, smoke, & ineffable longing, out beyond this enclosed world, this hurtling sarcophagus bathed in its cadaverous glow, out into an empty, featureless, futureless void, where all things in their agony promise, at least, to cease. The needle is a passionate barometer, a hypodermic spike of red fear wavering in a shallow green sea, warning at every straightaway of the impending cataclysm... & I am one with the machine, the driver & the driven welded, fused into a single unit, cage & caged one... there is no point at which my will stops, no extension of my desire which does not completely permeate this machine, this composite organism of longing... &, conversely, there is nothing of any power I have left to will that I have not given over, so that, now, now, her fierce hum & whine, the fixing, ambulatory hypnosis have set in, rod with bone, blood with gasoline, cigarette smoke with the faint, rubbery smell of seeping, burning oil... the lights' high beams are the blank fury of my eyes riveted in their narrow horizon along this tortuous, unwinding way, the engine in its urgings answering, echoing, becoming mine in the fire of her hearts aflame with the anonymous yearning for all that once was & may never come to be.

Now.

There is nothing of what I have left of my life that I have not signed away. My future is scribbled there, an indelible, illegible, indecipherable cryptogram. My life is signed & sealed, & soon enough will be delivered, all along this taut, dotted line, stretching out from the agonistic collapsing of uncounted hours, leading me inexorably towards that awaiting, reddening dawn of which I cannot yet begin to dream.

I glow in the phosphorescent green light, like some mad Frankenstein in his dull fury searching for his bride, like some man struggling to free himself from the stone clutches of entombment... & my hair is green-black with oily licks of fire, my eyes a pale, opaque green marble set with onyx-black cores.

& I wait for this man (in my thin, quicksilver mirror) to speak, to say something, to at least murmur some cryptic message from the land of the dead... mile after mile, he offers only his flawless parody of my unrelenting anguish, eyes on cue fixed to mine, then, with as much precision, away... running his pale, long-fingered, luminescent hand (& see it trembling slightly, even in this light) through the green-edged waves of his firestruck hair.

& at some point far into the night, he emerges from his shallow window; blossoming out into the void, disembodied, he

hovers in front of the windshield, over the hood of the car, watching, waiting, floating there, as mile collapses upon mile, a litany of numbers, the odometer's whorl obediently naming, by miles & tenths, all the unnamed, unnameable places & filing them away, lost, irretrievable, forever... he is the repository of all that I fear might come to be, the first fulfilment of some unspeakable promise or prophesy, the uttered word of some small god so late unleashed, a small, black, insidious thing which the fires of This have hatched, an insatiable, dangerous, gun-wielding god who desires only to feed upon me, to strip these bones clean... to leave me, robbed, beaten, stripped, left to drown in the vomit-filled ditch of my own horror... he offers simply & only his flawless parody of my anguish... running his hand through that hair, green-black with oily licks of flame, his eyes a pale, opaque green as he hovers, a hologram in the windshield, his square skull ringed in tendrils of smoke, the lit cigarette glowing cherry green, the inhaled smoke now blowing out in sharply defined columns, as from the horrible green mask of a living, breathing dragon...

I lean into the windshield but cannot break the code of his muffled somniloquence. Strained to cracking by the unaccustomed violence of our speed, the car shudders in an akinesic spasm. He speaks at first vaguely, rambling in indecipherable tongues, his face now ablaze with the ominous

flickerings of the oil warning light... the words spill through & coalesce in clots of disembodied meaning... he means to speak... he speaks of a future... of a future consumed in fire & drowned in blood...

& over the miles, embedded vaguely in the arrhythmic torpor of unnamed days, stretching, binding horizon to generic horizon, he brings me only this, this one image: The Bride of his yearning, lying, all in white (perhaps it is a winding-sheet, a cerement in white), dumbly clutching a dull bouquet of saprophytic flowers, Indian Pipe & Coral Root, there, on that altar of stone, that coroner's slab, that cold bed, being raised in consecration as a sacrifice to the savage rape & rending of some unspeakable heaven's thunderbolts... the image of disconsolate passion run its course through the torch-lit, high-walled streets of unrelenting chaos, up the mountain's side to that place, where it was all yet to be, to Golgotha, the Place of the Skulls.

IV

MASS DURING TIME OF WAR

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him -- you and I. All of us here are murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while? ... What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe the blood off us? ..." Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment.

from: Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft

Nietzsche

I

The Postcard:

Postmark: June 23, 1969
Wright's Bridge, B.C.

Hi, Ingie! Hope all is well with you. Did you get thru all yer exams OK? They're a bitch, as I recall. I'm OK. Let everybody know. I had to do this. Took the bus as far as Winnipeg, then stayed with the Schillers in Winnipeg for a few days (to get myself together), then got a lift with a girlfriend from McGill heading to Van. Island. Was going to go to Wreck Beach (that's where it's happening!), but ended up here, about a day short - another long story (see postmark). Hot (100*+), dry, dusty. Lotsa sun. Cara says Will's on the way. Mixed feelings, to say the least. Working at a café (The Oasis, Bob & Edna's) in town. Not sure about school next year. I need a piano!! God, it's hot! Staying at Acacia Grove Motel (can write me c/o). Spartan but restful. No a/c except at the bar. I'll send a phone # in a week or so. Love to all, yer Sis. P.S. Great hiking trails, cactus, bighorn sheep. & rattlesnakes! (see other side). You'd love it. P.P.S. Howja like the size of this card?? P.P.P.S. I asked Cara to get this to you next time she was out your way (without M & D knowing). P.P.P.P.S. Guess you get stuck with the haying this year! C'est la vie. Brigitte can help. Hugs for Mona & Ettie XOXOXOXOX

II

It's a large, rectangular, adobe-coloured building, with no redeeming architectural features except for the squared timbers running along & defining peripheral edges & framing the main entrance. From the west side of the river it appears to grow straight up out of the precipitous bank of eroded benchland; its future, day to day, would seem to depend entirely on the vagaries of the water thundering below. A sign swings out over the street, suspended by a thick iron bar, announcing to the weary traveller that he has, indeed, at last, reached the welcoming doors & sagging beds of The Heartland Hotel. Of finely wrought, hammered brass, it speaks of an age of greater prosperity, now lost to all but the memories of one or two of The Bridge's oldest residents.

You take my hand & lead me through the smoke & noise to the far corner, behind the pool table. You introduce me to Clifford, Leonard & Stan. Hiya, Stan says with a broad, friendly grin, pushing back his broad-brimmed felt hat. You the sculptor fella? I always wanted to buy a sculptor a drink. Here, Billy, beers for these two dusty characters.

I can't help but like him instantly. & you, relaxed, speaking easily, readily, indistinguishable from the locals. These few weeks have worked a miracle of sorts, I think. Except for us,

it is all locals here. One hotel, with its one bar, one pool table. This town must have seen better days, this bar looks like it could seat half the town.

Yeah, this guy, Noah Wright, built a bridge across the river here, made it a toll bridge, what, seventy, eighty years ago, Tom explains. Must be more. Gold rush. Sure buggered things up for us. Hey, look, here's Lonnie... Tom stretches an arm out towards the far door.

& in he steps, taking up most of the door frame, backlit by the late afternoon sunlight flooding in behind him, like a floodlight piercing the cool darkness of the room. The door swings shut behind him. He squints, scanning the room, then spots our table. He waves. I'll get there, he shouts over the music.

He knows everyone. Like the consummate politician, he works his way across to us, stopping to talk at every table. There is a lot of loud talk, laughter & backslapping. Tom leans over. He's been away. Nam. Decorated like a Christmas tree. Just got back coupla weeks ago. He's real touchy about all that stuff.

By the time he makes it to our table, he has two beers in each hand. Generous people, except for those goddam Shuswap, he

jokes, looking at Tom & his brothers. & they get all the taxpayers' money.

Tom rises from his chair & slaps his hand on the near rail of the massive billiard table. I'm up next. How's about a game, Lonnie. Just you & me. The usual stakes. He leans over again. We always play for the town. At least, some part of it. He owns a good half of what's built on it. &, as this, all of this, is the land of my people, as their chief I have standing orders from our elders to win the rest away from him, bit by piece. Last time, I won the motel, but he came back & told me he could't find the deed. I told him it was in the apple box under his bed. The next week he tells me his mother had deeded it over to Rosie, & he'd forgot. So, all I get's the runaround. Except when he wins. When that happens I give him the phone number for Indian Affairs. They seem to think they're runnin things for us. They laugh. C'mon, half-breed, lets see if they shoot a better brand of pool on the other side of the lake.

Lonnie nods. O.K.

Billy comes out from behind the bar & pulls the plug on the jukebox.

This is serious stuff, Lonnie says. Hand me my cue, Billy.
He turns to us & speaks in a low voice: We like a quiet game.
He turns, perfectly placed to address the entire room. All
eyes are upon him. There is absolute silence.

He begins:

The only absolutely certain & predictable aspects of the game are the laws of nature, of physics, the inherent qualities, the characteristics of matter, energy, time, space, & all the other esoterica known only to the post-quantum physicists. Things - the ball, the table, imported energy - will act as they always do, in a totally predictable way. To the extent that I am able to control my self as a variable, that too is a constant. The degree to which I cannot we may ascribe the title or value of coefficient of human or player variability. A much higher level of variability enters the game with the introduction of the second player, so high that this variable in description may be termed the chaos element.

Here he gestures with outstretched arm, palm upward, the index finger extended, pointing, like a man identifying with measured compassion a criminal in a police lineup, in the general direction of where Tom is half standing, half leaning, smoking, grinning, drinking, propped in his own inimitable, relaxed way, against the selection keys of the Wurlitzer.

The successful player, then, must be master of his self and, as well, a master reader of both the closer, more predictable, & the more complex, distanced presence of chaos in the larger

mix. He half bows his head & looks at Tom with uptilted eyes, as though peering over the rim of a pair of glasses.

Tom has broken, a tight, light, nudging open, moving only a few balls from the back edge of the triangle.

We do what we can, Lonnie says, standing & grasping his cue. Failing that, we do what we must.

Then, before he positions himself for his shot, &, turning his back to the table, he leans over &, backlit & haloed in a thick wreath of smoke, whispers to us, ostensibly to us alone, in that grabbing, electric stage whisper of his, for all to hear: &, conversely, I study to be the meanest, most unpredictable little piece of chaos that ever entered that other person's life.

All through the game I study him, making mental notes. I swear it had to be rehearsed, I say later, as we dig into plates of spaghetti left over from the luncheon special at The Oasis. Edna & Bill have adopted me, you say, only half joking. They do take good care of me. & no, he is like this, he does this all the time. It's like he has a script for every occasion. He takes his cue, & he's off. Isn't he something?

I've been starting to write things down since I left Aylmer Street, I explain as I take my notebook out of my backpack. Before that, actually. A bit of what's happening, a pinch of penseés, everything including the kitchen sink. It was to be a surprise. It still will be. I'll wait until you've forgotten all about it, then, voila, out of nowhere, there it will be, this dogeared tome, ready for you to devour & share with your grandchildren. Our grandchildren. I know, I know, I won't start in on that now. It's meant to be a letter to you, but you can't read it until I am done. How's about when our first grandchild is born? It's happy & sad, a celebration of your life, mine, ours together, my way of trying to make sense of all this as it unravels. So, tonight & most of our nights ahead, I want to find, to make some time to simply sit & write. I'm beginning to find the experience in some ways much like sculpting. It's like imagining I am working on this colossal piece, except that every morning when I get up, it

has moved. More like trying to mold & shape sifting sands than rock.

Please don't tease me. If you let me read it, I'll really give you something to write about. So, when?

When what? When do you really give me something to write about? But you already do! When this little adventure is over, my love, & we settle into our little cottage by the sea, you will get your own personal, autographed copy, from a press run of one. Fair enough?

OK, lover boy, come over here, & later you can write this into your little love letter...

& so, later, as you head off for the night shift at The Oasis, I begin. When I have done writing the pages above, I add what is, in terms of the style of my journal, an unusual addendum titled Lonnie: Notes on a First Encounter :

As the talk swirls around, I sit back, studying him, fascinated. The power of his presence is unnerving. His pale blue eyes have the habit of fixing steadfastly on whatever they behold. His movements seem to come out of a long history in the theatre, where personae are tried on like winter

overcoats, fine linen suits, &, as readily, discarded after the curtain's fall.

His face is like fine, chiselled stone, like the earth itself had come to life & chosen to speak out in our midst. & his hands, at times quick as birds, then clenching into solid squares of rock, punctuate the animations of his stories with a whole movement, a language of their own.

He has for this encounter clothed himself in the garb & manner of much that I have come to love: A man of the world, of learning, of style, beauty, an eloquent teller of stories (somewhat in the tradition, I will later piece together, of Grey Elk), a seductive, charismatic quality about him, in short, a Presence, a man to be reckoned with, & in whose presence we both, when we compare notes later, can only feel we bask.

There is a fine solidness to him, a manly grace to his movements. He is so much larger than life, it's like being on a movie set & watching the star, hoping, yet hardly daring to believe that he might walk over to our table & speak. & this mixed with a fear that, if he does, we will have no script, no lines to speak. The star, no longer discarnate but now become flesh, here in our midst. Like Gary Cooper, he's the kind of tall that casts a long shadow at High Noon. Yes, so much

larger, like the universe itself wasn't big enough for himself & some other as yet undefined player, & that someone would either have to leave town or it would all have to be played out on Main Street.

& you & I agree later that we might be willing to follow this man to the ends of the earth, if he would only say the Word.

He speaks with a certain studied elegance. His inflectional repetitions of phrases or of whole sentences separated by dramatic pauses... what is it... something... that deliberative delivery which draws, sucks the listener's attention into that vacuum of silence created by those lengthening, tottering stops in the flow of his speech. & soft socratics, soft hypotheses strung like mousetraps, houses of cards, houses of sand: Given, supposing, what if... Carnegie. That great, generic American salesman's pitch, selling the broad universe & all of creation's wares contained therein, a Willy Loman who this time is making it because he is on the make, a pocket full of Brooklyn Bridges & a soft script suitable for all occasions. & that Grey Elk line, a hybrid born of the collision of genetic & cultural materials, a north of 49 offshoot of the American Dream...

All of a sudden, I'm like a ranch dog dancing 'round a rattler, except I'm not sure who's cast in which role. My

image is unwaveringly fixed in his pale blue eyes. Dammit, you have to believe him. You have to believe in him. Almost, perhaps fully, the induction of trance. All this in retrospect, pieced together now, hours later. The curtain is up. The Show is on.

Suspension of disbelief! Now, at this point, I am in trouble. The world is born anew. All things become again possible. & I dance, not because I choose, but because I must. It's like standing barefoot out there in the rock & sagebrush oven of mid-day, when, as today, it nudges the 40 degree mark. Everything is so close, there is no room for stillness. All potential for that is, in the heat, squeezed out. Bare flesh on hot rock: Dance! Where is the sky above you, where is the world that was earlier this morning so predictably, so solidly beneath your feet? Everything beneath your poor, sandblasted feet & everything above & about your poor, skinny, sunburnt body is up for grabs. Another sky behind this morning's sky emerges & eclipses all that has been. The old order is swept away.

With the slow whirling time melts, recedes into the generalized backdrop of my existence. The things which would normally pull at me & focus my attention are pushed to the edges, become peripheral trivia. There is a rhythm here, an odd cadence which builds, as we drink more beer & bodies swim

& waver in the mix of smoke & music & the background white
noise of the ancient air conditioner.

III

They say Jesus was buried in a seamless shroud. I like that image. It's an image for the universe, for all of creation. Not the shroud part, but about it being seamless. I stand on this bridge & I am, with you, wrapt about in whole cloth, a wrap of sky & stone & water, & pale washes of moonlight & the scent of broken sage & cool rain. & you. & soon we will dance, soon closer, soon we will dance ourselves whole, into wholeness, wrapt, seamless, inside a deeper, softer, embracing night, our night within this other, vaster, vaulted night which hangs above & rushes below here, this, us.

The Bridge.

IV

They locked me away in Nam, in one of those little sweat boxes. For three days. First they dragged me in front of this tough little head Charlie. They beat the shit out of me, but I wouldn't break, wouldn't renounce the forces of Yankee Imperialism. So they put me away. I almost suffocated. No light, no air. I couldn't move. & hot, it was pure hell. But then, that third day, Bobby broke through their web of piano wire & sentries... I could hear that manic rooster crowing his guts out, then a bit of silence, then I could hear snipping, like cutters through thick gauge wire, & that's what it was, Bobby, cutting me loose. What a sight! As the front of the box swung open, there he was, my deliverance, & the moon, I'll never forget, just at the edge of the palms behind, setting, just behind him, like it was floating on a shiny sea of silvergreen waves... I had hated his guts as much as he had dared to love me all those months before. I was moved. What could I do? We went off & down the river, two days, & before we had made base something profound had happened between us...

Funny what life deals you... He takes a sip of his beer & lights up another cigarette. You know, it's all shit, & one of these nights I'm going to give you, both of you, a guided tour.

It's not a gaze. Too soft, but steady, unblinking. That way he has of fixing things, people, with those eyes.

Chill. Like the whole, huge room has just been hit with a wave of liquid nitrogen. Blue smoke hangs in the air.

How do I know what you are thinking? How can I? You stare at the white-orange end of your cigarette. I watch the baroque variations of rising smoke, the twisting, wavering tendrils, intertwined, dissipating... & then search for the sad blueness there, of your eyes, which sense & move to meet mine. There is something here. Presence. Can we not speak? Can we not move? Is this last riddle, this black little koan not enough to move us to action? Does fortune, blind Fortune, deal with Ophelia? & who will play your Hamlet? Lonnie? Me? Or is it Didi & Gogo again this time? Or, is it to be Lucky & Pozzo? & who, then, to play?

Like a click, a tumbler in a lock falling into place, there is a sudden dislocation of time, of space. I am thrown back into my childhood. Helplessness. Won't somebody help me, I remember praying. I am there, at the altar railing, it's Easter & I'm there, to the right of Father Emory, holding the paten, (o God why did it have to be Father Emory) & then, out of nowhere, it happens, Eva Findlay is there, kneeling & (o God why did it have to be Eva) pure late childhood lust shoots

up through me like I had been hit with a syringe of speed... & when Father Emory fumbles, or, perhaps it is that Eva is engulfed by that same rapturous swell of animal chemistry... whatever, the host falls, slides off the tilted paten, & then, there it is, on the carpet, small & white & round & reproachful in a flat, endless sea of crimson carpet.

Earlier that year, Miss McManus had told us about how Hitler had gone to receive communion, then spit out the host, the sacred body of Christ, out on the floor of the church. That seemed the important piece of history at the time. Not about the holocaust, the hell on earth he unleashed over those later years. & there I was, all alone. Utterly abandoned. O my God, why hast thou forsaken me, I prayed over & over... The church would have to be stripped bare (like it was over Holy Saturday, the day before, but more so, everything would have to go), & in a sense, me with the rest of it. The absolute shame that clung to me. Walking to school the next day, beneath silent, accusing, taunting eyes, the eyes of the village... bad news indeed travelled fast, I could see it in their faces, as much as I dared to look up at anyone, they knew, & I felt so alone, abandoned even by my family... like I was walking naked down those familiar streets to St. Lawrence Academy & people, for the first time & finally, saw me as I really was, filthy, twisted, a boy whose history of sin was written in blazing letters across his pale, naked

chest: Here is the boy who runs naked in the woods, hard & green & as full of sap as a willow whistle... God only knows what he does sprawled amongst the flowers... & what's worse, hides it from the world, from Father Emory in the confessional, tries, even, to hide his Sin from God our Father Himself. Indeed, there was, after this, no place to hide in The Garden. The Garden itself had disappeared. Me & Hitler. Awash in a chilling sea of absolute zero which rose to claim & drown me.

I prayed that my father would decide to move to another town, that my history, my deep, shameful, public secret would be mercifully left behind. We moved. To the city. A huge house, & so much money, so quickly... & from then on, for so long, so much of my life, our lives, went so wrong that I came soon enough to see that God did indeed answer our prayers & that my great aunt Ida was right: Be careful what you ask for, you just might get it.

& back here, at the bar, surfacing, feeling like I'm gasping for air, all I can feel is the suppressed hatred for Father Emory now unleashed. Lonnie's story has cracked something wide open in me. He does this over & over. With both of us, as though he knows exactly what to say & do, & just when, to jar us awake, to make us face & deal with something buried there, beneath the veneer of our lives.

The stuffed, glass-eyed animals, a mountain goat, a wolverine, a lynx, a coyote, gaze dispassionately down at me from the spokes of the rafters, as if from the high banks of a river, looking down at my head bobbing in the turbulence as I am swept downstream. Bells. The body of Christ. Corpus Christi. The body of Christ rings with a hollow, muffled tone, like the time I had that high fever with the measles which left me deaf in my right ear... I am pushed away from the host as I bend to rescue it, too late... always, too late... am I so stupid that I would heap one blasphemy upon another, to reach out & touch with my hand the consecrated host, the Body of Christ, lying there, mute, in its dumb mystery... & I don't know why, I don't know why, I'm sorry, so sorry... I look up, I dare to look up at Him, there, nailed to the cross, transfixed against the blue sky of the back wall, floating high above the altar, looking down at me, as always, with that same immutable, inscrutable gaze. It's a mystery, they keep telling me. I have learned it. I know all of the questions. & their answers.

& now, time for my own...

V

But there come to us things in our lives which, if we do not confront & wrestle with them with complete, selfless giving, will devour us utterly, without constraint or mercy.

This is how he begins, stretching his loose, muscular frame, running his cupped hands over golden hair which lies flat against the contours of his skull, pulled back & tied in place by a piece of braided rawhide. Blue t-shirt. Blue jeans. Blue eyes. Like yours. Teutonic. The blue-eyed warrior. Square face. Square jaw. Square frame. Square hands. What children he might have had, you say to me later, in our room, what gifts to the world. & what woman would not have had him... Had him, I reply, & you say, don't you see, you don't understand, do you, about the path, his path. The time for all of that is over now. There is no future. His future is with us, in these few remaining days. Now. Everything he says, every little thing that he does is for us, a gift, a sacred trust. Can't you sense the absolute power in the presence of this man, have you ever met another like him... Yes. No. That's what scares me so. But didn't you hear what he was saying through all of it today: Let go, trust, lean out into the wind, towards the sun, away from the darkness...

Silence. Deepening silence. He turns to you with that look of annunciation. Something is about to be shared, revealed.

You are sitting there, comfortable in that red cotton shirt, the sleeves rolled up, businesslike, relaxed, a hand-rolled cigarette between your deeply tanned fingers. & that red bandana he gave you, wrapped in a flat coil about your head. The passage of summer here has marked you, I think. You wear the wind in your hair, the sun on your skin, &, in your stillness, the motion of this mighty river, in your face the mending of unspeakable sorrow & a quietly burgeoning peace...

More often than not, it begins like this, evolving out of the silence. It is at about this time, with the late afternoon sun cutting across the riverbottom at a sharp slant, that the canyon wind begins to build, making it difficult, especially for us who are new to all of this, to get out enough line to lay a fly out over feeding fish. We have stashed our rods in the crook of a beach alder & have settled in for our afternoon tea ritual, the fire centered in a patch of sand amongst the rocks. He is very much master of this river & shares what he knows with a rare generosity. It only seems natural, you comment later that evening, that he should preside over the tea ceremony, in his hands an absorbing, eclectic mix of Zen and traditional native practices. The tea carefully poured - mindfully, he would say, pouring steady as a rock - he begins.

I spent all of my off time with some Buddhist monks when I was up on the Cambodian border last July. Hotter than hell down in the valley, in every way imaginable. I'd go up to their monastery, in the hills. I had to get away. It was interesting at first, almost seductive. Not a lot happened, although I could feel something building, as though this time of relative quiet, of respite, focussed all the garbage, the horror of what was really going on, just over the border, channeled it in such a way that something had to give. They knew what was happening. & they knew I was there, right in the middle of things. Then, one day, this tough, wizened, & above all very gentle old monk, Hung Nguyen, revered as a saint of sorts in that region, cracked me wide open like a ripe walnut. He greeted me with his arms extended, the palms of his hands turned upwards. I felt very much at home, made welcome in the manner of my grandfather's people, my people, the Shuswap. That afternoon, the bottom fell out of everything. There, sitting crosslegged & drinking tea, much in the same fashion as we are doing today, he related a koan. Three monks who sat closest to him held small, smooth red stones in their hands, which they had extracted from pouches tied at their waists. I learned later that he was known by his disciples as the master with one koan. Also, that those who knew him well lovingly, even laughingly, called him the Nutcracker. That one koan, they said, in the master's hand, could crack the hardest case.

Why & how this transformation was worked we will touch upon later. The koan itself may render such questions irrelevant. A holy man can move mountains. When the time arrives for the posing of Hung Nguyen's koan, it will be shared with you. It can only be shared in times of extreme crisis, like that one particular bowl of rice which is, unbeknownst to the giver, marked for a starving man. & in the giving, confers sainthood on both. But there is something which I would like to share. You will understand why, I think, when I am done. When the nut cracked, this is what spilled out.

I am in a high meadow & there, at the mouth of the notch, there, blocking the only path upward, the only way to gain the last few minutes to the summit, are two cougars. One, her face a drenched mask of blood, chews & pulls at the throat of a young, spikehorn deer, life spilling from his eyes, still twitching. The other, a few feet from her, watches me. One lion, the one whose face, head & flanks are streaked & spattered with blood, is white. The other, the one with the coal-red eyes, is panther black. Though they are beside one another, they do not touch, except for their tails, which are entwined. Through the long afternoon I watch them, frozen in fear, for the pathway back & down is steep, narrow & treacherous. & I know, from what my grandfather has told me, that I must go on. This is the place I remember him describing to me as a child, though it was full summer, &

nowhere near this mountain. You will see what no man has ever seen before. Nor will ever see again. You will know when the moment has come, he told me in his slow, gravelly voice. It is especially then that the valley, the river will call to you in her sweet voice, beckoning, promising. You will know when that time has come. You must put the valley & her river far away from you. It is then, above all, that you must wait.

There is, here, no easy exit. & on, into the night. At about midnight, a half moon rises. The sleek coat of the male glows bloodblack in the moonlight; his mate's takes on a phosphorescent glow.

On the morning of the third day I was awakened by the singing of a bird. It was a song, a voice, a sweetness I had not ever heard before. Small, smaller than a sparrow. Like a titmouse. But all black. Perched on a spindly branch of dead sagebrush, rocking in the gentle morning breeze, singing a bittersweet song, two bars, repeated, then a long, plaintive, single note, falling away. Wait, my grandfather had said. & listen. In time, another voice, another song will come to claim your heart. Follow where it leads you. The bird took to the air, flying almost straight up, growing smaller & smaller, until the blueness of the air swallowed it up completely.

I waited through the night of that day. I could not advance, nor could I begin my descent. My own inaction forced upon me the particular circumstance of one who is very slowly, imperceptibly, waning, wasting, moving towards an inexorable end. It was not yet time to turn, to resume the downward path. I was fixed upon that spot by a future which refused to reveal itself, on the one hand, & by the past, the path, which, in its stony reproof, had become an empty fiction of my wavering memory.

Out of May's bottomless sky a snow squall hatched & blew through. For a moment, all was obliterated in a blinding, swirling sheet of white; then, the moon reemerged, & there, inches away from me, were the tracks of two lions, retreating off & down the path behind me, & along & between, a trail of still-fresh blood.

Lucid, giddy with a sudden wave of engulfing certainty, with the taste of power, of possibility like sweet bread in my mouth after this long fast, I scrambled up the surreal moonscape of the narrow rock throat, up the last stretch, until the grade gave way to an almost flat, rock-strewn crown. About & beneath me lay, many days' journey all about, a world so far removed it took on from that height something of an alien, mythic status. This was the land of my ancestors.

This I prayed would come to be the land of my descendants. I watched the squall move along the valley, running eastward.

&, just as I turned to descend, the clouds broke, & the moon shone like a pale searchlight over the range to the east, exposing a second peak above, connected to the first by a shallow, thick-waisted saddleback. & a dropping, sweeping curtain of snow which, as suddenly, cut me off from the object of my quest. Illusion. From the site of my assumed enlightenment, from there, snatched away...

He sits, almost collapses, by the fire, with the loose, abandoned discomposure of a high altitude climber at day's end.

I offer more tea. We swirl it around in our cups, staring into the dark liquor, waiting. For something. You pull out your soft leather pouch, pass it around, we roll the loose tobacco in this intimate, binding ritual, then, with a proffered branch, cherry red at its tip, light up. He slumps, cradles his cup in his hands, eyes fixed in the wavering flame. He takes a long haul, holds it, exhales with a studied slowness, takes in a quick breath of fresh air, coughs, slaps his hands across opposite arms, then, rising, continues.

I've been there since, & have followed the trail many times...
&, beyond the rock throat, the rest doesn't exist. It's
illusion, all illusion...

& so, from that time, each morning before the sun rises I look
to the East, & whisper this prayer: Where? When? Who? The
rest, I somehow know. On the way down I roasted roots, mainly
Glacier Lilies, eaten with some greens. When I got back to
the village, I found that my grandfather had died in the
night. I went to his house. He was laid out there, near the
stove, on the simple pallet which served as his bed. Nann's
handmade quilt, all a riot of red with raised patch-squares of
bright yellow, green, blue, & all the other colors of the land
& river & sky, covered his shrunken frame, tucked in under his
arms. His hands were turned upward, with the fingers closed
over into loose fists, as though grasping something.

Flowers. I thought, how strange, how odd, as I opened his
hands, like paper, like fine parchment. No stiffness, no
setting of muscle, of tendon, against bone, against joint, as
though life still ran like a river through him. In his left
hand was the root of a Death Camas, the root he had repeatedly
warned me against eating when I was a young child of four &
five; &, in his right, bright, fresh, as though it were still
growing in the moist, warm earth, a delicate bouquet of Spring
Beauty.

He pauses here, poised in the telling somewhere between elation & exhaustion. He takes in the sky, the river, the fire.

You must taste death, he told me, taking his small pocket knife & paring off a translucent shaving from a Death Camas bulb. Here, he said, put this on the end of your tongue. I could feel the sharp, cold steel of the blade as he laid the thin wafer of flesh upon my tongue. I held it there for several seconds, waiting. Waiting. Spit it out now, he said, quietly. Now you know what death tastes like.

Like beeswax. Like ashes. Like the cold sharpness of steel before it cuts you open. Over in Nam, when we'd run the rivers at night, I'd sometimes get that cold, metallic taste in my mouth, the rolling, cool taste of beeswax, & I'd be there, back there, on the mountain, there, by Grandpa's deathbed...

He walks off, downstream, towards the water. I stoke the fire while you cut branchends of sage for our smudge. Soon, the thick, sweet, earthy smell of sagesmoke claims the air. He returns, as though on cue, bathed as he approaches in the warm orange light of the fire.

But you see, I have not dealt with these lions, they have come down from the sacred mountain & are loose in the world. Long gone is the age of innocence. My innocence. They are now, by this act of audacity, unleashed upon the world, where they prowl & roam at will, sniffing, tracking down, seeking out their own last supper, the author of their being. & I have had to grow ever more wary, cagey, vigilant. I must anticipate their movements, the yawn & flex of their desire, the sharp-toothed hunger of their implacable yearning to be, that one last time, in that happenstance or fated place, brought together in that final blood-letting, bone-sundering moment of truth. With tails entwined, they will dine upon their master, then, returned home to that high mountain pass of their inexorable longing, waste away, of thirst, yearning, of a hunger that none but the Death Camas can sate.

A fine drizzle begins to fall. He unsheathes his Buck knife. Come. We will gather more sage. We shall gather, &, in the smoke become whole again, connected again, one again...

Stripped of our clothing, we rub the pungent green leaves into our now wet skin. We kneel in the fine rock & gravel, breaking the branches & offering them, one at a time, to the heart of the fire. How like a god he is, I think, fallen to

this lesser place below. A god, indeed, & in need of what sacrifice...

I awake several hours later, to a cloudy, moonless sky. The fire has been stoked & tended. It still burns with a hard, bright core of light, fanned by the brisk night wind. In a single motion, I roll over & sit up in the narrow tongue of sand. You are not there. I can, in the weak light of the newly rising moon, make out two shapes at the far point of the rock spit, vague, ephemeral, fixed. He is still talking. I see hands, arms, his, outstretched, reaching out to the sky. & you, still, unmoving, in silhouette, turned towards him, face uplifted.

Later still, the room grey with dawn, we lie in bed at Rosie's, relaxed in our dampness, our wetness, wrapt still in the clinging, earthy sweetness of broken sageleaf & smoke. He has given us back ourselves, I think. The rain falls, drums softly upon our roof, just for us, I dare to think, as I begin to kiss you there, & there, & there, to climb this, our sweet mountain, to court these, our own beasts of longing, to feel them, tails entwined, yearning & flexing so close beneath the shallow, so-thin robes of our skins, stretching now to be one, crouching to rage up & out & across & through our bodies, again entwined, yearning for, at long last, release...

VI

You. & me. Acacia Grove. Through the window the pulse of the neon sign's blood-rose light, beckoning the wayfarer to come in from the desert night. & let us suppose for a quick moment, that two as yet unnamed people, let us not say who for the moment, are preparing to ascend The Rock.

The Rock?

The Rock. Without foreknowledge. Without map. With neither advice nor direction. With only one's heart for a compass, & knowing only that there is no path, that the path is made by walking.

Not saying: This is a journey. Not: This is a quest; not naming object of desire, no grail, stone, talisman, amulet...

Only that the journey must, as always, begin with the taking of the first step... & the what's, the why's, the questions of character motivation... not even the vaguest anticipation that this venturing forth might come to prove or reflect upon any given or possible thematic engine which might drive it...

To walk. Take that first step. Simply that.

& then, perhaps, after, we sit, still, unspeaking, the nothing that isn't there within our minds uniting us. & no need, then, to leave it left unspoken.

The day is bright & clear, & there are no words for any of all that lies beneath & around & above us.

But if there were words, if we were to fall back upon the world, this world as it has been invented since First Utterance, from that first naming of things...

We would say: How bright & clear this day is. & look! There (gesturing south, over The River, below where we sit), an eagle. A bald eagle. With a fish, a rainbow, struggling, silver, flashing in the sun...

& as we had agreed in the depths of the previous night, we would each have brought one thing, ONE thing only, & at this point, the point of the mid-day's rest, one of us would remove, from pocket or backpack, whatever had been chosen.

& we had not decided upon a way, a process, a method of deciding who would reveal to the other...

Only that one would reveal; the other's it would be to withhold, to conceal...

& we would arrive at a way of deciding, or perhaps we would stumble upon it by being sure not to seek it out & run it down...

& I would have a stone, a polished stone - the colour red, of course, red as His Heart...

Red, of course; & I would have a piece of paper, pale parchment, uneven at all of its undefined, dog-eared edges, which, upon it, would have written, in small, tight script, something...

What?

A koan.

Yes, of course! & we would come to agree that it was your task to reveal & mine to conceal, & so you remove the piece of paper from your pocket, but, because this is a day without words, it is not mine to look upon what is written there, nor to ask you to speak it.

& so you take the paper from my hands &, turning away from me you busy yourself for a moment, & when you turn to me, your face is transfigured with a pure & joyous passion. You have used my paper to wrap something. I do not know what. It is

about the size, I think, as you stand there against the bluest sky, of a fist, more or less the size a human's heart. You take it, cupped in the shallow bowl of your upraised hands, holding it up to the sun, now straight south. There is suddenly this upwelling, this shared sense - we both feel it & we both know that we feel it together - of wordless prayer - a sense of Presence - then you hurl it with complete grace & dispassion out into space, out & down, into the narrow canyon below...

It falls clean into that clear, glass-faced pool just above the high, thin falls of Lost Creek.

& that night, some hours after you have taken that nasty fall & have (we will later learn) broken several small bones in your hand, after the sun has set &, as was previously agreed, we can now break our day long fast of words, you ask me what had been written on the paper & I say a koan & you say which one & I say they are all One & laugh & you say Aha! & I say no, not that one & you say which one & I say this is a new one, a koan for a mountain, this mountain, upon the occasion of its ascent & descent, by any one or two such as we. & you insist that I relate the koan to you before we bed down, & all I will tell you is that, in the wordless course of our day, fully one half of the koan has already been told. The path is made by walking, I repeat. & you say tell me the other half

of the koan, you wretch, or this ledge, this cold bed of stone will be your only prize & solace. & I say, well, my love, you decide by day's break what to pack & I shall do the same & we shall head out & up, into that wordless morning & we shall hear if we are able, what koan the day brings, as we reach the summit, then descend.

& I say you're serious, aren't you, & well, if you are, we'd best to bed & some sleep

& I say You're on then & you say of course & I say so am I.

&, wordless, love erupts there, high over the valley, at the edge of stony earth & moonless sky. & later, you turn once again, your hair backlit by the fading embers, your face a flickering mask, &, clutching me with that fierce desperation of one who is drowning in some dark, nameless sea, you whisper hoarsely in my ear, love, that is it, Love...

VII

The sun breaks over the range to the northeast. We walk through a sepia landscape of twisted apple trees, all in rows, down through a towering copse of cottonwoods, out & across the broad, shallow beach of rounded stone & down, here, to the river's edge. He looks about as though trying to gain the scent of something on the wind. He turns & looks at me, then you. That long, sure gaze. He begins.

The warrior arises early. Always, his companion is there, sometimes boisterous, greeting, sometimes, & much more often so, holding in the shadow, reluctant. He himself is shadow-filled, ephemeral, flickering, playing at the edges of vision, always away from the edges of light, always emerging, merging, becoming one with Night. Death can not stalk us if we name him as one, the constant one, in our midst, in the Circle. If we do not name & include him, the Circle of Creation is broken. So, here, the dark seam, the water shadow below the boulder, see how it wavers like a snake, its head just t' e, at the front edge of the quiet water... He waits, shows himself there, shows me where to lay out the line, where to place the fly; the fish, too, knows this is a place of great danger. The Eagle, the Osprey, & even rumors of Man are woven into the unspoken language of his primal history.

When first we practice to deceive. Indeed. This is the fly fisherman's art. To make of feather & fur, hair & quill, an offering, as the French say, a trompe l'oeuil, which will entice, will successfully lure the unsuspecting quarry, bring him to the sharp taste of the hook, & perhaps, beyond that, to that finality, to the very sting of Death... & all this is to be done in an attitude of studied reverence. When, here, on the shore, I take his life, when I spill his blood on this altar of stone, all that has been in him, all that he has seen & felt & done, all of that I must assume responsibility for. When I kill him, I must be wholly attentive, must see the life ebb from his eyes, must hear in his brief, final telling of the sweet summers' floods, & of his feeding in the River's full crest upon dark & fat stoneflies tumbling through the fast water, & of endless hatches of yellow, brown & green-bodied caddis, & of the voyages of his cousins to the sea, the steelhead who return in the fall, silverbright, monstrous...

This here's a Bighorn Caddis, something I created, tied with the rump hair of a Bighorn sheep, from right along the slopes of this valley. I tie this on, like so, &, with a bit of practiced art, casting over there, into the dark seam, the grand deception is launched...

We watch as the high-riding fly totters along the sharply defined edge, where the fast & slower waters meet. Nothing,

until the fly begins to drag in a skittering wake as the line tightens. The fly describes an arc, all along the seam, until it is stopped dead, intercepted in a flashy, splashing rise.

Good fish. Watch him run for the deep water.

Just as he says this, the line screams from his Hardy Perfect, a reel which the night before he dismantled for us, speaking of & explaining its inner machinery as though he were peering into the steel heart of some cosmic mystery.

There is give & take. He holds the fish at the edge of possibility... a bit more line & the fish will gain the fast, tumbling water of the rapids & surely break off. Too much tension & the tippet will snap under the strain of his sheer weight & the ferocity of his repeated runs.

The fish runs long & fast, taking the line into the backing. He leaps, a bright, silver-rose tumble of colour, landing in a broadside splash along the edge of the slower water. A few feet at a time, the fish loses, succumbs to the will of the fisherman.

First fish. & a good one. We let him go. Good luck for the rest of the day.

He unhooks the fish with a deft flick of his wrist. There is no blood, a good sign. The fish holds in the shallow, still backwater, the deep pink of his gills working to regain oxygen & strength; then with a quick, shuddering pulse, he streaks away, threading through the shallow maze of rock, out into the bright, aqua green of the parent water.

I must be alone now. I will meet you for lunch at the tailout.

He gestures with an encompassing sweep downstream, the palm of his left hand facing groundward, then, in the sudden, electric motion of a conjurer, snatches at the empty air. Palm upward now, he uncurls his fingers to reveal a Water Ouzel. For a moment the bird fluffs & preens, his eyes darting about. Only when he sees us, the others, does he spring out into morning's blue sky, a muffled explosion of feathers & unfettered desire.

We make our way down the beach, poking, pausing, kneeling. After the heat & confusion of the long summer at what we now, in our own closed system of language, have come to call The Bridge, a relative serenity has come to color the piecemeal, hour by day rhythm of our lives. He has come & gone several times, appearing & disappearing, as unannounced & as cleanly as the medium & subject of one of his own elaborate illusions. I am the Trickster, he declared simply one breaking dawn

towards summer's end, his shape in the smoke dissolving & at once resolving itself into that of a Raven. With a quick spring of his twig-thin legs, he pulled with his wings at the air & flew off over the arched crowns of the cottonwoods & disappeared directly into the blazing furnace eye of the first sun.

Before high sun, he returns, with a cleaned brace of slightly smaller fish.

Better eating, he says, with a boyish grin. He cuts two willow forks & gently impales the fish along their flanks, then walks up a dry streambed & cuts several branches from a dead alder.

Not dead too long. The best wood for this. Just enough smoke. Sweet smoke.

He angles the forked sticks over the crackling, smoking fire, keeping the fish out of the direct flame, & in the slow-rising vortex of dry smoke. He turns them once, until the skin is nicely blistered, then distributes the fish.

Enough. Enough for all. The earth, the air, the water provide. & here. Here's some bannock from this morning. & raspberry jam. He unfolds a small, checkered tea towel &

takes out the bannock, lifting it skyward with both hands. & some tea, he says, tossing a shallow palm of tightly-curved Gunpowder leaf into the billy can.

Smokes rolled & lit, we begin to reflect upon the events of our morning together. He looks across the River, then up, to take in the flattened, slightly tilted stone monolith of Bighorn Mountain. Nothing is hurried. There is a different pace here, a slower, more measured cadence, a drumbeat already there, here, waiting for the body, the mind to take up, which awaits only the moment of recognition, the moment of affirmation. A simple word. Yes. to life. & Death. & all that is strung taught along & across the drumskin continuum between, staked at its edges, at the four corners of the world.

Together, we retell, from our unique vantage points, the taking of the first fish. He is satisfied to let our versions stand, adding his own coda. He lights another cigarette. His peach-gold face, the honey-blond hair pulled back from it in a tight pony's tail, takes on a luminous intensity. Everything, the whole world of valley, mountain, tumbling river & bare, aching sky, seems to swirl about & focus in upon him. Out of the silence, words. He speaks.

The magic, the power, is not in reaching out into the thin air & creating this, say, a Water Ouzel, ex nihilo. It is, rather, the power, the magic of stillness, of being inside the world, immersed in, one with it... I see where he feeds, where he goes down into the water, dipping in search of caddis cases... when he emerges, I am there, I speak, I offer my hand & slip it beneath him. There is trust, harmony... This is the magic, waiting everywhere, within each tree & rock, bird & flower... we can coax it out by entering into...

VIII

The River is a ribbon of aqua green far beneath us. It is uncommonly cold for late July. The top of Bighorn is obscured in cloud. Lonnie figures we are some two hours away from reaching the summit. Here, at six thousand feet, the trees thin out & give way to the odd, stubborn juniper, gnarled roots driven into the cracks & crags the rock provides. That's all there is from here on up. We are resting on that same ledge where you & I slept two weeks ago.

At his direction we stop & build a fire. He takes dried fish from his pack & places it on a low, flat stone. We stir a batter for bannock with water from your canteen until it is thick enough, then wind it around sticks to cook at the edge of the flame.

Someone's been here. Recently. He picks up a blackened branch end & sniffs it. Maybe two weeks ago. Not my people. Two of them. Careless. These hikers don't know there's more than one kind of danger on such a climb. They had no sense of the power of this place. I begin to suspect he knows it was we who were here, that we defied him, & even slept here, balanced at the edge of his sacred mountain. If he does know, he shows no sign. But then, he is master of himself in these

matters. I suspect he could kill someone & show no more emotion than he does now.

He turns towards us with something in his hand. Until just now I wasn't sure if I could tell you. You see this red stone? This is the place. The time is right. Here, finally, I come back to the koan of Hung Nguyen, The Nutcracker. This is precisely what did it for me. Cracked me wide open, yolk & all, ready for the frying pan. You see, I was so busy welcoming newborn babies into the world in the name of These United States of Amerika & of the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, & marrying their aunts to their uncles, forgiving their cousins for killing those who would otherwise have killed them & raped their daughters & cut the bellies of their wives open, my time taken up with anointing their sick & burying all those dead from all manner of horrific causality in that wet, green, burning hell, that I had not recognized the need, my need, for just such a "priest" as he to set my own unworthy foot on the path.

The Path, he said again, as if to underscore it as it floated in the air before us. He begins.

A monk hears of an enlightened Zen master who lives high in the mountains. He decides he must discover the path which leads to his hermitage. After much searching over a period of

many years, he succeeds, & from there he sets out to find him. The walk is not nearly so arduous nor challenging as his long time spent in preparation had led him to expect. Just as night falls he sees, across a mist-shrouded meadow, the mouth of a cave, flickering with the shadows of flame playing against the dark sky.

He is met by a very old man who offers him a thick soup of roots, herbs & flowers. After a respectable interval, the monk, unable to contain his ardour, finally asks: Master, what is it that I must do to attain enlightenment? In the middle of the night, just when the monk is succumbing to the seduction of sleep, the Master speaks: Today you ascended the mountain. Tomorrow, you will go back down. This is the way of the world. The pathway up & the pathway down are the same. You must seek only the moment of sameness, when world & not-world, self & not-self collide, become one. You were at a certain point at a certain time all along the path today. The same can be said of your descent. Tomorrow, you will arrive at a place along the path at exactly the same time you were there today. As you descend, seek that point. When you discover it, bring back to me a stone from that place.

I want you to see this. I have brought something with me. Here, here is a small bag of stones. Find & put one in. Then take one out. He waits some time in silence. We forage along

the ledge & return with our little treasure, oblong, ovate, speckled green, like a bird's egg. I bring it back & hold it out to him. Here. In the bag. Now, take one out.

The mask of his face cracks open. Ahh, he says in a low voice. Ahh, he repeats, as if not able to understand what he has just seen. You. You have chosen the stone. The bloodstone. That is the stone taken from the place of conjuncture, the place of which the Master, in his logion, spoke.

He slumps to the ground, resting on his knees for several minutes, as if in prayer. He is silent.

You see, the riddle of the Master is, at the level of logic, simple & self-obvious. There must be such a point, just as two travellers who set out at the same time & journey at the same speed, one ascending, the other descending along the same path, must pass each other & so meet the criterion of the Master. But, over the ages mathematicians have, without exception, failed to prove that such a point exists.

There are a dozen stones in the bag. What you have chosen is the stone of deliverance. This is the same stone I chose that day, high in the green hills of Nam. It has come down through many centuries to lay in your hand.

I turn it over & over, wondering what it can mean.

Hung Nguyen explained that he who has the stone must keep it there, in the bag with the others, & only offer it to one who might truly come to understand the koan. But not until the riddle of the Master comes to live in his bones can he who has the stone offer it to another as I have today. When I chose the bloodstone, there was great laughter. Not the kind of laughter you will ever hear down there. No, it is the voice of pure joy, of deliverance from the suffering of the world. You see, in choosing the bloodstone I had finally taken that horrible burden from him, for it does not do for a man to die while in possession of the stone. To this time, since that day beneath the sacred Bhodi Tree, it has not happened. You see, so much depends on this. He places the bag in my other hand. It feels like fine, dried parchment. Now, place the stone in the bag. Take the green stone & put it in your pocket. Always carry it with you. Without it you are in danger of losing all that you have gained today. & more. Keep it safe. Guard it as you would your life. Your Love.

He looks over at you. His eyes seem to have softened. He relaxes, slumps against the wall of stone behind. I would have laughed too, but, as my grandfather taught me, it is unhealthy for a man to laugh alone.

We sit there for some time, in the silence. The sky has clouded over. Perhaps it is only an illusion that his eyes have grown dark.

For the rest of the day, & for the days to follow, there is a profound change in him. An odd detachment sets in. He vacillates wildly between these twin poles of passivity & ferocity, between this self-imposed, vacuous isolation & a manic evangelism where he paces & rants, wild with, consumed by the task of delivering us, safe, saved from the world.

Along the narrow ledge that pacing begins. His voice builds like a thundercloud. He seems detached from all that surrounds him, as if he were speaking to some crowd only he can see, hovering in the air, as in a vision.

This koan lesson is the cleavage line that runs through my soul like a fault line running through bedrock, promising, threatening to rupture at any unannounced time, to rend asunder all that has been of the known, the familiar...

& you see, it is the known, the familiar, which hangs like an invisible, toxic cloud over our anomic landscape, one part ether to render us comatose & unfeeling, one part mustard gas to encourage that searing blistering of the soul from within, which serves to remind us that, if we are in the process of

dying, at least we are still alive & have the capacity to feel, even if it is only the senseless inadequacy of our own suffering... & one part essence of sodium pentathol, so that we will insist upon & spill out the truth, our truth, like warm blood upon the altar of our own assumed holiness... the known, the familiar fixes us in our numbness, blinds us to the miracle of the particular, masks it in the surreal veneer of the general, the categorical, the generic & the anonymous... the anonymous fictions of our empty lives...

We sit. & wonder. Where does this all come from... where will it all lead...

IX

Conrad had it all wrong, at least for these, the closing hours of the millenium: Man does not journey upward into the branching arterials, away from culture's order, to confront & collide with the imminence of chaos, the unmasked spectre of nothingness, raw in her now quaking, now rotting flesh. Rather, in this, our age & day, we cling to the rotting vegetation along the stream banks, desperate to halt our impending flush & flow downstream & out, into the claiming morass of a larger, all-embracing, all-consuming undifferentiation. The horror for us now lies not in the flight away from & into, but towards & out of. The seedy, illiterate, infected crowd, wed to her shiny twin, the rehearsed, manipulative intelligentsia, the groaning, protofascist horde, is the nightmare, anonymous jungle of no return which awaits post-Nietzschean, alienated, alienating, godless, godawful man, her lianas cascading, waiting dumbly to embrace, to enfold & obliterate...

& so, it is not tea, religiously, at four which will hold the wolves at bay; rather, it is altogether too much of tea & crumpets which, sip by nibble, does us in, all too quietly, all too unannounced...

Here, he pours from the blackened billy can, pungent, greenleaf Gunpowder tea, into our tin cups. We sit, as always, crosslegged, here, in the sand & stone... in silence, we sip... in silence, we watch The River flow...

X

The dark, high cliffs of columnar basalt shut out the sun. The narrow canyon floor is almost damp, almost cool after the searing afternoon heat of the open range land. We stop at the first bridge to water the horses.

Lonnie scoops up a hatful of water & pours it slowly over his head. His dark blond hair is matted against his skull, giving him an elemental, almost savage look. More than ever, now, he has the appearance of the classical warrior.

Usually I come in by truck, but this first time I wanted you to come to it the way my grandfather did. &, generations before that, long before the Spaniards had brought the horses, the scar of this trail was blazed by millennia of feet, walking softly. It is not much further. You will sense when we are near.

We pick & nibble on small, acid-sharp strawberries. The horses stand in a mixed patch of Fireweed spikes, White Geranium & the last of spring's Arnica, bowed, drinking.

I watch your hands move, deft, searching. & I think back to the farm, to you, kneeling in the dirt, your hair undone. I could never love you more than then... & without him, things

would be different here... We'd strip & bathe in the cold creek water, then lie in the sun, or run through the stand of tall aspen... & find & stretch out, tangled, on a bed of cool moss...

Just beyond the next twist the land slopes sharply to the right. The Ponderosa & Douglas Fir give way to White Spruce & spindly Birch. We descend into a bowl of remarkably cool air. I can smell the lake. Dragonflies dart & hover, iridescent in the slants of shattered light.

Hold 'em back, says Lonnie. Especially the roan. They know what's ahead & will break for pasture if you let them.

The trail follows along the west side of the lake, opening out into a natural meadow at the north end. The cabin is larger than I had imagined, rough-hewn logs with a screened-in porch running the full length of its face.

A hawk, I say to you in a low voice, gesturing in the direction of the large fir shading the front of the cabin. A Red Tail.

That's South Wind, Lonnie explains. First warm current brings him up the canyon every spring. He works the meadow country around here, then descends to the valley in the fall. His

ancestors have been coming here longer than mine have. Grandfather said that there was always a nest in that tree, for as long as even his own grandfather could remember.

He shapes his hands in a broad cup before his mouth, then lets out a high, thin cry: Kii. Kii. The hawk springs from his roost, launching himself with deep, leisurely strokes of his wings, out into a low, tight orbit around us.

He's like a pet dog. Even comes into the summer kitchen at the back when there's fresh kill.

Our first task is to unsaddle the horses & let them run. Then we settle in.

It was all so simple then. The sun came up. The sun went down. The birds sang. It rained. The sun came out. Flowers blossomed in their season...

How could either of us have known. Earlier, while it was still light, as afternoon settled into evening, the remembering, the stories were of his grandfather's time. About his own vision quest up Bighorn. He went light on the Nam stuff, until later at night, when we got into the second bottle of scotch & had smoked a joint or two.

Medicinals, he says. My people have used them since the beginning of time. Sacramentals, Mother Church would call them, if only she could reconcile & square her narrow view of a vertical, absent God with this more earthly spirituality... You see this, he says, holding his glass up to the fire & peering through the amber liquor. You see the flames dancing there. Firewater. It's a wise man can invite the devil in, take from him what he can get, then show him the door... Oh, don't doubt it, not for a second, old Lucifer's got his hot little hands on the whole Book... He was there, he saw it all, he lived through it all... but he threw it all away... & so, here's to the devil himself! May his stay be pleasant, short, but fruitful.

We toss back our drinks, then stare in our collective silence into the flickering heart of the fire.

But it's not so serious as all that. I come by it honestly. My father was Irish. That very little bit of rambling rhetoric is a snatch of evening theatre he delivered to me one night at a honky tonk in St. Louis. It was the night I first met my brother. We had to carry him back to his hotel room...

& Mother Church. Ever vigilant in her moral crusade against the Whore of Babylon... I was twenty three. Three weeks away from my ordination. She was the Archbishop's grand niece.

Stranger than fiction. Met her at a garden party hosted by the Archbishop, in honour of us, who were about to be ordained, about to give our lives to Christ... There, standing like an apparition, in blue, in the garden, of all places. It began to rain. Everyone went inside, except for us. & there, wet with rain, I knew for the first time what it truly meant to be born again. Washed clean. Born in the Spirit. Alive, set aflame by a consuming passion I had never known before. Or since.

She was my salvation. I only touched her once. On the cheek, to brush away a tear. She was twelve years old. & so, I loved her at a distance, & soon, very quickly, found it necessary to increase that distance, until the time & space between became too much to bear, opened into a gaping wound... & so, I let her go, I let her slip away into the anonymity of the world at large. I could not have held on. It would have killed me. Perhaps both of us. Sometimes, I suspect it is doing just that, in its own silent way. Scandal is the name men give to perfect love. Another place & time, say two hundred years ago, it would have been very different. Codes of moral behavior are deeply rooted in cultural norms. Had I been my great grandfather, I might have waited a year, then taken her after first blood.

I dreamt about her in Nam, up on the Srépok. Through the rains & the rats & the scorch of napalm & the killing of children, old men, women, even the babies in their bellies... because they were my men, my friends, & it was for freedom & democracy & they couldn't seem to get that, what it was all about...

She kept me alive. I would be alone with her each night those long months on my first tour. There, beneath a foreign sky, alone, my heart pounding, afraid to slip off into the depths of sleep, afraid of letting go, afraid of what might come... But soon enough this all came to an end. I had, as an American warrior, been immersed & steeled in the white flame of immolation... As they say, something happened.

He walks across the kitchen to the long counter & brings the bottle back. Never do this, Grandpa said, keep the devil out of the living room, &, especially, away from the open fire. So, we'll make this a quick visit, not enough to let the genie out of the bottle to run amok. He pours a three finger round, puts the bottle back & returns, pacing up & down in front of the fireplace. He stops & leans on the mantelpiece, staring down into the flames.

A large moth knocks & wobbles wildly about the coal oil lamp by the window, racing in a manic, looping orbit, drawn by the

twin fires of the flame & its framed reflection floating out in the darkness beyond. It tilts & dives towards the light, then, at the last second, veers away, repelled by the ferocity of the heat, the blinding light.

He pokes at the fire & throws on another log. He looks over at us, a small congregation of two he must reach at any cost. He lights up another Marlboro.

When the time comes, when the hour reveals itself, you are finally driven to know; when the need burns pure enough, revelation comes. For those who have eyes, let them see. Perhaps it is the burning wreck of an automobile we pass along the highway. We choose to drive on, stunned, revulsed, eyes averted. We cannot bear the responsibility. It is all too much. We want the suffering, the pain, the deaths of countless thousands each day to remain anonymous. & we go home & pray for the souls of the lost & thank our personal god that it wasn't us in there, crying out in mortal agony from the twisted wreckage. & so, perhaps what was that single revelatory moment of an entire lifetime, when the Divine chose to speak out from the heart of that particular flame, wreathed in the dark smoke of burning rubber & oil, that unique moment in our lives was passed up, at that instant when our right foot moved from the brake back to the accelerator...

We cannot kill without the full engagement & consent of our own souls. When we kill without reverence, without compassion - & of course in Nam that was a total absurdity, totally impossible - then our own spirit must atrophy & wither. We become another voice sounding from out of the Darkness, another agent of Chaos, joining that vast legion of the walking dead...

Already, even before this war has ended, you can see them all over America, the wandering, staggering casualties, uprooted, homeless, bitter, confused, utterly shattered. I at times suspect I am as much on the run from that war, which we have brought back with us, as I am from the more incidental circumstances of my own life...

When I was on leave stateside after my first tour, they approached me with what they called The Offer. In the end, they were right. They made me an offer I chose not to refuse. The details are of little concern. & in so doing I so compromised myself... He trails off, his eyes focused at some distant point, far out into the night.

Most nights he would fall asleep before the fire, as though taking those final steps to the bedroom was too painful an act, that even the level of scotch coursing through his veins wasn't enough to stave off the beasts of the night.

The quarter moon rises up through the thick tangle of trees along the ridge to the east. We look out over silver, concentric rings spreading out across the face of the lake... &, as the trout feed, we wonder aloud where all of this is to take us.

You turn & look up into my face, moving closer. We kiss. Warm, familiar, but without passion. He takes everything & pulls it inward, into himself, you say in a low voice, leaning into me. There is nothing left for us. He's like a black hole, sucking everything in. But I love him. It's a different kind of love, one I have never known. He is a man of great wisdom. This, these few weeks, is a chance to learn, to prepare ourselves. I feel like he must have felt when he met that old monk, the Nutcracker. I feel like he has me in his hands & is cracking me open. It's painful. It hurts. But it's necessary. I feel that I am giving everything now, so that when he is gone I will have & be able to give to others.

You look at me with that expression of dark concern. We have come so far. & now, up this box canyon, is where it all stops. You & me, all of this, gets dealt with here. We can't run any more. You. Or me. Or Lonnie. & if there's a way out, back into the light, & I have to believe there is, he will lead us.

A single word. Intelligence. A priest. That was my cover. There I was, as far up into the belly of Nam as I could get, tight against the border. An American priest. Marrying young couples. Baptizing babies. Burying the dead. The many dead. Up on the Cambodian border. Up the Mekong, then up the Srépok, up until there are only scattered villages & the endless green of jungle. I was working a unit supplying coordinates for bombing missions, intelligence on regional activities. They needed me there, to work the trust of the people who really knew the area. They would have nothing to do with uniformed personnel. It was classic covert activity.

That's where it happened, there was my burning car wreck, that's where I got religion. They were flying too high to hear, but when the B-58's dropped their payloads up the valleys to the west, in the direction of Pnom Pen, it would light up the night sky like heat lightning. We weren't supposed to be there. It was more dead, innocent people...

The C.I.A. The National Security Council. The Pentagon. This is America's Trinity. & I was there, in the belly of The Beast, a pawn in their holy war.

One night a mother brought her ten year old daughter to me, to confession. The child could not speak. She was shaking. Her dark eyes were filled with terror. & what was the sin that so

badly needed absolving? What so drove her mother, what act, that she so feared the eternal, consuming flame of hell for her child? A dozen or so men from the platoon, assigned to protect, to protect the villages of the lower valley, had held her, tied her up in a thatched hut off in the jungle for three days, & had repeatedly raped her, sodomized her. How was I to explain that some sin is not in this life to be forgiven...

He turns away, towards the fire & downs the rest of his glass in a single draught.

& that's how I got religion...

My next R & R, out to Manila, was a working holiday. I was to make contacts there with the broader southeastern network. We drove up into the mountains, to Bagguio, for a closed conference. Whatever doubt had lingered in recent weeks disappeared that first evening. I had been taken inside the cabal. I, a humble Lieutenant in Intelligence, was suddenly whisked into the inner sanctum. I was now being absorbed into the most powerful secret society on Mother Earth, like a paramecium absorbing some infinitesimal mote caught up in the slime of its passage. I was slotted to become a conduit of information not only to the Corporation & its affiliated subsidiaries, but also to the corresponding people of power inside the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Over lunch &

very dry martinis I was jokingly referred to as Cardinal MacArthur. I was to lead the Church's covert operations in the region in her cooperative initiatives to crush the Satanic forces of Godless Communism underfoot.

At the banquet that evening, the Papal Nuncio addressed & introduced me as Father, as though I were an ordained priest. Granted, I had flown out of Saigon dressed as such, & had, under orders, continued to affect the persona of Father Alfred Dietrich in dress & speech, even in The Philippines. He even hinted at the Vatican's desire to move me rather quickly up within the ranks of their hierarchy, to become a sort of ambassador to the agents of justice & light in the region. Yours is an extraordinary case, my son, the Nuncio confided to me later, alone. Rome is making special provision for your ordination next month in Saigon. A very private affair. It was all too much, too soon. It had all gotten out of control.

I had an excuse to beg off early. My brother was also on leave. My half-brother, Luke, from St. Louis. A West Point man. Major. Infantry. &, though I hadn't seen him for some months, I commandeered a jeep back to the compound, went to my room, poured myself a stiff glass of Cardhu, & began to laugh. I laughed until I was exhausted & sobbing for air. Then, the tears. The well was deep, deep as my life. Grandfather, I called out, where are you, what am I to do...

I lay in the darkness for an hour or two, then staggered out into the humid night. I was a man without a home, a country. Certainly not here. This was an entirely new chess game. How to find a way back... I never saw my brother again.

You must know, I must tell you, once in, like quicksand, once far enough in, there is no way out. & my struggles to extricate myself soon took on the character of the fly entangled & straining at the perimeter of the web, telegraphing with every smallest twitch & motion, with every stolen breath, the location & life status of the victim to the diamond-eyed manipulator pulsing at its core...

& so, I have come home. Here. It is the obvious place. If they can pick it up, if they have the missing thread. My father & my brother are both dead. To be the All-American boy making good, I had to have a different life history. I had to be, to assume, to create that persona, from birth. My father, wonderful, creative, tragic man that he was, co-authored my new life. Born, raised, schooled, all of it, down to the last detail, with all the papers, I was, I became, that person, that All-American, Lonnie Judd. They certainly didn't seem to know who I was, who I really am, when I was over there... Perhaps it was all a matter of expediency on their part...

At dawn I will be on the lake, casting the best of Grandfather's flies out over large, cruising trout. None of this will matter. Grandfather will be with me as the sun breaks over the water.

Here, I must show you these. He goes over to a small workbench set between the far stone corner of the fireplace & the end wall. He comes back with a finely crafted fly box in whose face of pale Spruce is engraved a handsome loon with a trout balanced in its mouth. & in the corners, wet flies.

Look at these. All wets. Wet flies. Grandfather lived the latter half of his life up here. Fed himself from this lake six months of the year. That smokehouse out back, that was for trout, & in the fall, for select cuts of moose & deer. Used to be elk up here too, & Bighorn sheep. Smoked ribs were the best. That & the salmon we'd bring up from The Bridge, the big chinook in July, & then the sockeye.

Eventually he went white & bought a pressure canner. It's still there, in the cupboard.

So, I have come home. My time is short. One way or the other, they will not take me alive. I will be up here. This is my country, my land, the land of my people. This is where I should have lived my life. This is where I shall die. I

know every tree & flower, every game trail, bluff & draw. I'm even ready for choppers.

Time for some recon. Another two hours before the moon comes up. You'd better turn in. We have a heavy day of fishing tomorrow.

For the first few mornings, he has been getting up & heading out before dawn. He joins us later for breakfast, calling us lovebirds & chiding us for sleeping in. On Sunday, he takes us around & shows us what he has done.

You see this? No, you don't, do you. Only a trained scout could pick it out. A trench. Covered with a lattice of spruce boughs, then dirt, needles, cones. All along here. & up, over the mouth of that draw, & over there, where we came in. Anywhere a man can gain access to any of this open area around the cabin. They're wired electronically, so I know from inside when & where something's happening. I put fox & skunk scent around them, to keep animals out. For most of them, it works. &, just as we are protected from & hold the outside world at bay, we become, in a loose sense, prisoners of the defenses which I have taken pains to create. A warning. Be very careful. Don't go more than a hundred yards from the cabin.

That night, his sermon is on Dame Fortune. He illustrates key points with sleight of hand, vanishing & reappearing kitchen objects, coins, even bullets. Then, after we have gone to bed & you have fallen asleep, I hear the creak of the screen door, then a horse ride off.

We are awakened by gunfire. Sounds like from across the lake, I say. We wait. About half an hour later, we hear him ride up to the back door. He staggers in, breathing heavily. His forearms & hands are covered in blood. You see this, he says, holding up his hands. This is the blood of the lamb. I am washed in the blood of the lamb. He was cast down into the pit, he died so that we might have life. They are coming. This is a sign. The hour is upon us.

He moves past us, into the kitchen. & takes the half empty bottle of scotch from the counter. He slumps into a chair & stares at the floor.

In the morning there is no sign of him. We find a large black bear by the back steps. His throat has been slit, his paws sawn off & his genitalia cut out. The bloodied saw rests against the woodpile. The limp body lies collapsed in the sticky, dark pool of its own blood.

It has been arranged. She has this morning agreed to - & I don't think this comes as a surprise to you - has expressed the desire to spend time with my people, specifically, my aunt, my mother's sister, my grandfather's eldest daughter, who is a holy woman in her own right. Time to experience the Spirit which runs like a subterranean stream through this dry land, awaiting those who seek her out, those who thirst & come to drink...

She is leaving after lunch. We are to meet her at The Bridge, at Rosie's, in ten days. & we, for our part, will begin today the task before us.

& so, just so, it was all arranged.

Inside, they teach you very well. There is a memory game which Kipling describes. In Kim. You know the novel? In Boy Scouts. Yes. Your task was to look at, say two dozen objects for one minute, attempt to memorize them, then, when they were shown to you later, with objects missing, you were to name them. Like that. But much more sophisticated. Time & necessity press in upon us. You must learn very quickly what I can teach you of the science of mnemonics. One way or the other I will soon no longer be with you. Someone has to know. The Truth will, perhaps, set us free, if there is time enough. It must be kept alive. It must be told. You must be all of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John in a single voice, a single mind. & you must not let them take this from you, at any cost, for to succumb is to forfeit the ultimate price: The ransom of one's very soul.

He started me out with simple objects in the kitchen & living room, then moved me out of doors, naming trees, flowers. Then back inside, to two dozen wet fly patterns his grandfather had tied. Then he questioned me about what he had already shared with us, pointing out where I was vague, where there were gaps, & how I could train myself to remember it all, word for word, if need be, with but a single telling.

I can show you, too, how to recall, in detail, even word for word, that which has happened in the past. It doesn't always

work. It's not quite classical hypnosis. Rather, it's a way of paying close attention to what is already there, stored away.

We began with my eleventh birthday. I named everyone there, & who had given me which presents. Pay attention to your mother's voice, what is she saying, he coaxed. You've got to let that snapping turtle go, she was saying, before someone gets hurt. Your father never should have brought it home. Just like that barn owl. We can't run a zoo here, can we. Now, why don't you & the boys finish up your cake & ice cream & take him up the street behind the saw mill & let him go free, back to the swamp...

The vividness of this complex memory brought tears to my eyes. Lonnie had given me a gift which, it was obvious from the outset, was like stealing fire from the gods, a gift which had to be used with a wisdom I doubted I possessed.

There are classical paths of enlightenment, of salvation, upon which individuals may embark. There are ways of dealing with what is, now, when one's foot hovers between the brake & the accelerator. What is it to be? Will we be witness to the agony in the flame, or will we collapse behind the wheel, mesmerized by the reflections of road signs warning of danger, of the need for caution & restraint at every twist & dip? Will we shrink from the gaze of fellow animals in the thickets & at the edges of fields, themselves mesmerized, their glass eyes luminous, yellow, red, ablaze in the twin shafts of our anonymous headlights. Will we dare to throw it all away, cast it all off, imploring the great Spiritus Mundi to erupt in our midst? Shall we risk courting our own salvation, even if it means losing ourselves? Shall we attend at the burning wreck? Shall we dare to reach in through the searing flame? Or, will we drive on, forever, towards a dawn which shall never break, through a night which will never end...

This is how the work on the script began, with an intense fervour. We were to court the flames of immolation.

As we wrote it, we memorized it. Both of us. Line for line, word for word. Every night before the fireplace we tried it out, ran through it, developed it, until it had an exciting, almost bleeding rawness to it, until it drew forth sweat, tears. Soon our voices merged & it became impossible to

distinguish one voice from the other, nor will, nor purpose, nor desire...

What was it that we were working towards? That burning wreck which was the central leitmotif of his passionate sermonizing? Or was there something else, another vista down the road, around a sharp curve, a revelation of such eclipsing intensity that this would all fall away like matchstick scaffolding...

When time grows short & we are desperate with prayer to vindicate ourselves, to pull ourselves from the wreckage of our own lives, what hope is there that some such significant event will present itself, so that by our heroic intercession we may at the last instant be redeemed by the seeming selflessness of our own agency... Yes, everywhere humanity is in chains, but is there not that kernel of what we might call nobility, some remnant, a dried & shrivelled flower, a Mountain Bluebell, perhaps, from The Garden of our Innocence, pressed between yellowed pages in a forgotten book of lost memories somewhere, which, if we could but find it, lay our hand upon it, as a talisman, might make all the difference...

Did you not love her? Do you not love her still? What is there that you will not do to set her free?

& so, desperate, as I say, we pray that the wizened, crushed Flower of Hope will somehow reveal itself, that God will in His mercy see fit to speak, to beckon us into our night...

Can't you see? She's already one of the desperate ones. & so young. She's little more than a child... Something lies beneath. A secret. A shadow. Her shadow, which dogs her & will not let her rest. When she comes in here early in the morning she looks like someone who has already run through a marathon night of grief. Though tragedy is generic in the aggregate, it is in fact quite particular, as unique as our fingerprints. & yet our common lot draws us together. It is the response of the herd instinct. We are all hurtling headlong into the black throat of hell. That end binds us as sisters & brothers thrown circumstantially together on the same grim journey, & facing the same inevitability. But we cannot hear ourselves above the anomic, anguished scream of the horde. There must be time to be still, a place out of which we can speak & be heard... A thousand millennia ago, people of the trees, the sheltering caves, the savannas, knew this. Night had to be kept at bay. It insisted. It had to be dealt with. Humanity was everywhere on the brink of the first elaborate fictions in all of universal history. Literature was about to be born. With amazing synchronicity, in every emerging culture there erupted that first dim flicker of Enlightenment, which was to set the souls & minds & hearts of people everywhere ablaze. God spoke from the Burning Bush, whispered in the ear of one who would become the Holy One, the Shaman. Singly, then in small groups, voices risked the unfettered power of that Presence which might turn like the

unpredictable wildness they sought to tame, & in an instant, crush them with a single blow. People began to speak of the Way, the Path. The work of the Anointed One, The Chosen, is to announce this good news, to prepare the way, to set the feet of others on the Path. But to what? To that place of human carnage, that foretaste of hell which explodes in a bright ball of flame just as we round the bend, just as we crest the hill, just as we begin our descent into the last dry valley on our long journey home?

&, now, we are here, at the great spiritual watershed of human history. Already, it is too late. These final days will of necessity be marked by acts of unprecedented desperation. The world has chosen to turn away, to lose itself in itself, in the petty world of human artifice & concern. We turn away from Creation, inward, into the blackness of our own closed hearts, into the terminal malaise of our unsaved souls. &, not at all liking what we find, we busy ourselves with yet more incredible fictions, we build the walls higher, so high that the sun cannot enter, nor moon nor starlight. We populate the world with enemies of every stripe & conviction. In short, our God is so personal He cannot exist for anyone else. We lose ourselves in the world. We bury ourselves alive, then spend our lives praying for, longing for resurrection.

This is my last expedition, my last foray into this place of tragic beauty. I seek no mountaintop now. No eternal spring. Time is now my sole jailer. Each morning he announces the numbering of my days. & so, my exhortation. I plead with you if I must: Acknowledge this. That our fates, indeed, our salvation, is all bound up together. We sink or swim as one. & so, I make this single request. Join with me in this parting act of creation. Others may, in its execution, judge it to be outrageous beyond the capacity of human imagination or credulity, as much so as His own Death & Resurrection. But I ask that you hear me out. Then, perhaps, you will see your way to granting the wish of one who is, one way or the other, about to die.

In the days which follow we fish, we swim, we ride up along the ridge beyond, up, as far as the horses can manage, scouting, looking out from every vantage point, then hike the last hour to the summit of Bighorn. There, beneath a thick haze of smoke from burning forests, in every direction spreads the land of Lonnie's people.

The devil brought Jesus up here & tempted him. Wouldn't have worked for one of our people. We had no notion of personal power or property. Not back then. Maybe now.

We sit & walk & ride in silence. Then, as we descend into the valley, the dam breaks & the words come. We have supper. & then, that awful travail...

Over the final few days & nights I surrender something of myself. Until now, there hasn't been room for another person. I have to make room. & that will take a painful emptying. From watching Lonnie, listening to him, I have come to realize that, like St. John of the Cross, I must die to my self before I can reach out through the flames to another soul in distress. Something happens between us. He becomes my Father-confessor, he in whom I can confide & share the most intimate details of my life, my being. &, in the end, as well, of she whom I most love... & somehow, somewhere, my sense of the sacred, what I have until now known to be holy,

is transmuted, perhaps even given up, as part of the total surrender which this undertaking exacts..

& everything becomes excessive, larger than life, it all hurtles along at increasing speed... the scotch, the mescal, until it all blurs, fuses.. there is no more Lonnie, no more, nothing of me left, only this single voice speaking out, & its small thin echo in reply...

On the sixth day he shows me the gun. At that point the script demands it, cries out for it, for the deus ex machina, the cold modus of redemption of this, our tortuous via negativa, the Path of Deliverance upon which my beloved will soon discover herself.

XI

Today, we will be using the liturgy from the Mass in Time of War, he announces, unrolling the dried, yellow corn leaves. From New Mexico. From the spring. He stands behind the long blue table in our living area & places the leaves & the fat, earth-coloured buttons within beside the clay cup. He is dressed in a pure white robe of rough cotton.

As I have said in recent weeks, the time draws near. His voice is charged with emotion. As it was in Nam, so it is now. News spreads quickly up the network of rivers & valleys. They will be here for me tomorrow. It is almost over.

& so, let us begin.

We are gathered here, one final time, to celebrate the days & nights we have shared together, & to bid our farewells. First, let us draw near to the altar, the table upon which the holocaust of our offering is to be laid.

It is so formal, so like Lonnie, the sense, the need for the theatrical, & this morning, with the sun streaming from high above the River across the benchland & through the broad window, igniting the room in a riot of intense colour, he has it all; theatricality on a cosmic level... & there is

something sad here - you, also, all in white, heartbreakingly beautiful beside me. You look like a bride awaiting her groom. We haven't spoken to one another for ten days. My heart breaks with yearning for you.

He continues, reading each part first in Latin, then asking us, in turns, to read the translation. When we come to the gospel, he pauses for several minutes before beginning. For the first time, I see tears in his eyes. Then, in a shaky voice, he begins.

Because this is a most special occasion, we will have two readings. The first is from the Feast of the Transfiguration:

In illo tempore: Assumpsit Jesus Petrum, et Jacobum, et Joannem fratrem ejus, et duxit illos in montem excelsum seorsum: et transfiguratus est ante eos... At that time, Jesus taketh Peter & James, & John, his brother, & bringeth them up to a high mountain apart: & he was transfigured before them, & His face did shine as the sun: & His garments became white as snow... Et ecce vox de nube, dicens: & lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him."

& the second, from the Mass in Time of War:

In illo tempore: Accesserunt ad Jesum discipuli secreto, dicentes: Dic nobis, quando haec erunt... At that time, the disciples came to Jesus privately, saying: "Tell us, when shall these things be? & what shall be the sign of Thy coming & of the consummation of the world?" & Jesus, answering, said to them: "Take heed that no man seduce you. For many will come in My name, saying: I am Christ: & they will seduce many. & you shall hear of wars & rumours of wars. See that ye be not troubled. For these

things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, & kingdom against kingdom; & there shall be pestilences, & famines, & earthquakes in places. Now all of these are the beginnings of sorrows."

There is no sermon. Instead, we sit for some time in silence, bathed in the burning shaft of sunlight...

&, as we approach the consecration, he is visibly shaking. He takes the leaves of corn, & the mescal cradled within, & raises them above his head. He speaks in a clear, wavering voice:

Qui pridie quam pateretur, accepit in sanctas ac venerabiles manus suas... Who the day before he suffered took bread into His holy & venerable hands, & with His eyes lifted up to heaven, to You, God... giving thanks... saying: Take & eat you all of this... Hoc est enim Corpus Meum... For this is My Body...

...accipens et hunc praeclarum Calicem in sanctas ac venerabiles manus suas... dicens: Saying: Take & drink you all of this,
For this is the chalice of my blood, of the new & eternal testament: The mystery of faith: Which shall be shed for you & for many unto the remission of sins...

We chew the mescal, bitter, dry & woody, in silence, then share in the cup. More silence. & then, we drive in Lonnie's truck, out into the desert scrubland. We are each to travel in a different direction. No instructions. Simply to be.

IMMOLATION: A MONOLOGUE FOR THE HOLOCAUST

Terror, and the pit, and the snare
are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!
He who flees at the sound of the terror
shall fall into the pit;
and he who climbs out of the pit
shall be caught in the snare.
For the windows of heaven are opened,
and the foundations of the earth tremble.
The earth is utterly broken,
the earth is rent asunder,
the earth is violently shaken.
The earth staggers like a drunken man,
it sways like a hut;
its transgression lies heavy upon it,
and it falls, and will not rise again.

Isaiah 24.17-20

I

I love this garden. So meticulously tended, yet in such an understated way that one might almost feel at first impression that this is a wild, natural piece of landscape. One can stand anywhere within this composition & feel a special magic. From this very spot one can look down over the river, the canyon, & see it transformed, through her eyes, perhaps even through the eyes of God. It's as if she were a landscape painter who is able to climb inside the painting itself &, through the miracle of her direct agency, create what we now stand in the midst of. Rosie has achieved here a sense of order, of balance so exquisitely subtle that the garden, as work of human hands, transcends itself, becomes invisible. It is of significance for me that our final hours together begin here, in this sacred place.

Here, let me pour you a glass of chablis. The very essence of this, autumn's late afternoon. Full, tumescent with the sap & surge of summer, her history, her heart, distilled here, a fitting cup to raise in thanks to the gods of our mutual good fortune.

All that has happened over this protracted, hot summer has led up to this moment. I have had my time, alone, with him, to do much as we are doing, but with one significant difference,

which we shall come to in due course. Our lives, singularly & in the aggregate, are much too short, too fleeting to let the promise of this conjuncture melt, dissolve in front of our eyes. This is the last time we will be together. After tonight, nothing will be the same. For either of us. Ever.

& if we are to be responsible, each for the other, each to take the life of the other into ourselves, & take it with us wherever tomorrow may find us, that gift must first be given.

So much has already been said. So much remains unsaid & perhaps never will find utterance. But in these last few precious hours there falls between us this opportunity, this final stage upon which we may strut and fret, laying out in a closing gesture of reciprocal generosity what our lives have really been all about.

We are here to save one another. I believe this with a fervor that this night will come to demonstrate. &, on that brief theological note, if you will allow me, I would speak first of fathers, for therein lies the key to life's sorest riddle. For me, at least. & for you, as well, I suspect.

To them, let us raise our glasses. Whatever happens, whatever this night brings, please, I implore you, carry this, my life with you. I pledge to do the same. & now, let us begin.

II

My father was one American man: Power, salvation, guts & glory.

I was born in that brief hiatus just at the waning of the Great Depression, just as America was gearing up for that unprecedented cataclysmic engagement, girding her loins & cultivating a renewed stoutness of heart & purity of national spirit. Through the dustbowl years of the thirties, America had fed on a steady diet of hollow promises whose ubiquitous centrepiece was Roosevelt's chicken in every pot. Between ennui & a slow starvation born of sameness, a deeper hunger had emerged, a sharp hungering for something as yet undefined, something amorphous, floating half-formed on the great screen of consciousness before the collective eye of the faceless populous. Silent, expectant, they longed deep in their national psyche for someone, some one to name the hunger, the yearning, to name for them the Beast of their newly unfolding demonology.

I was the issue of those loins, that fertile moment in history, as it strained to give birth to a new age, a race newly anointed & commissioned, a new heaven & a new earth, met, finally, here, in this, the fulfilment of that promise

made from the beginning of the world: The Word, in its consummate utterance become, at last, flesh.

I was the issue of those loins, the wunderkind, the child wonder who, born here in exile, would return to the land of his father some years later, as a fully grown man, shaped & formed in the ways of my mother's people, would emerge from the desert, the last sanctum of my tutelage, the Warrior-King to be, the Golden Child... I grew up without a father, which is no great loss in the culture of my people, the Shuswap, for it is the prerogative & duty of uncles & grandfathers & shamans to bring a boy before the altar of manhood.

What I had to learn, had to come to know in these bones, in the coursing of this bloodlife through these veins, in the flooding of the universe through the portals of these eyes, breaking in a wall of light & color & form upon & into this inner darkness... all of that happened here... what happened later, going South, was merely, in hindsight, the finishing school touches of another warrior caste, of a totally other culture.

I went to find my father, for I had always been driven by a sense that I was to be about my father's business. I had not needed him as I grew into a man, but once arrived, there, once descended from the mountain, there was a hole, an empty space

which threatened at times, like a vortex raging within, to pull at anything it touched, draw it in, to assume it, to assimilate it, drag it down, take it under, forever lost... & a man who has come to the altar stripped cannot bear too long that empty, self-devouring place within, for it will destroy both him & everything he touches...

& so, I set out in search of father, & I found there the face of America, & across that rough-hewn caricature, her signature, writ & scrawled large, in a sprawling, muscular, almost careless hand, & behind, beneath that face, her soul & heart, the quintessence & distillation of her being: The man who dreamed an audacious, reckless, ambitious dream for all of mankind, not just for America. & when the beast rose up, snaking in her horrible fury across the scourged flanks of the world, like lightning telegraphed & forking in her split tongue West to East, that pestilential plague incarnate in whose veins sang & boiled the most vitriolic poison known yet to man, when this many-headed Hydra stood wreathed & crowned in her own fire against the falling sky of this new, impending Night of human history, he took on, he became the Moral Imperative.

I saw a black panther in a cage. In St. Louis, of all places. Where he was born. Where I had been conceived. At the World's Fair. Motivated, I think, by love, blinded by what he

took to be love, he had, in a sense, kidnapped my mother & transported her there, all the way from this dusty little town, down into Idaho, across to Montana, across the Great Plains, to the place of his birth. I say kidnapped because she was only fourteen & was wrenched from her people without permission nor regard for their ways, our ways, & he as old as my grandfather. & when the war came, he sent her back here, with me, & left to join up. She did not speak much of him over that long stretch of intervening years, & when she did, it was in a wistful, respectful sort of way.

& so, that mythic quest was & has been for the father I had never known. & that journey has brought me back here, to this room. With you. The circle is almost complete. Fate awaits our collusion in the final act. Salvation, for us, is at hand. One step at a time, through the long desert, we prepare, we come, inch by moment, closer to the heart of the Mystery, to the core, to the Sanctum Sanctorum, to the place of our undoing, to the final altar of our deliverance.

This is how a Shuswap boy goes off to march to a different drum. I had to become a warrior in his terms, on his turf.

I stayed there through the afternoon until evening came & darkness fell, restless, pacing, as though I were the caged

beast. Somehow my fate was locked up within his. I had to find a way to release him. The world was his & heaven herself cried out against the outrage of his sterile isolation.

That night, in a noisy, cheap hotel, he came to me in a dream. You must release him, he said. The key lies within. He opened a small casket of heavy metal, a pale gold in color, highly polished, with inlays of precious stones. From within he drew out a case of carved sandalwood & placed it on the wash stand in my room. He poured water from the enamel jug into the basin & washed his hands in a deliberate, purposeful manner. For several minutes he stood in front of the stand in an attitude of prayer. He opened the casket, hinged at the top, & withdrew a small, square object wrapped in purple velvet cloth upon whose face was emblazoned, in metallic vermilion, a lion with two heads, facing in opposite directions. He pulled away the cloth to reveal a crystal case edged in gold.

Here, he said, gesturing for me to come forward & join him. I ran my fingers along the case, along its cool edges, along its face to the gold latch. I tried it. It was locked. There, inside, lay a small key, intricately fashioned, in the same gold, & on whose head the same crest was stamped.

The key lies within, he said.

I awoke, soaked in sweat, hot & cold, that same feeling I would get over in Nam with the choppers coming up the river & the monsoons opening up the sky like some giant had taken a knife to her soft underbelly & ripped her wide open, spilling her steaming lifewater out over the green world on fire below. I didn't sleep for another three days.

It's what I have come to call a koan-box. This room, as you will come soon enough to see, is just such a unique configuration of circumstance. Nam was, & still is, for the poor bastards over there, a koan-box. There's no way in. & there's no way out.

III

When we shutter up the soul like a house where now no one lives, where we admit no ray of light, no annunciation from the encircling cosmos, where we sit & pine & waste away while tending the smoldering ruins of a once-blazing life, now stoked with the spindly faggots & scrap-ends of self-loathing & despair, here the sphere of human will implodes, suffocating as it collapses in upon its core.

I am the kindler, the one who gathers the scrap-ends of people's lives, brings them together & coaxes the flame of life from out of their midst. For the attentive, patient ear there may come, once in a lifetime, once in an aeon, out of her flickering core, in & out of, woven & one in the discourse of her sputter & crackle, an altogether alien, other sound, like the rustle of dry leaves caught in the throat of autumn's canyon wind, rushing headlong into Winter. I heard it once, as a green village burned, consumed in skyscraper sheets of violent flame, the sky all orange & black... That voice... the Voice of God in Fire...

I kindle the extinguished fires of hope in those whose lives have collapsed inward in a quiet, undramatic way, whose very being has the chancre & set, the slow creep of lethal rot... wormrot; the damp, stale, clinging rot of life gone sour &

ebbed away... why, one would think such a tatter of sodden detritus was utterly beyond ever catching again, any burning, any glimpse or flicker, tongue or spark of light, of heat, of self-consuming passion, awaiting only the inevitable event, the welcoming gesture of the earth to open &, with dramatic finality, assume the corpus whole into her stony throat...

I am the kindler, the one who ignites & attends at the edge of each personal tragedy in progress, hovering at the edge of each private cathedral or strictured vault, watching as the light builds behind the bars, behind the blue & bloodglass arches, the testament in vitro of a slain army of saints... silent, unmoving, waiting, still, at the portals of the outermost sanctum, waiting for the silent scream of unrestrained terror & desperation: Deliver me...

& for all of us, without exception, there awaits this, only this: Hellos, that place of stones beneath the brown & greenskinned earth, the welcoming maw & gut of terra firma, terra incognita, terra horribilis... Through my most grievous fault I come, we all come, in the end, to this, our sad, indifferent, rocky bed, & there to lie, to sleep the rounded sleep... perchance to dream...

IV

&, if you would allow me, my dear, one more story, une histoire courte, another koan-like little piece which I offer here as key to what might otherwise prove for you to be a most distressingly confused & confusing evening. It features an old acquaintance.

The Raven had stolen her lover's voice & had banished him to the mountains. He then flew up & away from the town. He waited, perched at the topmost branch of a high tree at the edge of a clearing where she met her lover each day. When she came, carrying a basket of fruit & wine, he hid in the shadows.

Where are you going, my dear, the Raven inquired, his voice now that of the lover. At first she was perplexed. The voice seemed to come from above, out of nowhere. She looked all about but could not see him.

Where are you my love, she called out in a voice as sweet & fresh as spring.

I am over here, he replied, from behind the tree. She heard a flutter of wings.

I am over here, waiting for you, he called from the other side of the clearing.

This continued for some time until, exhausted, she fell to her knees, her head in her hands, & began to weep.

The Raven grew braver, emerging from the forest directly behind her. Please do not cry, my dear, he said in the lover's voice. I have a gift for you, if only you will stop weeping so. But you must keep your eyes closed.

He stretched his wings skyward as he said this, growing in stature to the full height of a man.

She could feel his strength as he embraced her from behind. She felt a new presence here, a softness, a warmth, as though for the first time she were completely enfolded in his love. He rocked her gently until her weeping stopped.

You see, he said, I was here all along, waiting for you. & now, I will deliver what I have promised, he whispered in her ear, laying the sharp, cold curve of his beak along the exposed curve of her neck.

V

& now, with the chill of early evening already upon us, let us go inside. Allow me to pour you a glass of wine. An uncommon Chardonnay. A gift of my uncle. From the grave. Now, close your eyes. & be still. Yes, yes, I know, the blindfold effectively shuts out the world, at least the outer world. All the better to see & move about in that rich, inner universe, where all things are possible, & neither wish nor desire to be thwarted nor denied. & all guided, at least the wise so choose, by the simple, all-revealing dictum:

The sweeter sing your angels

The brighter burns your Hell

The perfect case in point is, perhaps, the sweet-throated legions the soft summer breeze of this wine promises in this, her most seductive bouquet... so altogether one with the sweat & harvest scent, the married scent of leaf & fruit & flower, crushed & commingled, all one & met in the sweat & soft hair & hard, straining limbs of that so young farm girl in those so young days when the world was forever breaking in a wash of birthing green... & for ever that enduring, full green of my so long lost youth... & in its first rich mouthful, the promise, equally, to deliver, & without thought for consequence, for the unwary, a full, riotous flood... but

of what, & at what cost tomorrow, with the breaking of its bloodred dawn behind the reluctant eye, & this, her legion of angels, her full, paling bouquet now withering, now withered on the hard, strawbrown stalk, now beaten & trammeled into & become one with the dust... our dust... O why is the womb of the world so rendered & rent, now, dry as the deepest well in this, our deepest drought... why, when we strike for blood is there only the dry, creaking rust of our forefathers' tales... why does the wind catch & creak in the thortree's branches like gall in the parched throat, why does the pale, maculate sky now ache with the tatter of a single, desperate bird... & so the caveat: Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it. But one must close one's eyes as well, for this is a surrendering to the authority of that inner world from whence the wish derives its power to become in reality. & so, what is your wish? Oh, no, no, don't spoil it all by saying anything. One must hold on to one's innermost, most heartfelt wish as though it were one's last breath & gasp of air. & it is like the very name of God. To speak it, to give it human utterance, is at once blasphemy & the curse of death to the inner power, the magic which informs, inspires, breathes life into, binds together the knower & the known, the wisher & the wished, the lover & the loved...

& a koan-question to carry with you now, as we lurch ahead in to the unknown, the unexpected: Do you think that

satisfaction, that hollow vessel of promise, ever brings anything, let alone life back? For you? For me? For any of us? Ever...

VI

You have come to share so much with me, of your lives, past & present, & have allowed me a glimpse into the future with you. You have told me, both of you, many things you have not yet told each other, things you have not ever shared with another person. It is for me, now, to reconcile, to resolve all of that which has been spoken & shared... & I, in turn, have shared much of my life & of that only the beginning. We are this night to become responsible for each other's histories, each other's lives. But there has been, & I think you are well aware of this, an intentional holding back. It is both prudent & necessary, as any conjurer worth his salt will tell you. To reveal all is to destroy any & all possibility for magic to erupt in our midst. Were we created omniscient, there would have fled the vision & the dream. This too why the Spirit of Creation has had such a lonely time of it, & why we are here at all, to relieve the unbearable burden of riveting certainty at every turn & twist. One cannot anticipate the spring of any resurrection when death has so irrevocably lost her sting...

VII

& now, the matter of my stepfather, in brief. He was in many respects a very generous man. He gave my mother many things, among them the gift of music which she, in turn, gave to me. But I railed against the imperialism of this other, strange culture, for it was his, all of it, & that an elaborate illusion, artifice, a sham of unspeakable cruelty, a precariously engineered house of cards which needed only the winds of truth to betray its fatally flawed architecture & so cause the seductive temple of her deceit to collapse beneath the weight of her own unsupportable lie. When he would play something by Satie, or, my childhood favorite, Moussorzsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," which for a brief moment would buoy me up & carry me away, a most delicious & longed-for escape, intoxicated, lost in the rapturous floodwaters of riotous synaesthesia... when that music invaded my inner world, a place within which I had sought to make a harbor of safe refuge, I would think, I would scream out, No! You can't do that! No! I won't listen! No, this can't be! But you, of all people, know of what I speak, though you have not revealed that part of your life to me in so many words. & he, he, who professes so shamelessly his love for you, night & day, a fawning Hamlet to your wavering Ophelia, knows so little of who you really are, has no idea that this most elemental of betrayals has passed across your life, an ever

darkening shadow which will forever obscure & eclipse the Sun of Love, for you... & for me... We are, my most lovely one, bound by fate, bound fatally together, bound by the raw hoops of steel which illimitable shame throws about us both, bound by the accidental collusion of this, our now-shared, most intimate Secret. It is said that confession is good for the soul, & if it comes to that, know that I am here for you. The sin is not ours to confess, but the soul needs convincing...

When he would play something by Chopin, by Rachmaninoff, I would think, no, I cannot betray my grandfather, I must not listen to this, I must not be seduced by this... but then I would succumb, & all would be lost. Irrevocably.

& so, the music of & from this other culture is, for me, laden & charged with the collision of, the irreconcilable fusion of pure beauty & abject horror & revulsion... & so, as we enter the dark, shared commonality of this enduring nightmare, we, these intrepid, fear-filled, isolate souls, straining kites without moorings, we who lean out & long to gain the full ocean's blue depth of sky, we who hunger for the light beyond this world to at last shatter & break through these grey years of stone, we who are walled in, we who are alone, wandering, yearning, stretching, reaching out towards a dawn which we hope & pray will come, which can come to be, which must

arrive, if only we can hold on, if only the centre will hold through that last desperate hour before the breaking of that new dawn of our deliverance...

& so, I invite you to come over, here, to the Heintzman, this magnificent piece of musical architecture, this fully functional monument to man's desire to steal from the mountain the fire of order, of music, of passion, of chaos, of all that binds & unbinds us, all that lifts us up to the heaven of our New Jerusalem... & all that is poised & balanced upon the fulcrum of a single, perfect note, to cast us down from the heights of Babel, whose tortuous tower we have had the audacity to both construct & ascend, & for which the toll & price must now be paid in full... Are we, then, equally prepared to set our foot upon the path of descent, down, into a hell of whose torment we cannot even begin to imagine or dream... come, come, touch, coax, unleash all of heaven & hell, batter & break open the reciprocal doors of our mutual misperception, so that the hearer & the heard, the seer & the seen become One...

But all of this is too much. For both of us. I must apologize for the savagery to which I am this evening too much inclined. The sacramental of the Hopi makes me crazy with words, I run on & on for hours, then, suddenly, I seem to break out the other side, into a still garden bathed in the

profoundest silence. I have there become pure, wordless Mind. There is never any guarantee of deliverance. Otherwise life would be an incredible bore, even for God. I do hope you understand... the wait has been so very long, there is so much to be said, & so very little time... & so, then, first to conclude the relaying of this sordid little tale, all about the wicked stepfather...

VIII

Through the agency & grace of my mother & this man who was her lover, then companion-confidante, I own or am part of most of all of this valley. In financial terms, I have more than I will ever need for this all too short life... As for me & Creation herself, I have only what any man can have when he stops grabbing at fistfuls of earth & cursing the dumb intransigence of the sky, & comes to see that it is only himself that he's cursing, only his own blood & flesh that he tears at, only his own ruination that he seeks to run down like a slaving, wounded dog, who, once having tasted of the leakage of his own mortal laceration, lusts for the taste of his own death's blood. The lessons are hard to learn. Words from the right mouth often have a hypnotic, falsely cathartic effect, which can lead one to believe that what is of the essence has been grasped. & that first feeling is usually the first caveat & litmus test of Truth: Our own hearts are most prone in this regard. How often do we lead ourselves along the ruinous path of self-deception? Sometimes I think I am my own most elaborate illusion... awaiting, anticipating its own dark moment of birth...

IX

& as for the man you profess to love, still, so madly, you know that he has not been well lately. Our little mass with its electral eucharist was a heartfelt attempt to bring us all a little closer to The Truth, &, as well, deliver him out of some level, at least, of that blackness, that turmoil, that... whatever it is that seems to be tearing at his entrails & feasting upon his liver... &, so, I have made arrangements to have him join us, in a manner of speaking, later... In my own inimitable manner, I shall, when the moment is ripe, conjure & materialize him from out of the thin air. Here, I like to do this with a bit of a theatrical flourish. Yes, extracted, distilled from out of the ether hanging between us, a warbler. He came down the fireplace chimney this morning. Made himself quite at home, once he settled down. Pecked at & made lunch of several of those dried pussy-willow buds there, the branches standing bare in that earthen vase on the table... &, so, being so well fed & taken care of, he agreed to enter into this small charade with me. With the expectation, of course, that I release him forthwith. Here, my friend, mon ami, here, the door, here, the sky, the blue autumn sky, the great round world is yours to claim...

X

You see, we are both on death row, but for one of us, there awaits a reprieve, a calling back from the brink, from a tottering at the edge, the lip of the awaiting, enfolding embrace of the Dark Unknown, the Abyss... like Jesus & Judas, for one a reprieve... but for whom... was it for Jesus in his resurrection... or for Judas, who, the real criminal, walked away a free man with his pieces of silver, only to have the executioner within turn upon & deliver him at Potters' Field...

Here, in Potters' Field, we survey the wreck born of this collision: Bodies broken, broken clay, dust to dust. We are the scattered ashes of the Divine Dream. We are the escaped species, flowers' seed borne on the wind, only to root & wither here in the shadow of Death's Mountain. Is the ultimate freedom taken when a man hangs his own life in the balance & finds himself wanting... then, calling upon the much-seamed, patchwork history of mankind, summons... summons, what... the courage, the audacity, the pluck to take the ultimate responsibility for himself... & End it all. For who knows what dreams may come... for who knows... & this, too, a gift...

Did you read Hamlet?

Did you study him, in quotations generous with reflection upon man's true condition, did you stand with him in his midnight graveyard, eyes riveted on that grinning skull, reflecting upon the fate of Poor Yorick with the tempered eye of a gravedigger's stoic honesty... did you as a woman seek beneath Ophelia's petticoats to find what she was really made of, only to find your own silken, virgin thighs there, singing in the flesh's silent, ambiguous hymn of agony & expectancy, awaiting that touch, that Kiss, that most primal moment when the past, your past, must fall away utterly like a long-suspended curtain & all of future's force & sweet fury equally must break full upon you, within you, & drown you as you gasp & struggle & claw for the light & air & freedom of that new, utterly new & transformed world, there, just beyond the wobbly green skin at the edge of this, THIS... have you, did you...

This is an invitation, a promise, a hijacking, a sentence to time-in-bondage... of Solitaire for two... I would give you months, years, the rest of my life if necessary, but it is almost over for me... I recognize this expeditiousness borders on criminal violence, but history is filled with this same lesson: Drastic measures must be taken. He will be all right, in the end. It is you, my Love, who is most worthy & most in need of Salvation. Can you not already feel the heat... Now, who is inside, & who is without, who shall pluck

whom from out of the white-hot centrum of the engulfing flame...

& a note of caution for the survivor: Come through to the other side & you will seek this ephemeral middle world again & yet again, this, all of this will become your future. The shackles, then, I warn you, are not the invisible tethers of insinuation that this Deus ex Machina forces upon you in my presence... no, you will come to love this, all of this. & me. & if you are fated to be the one to survive, it will be a bitter sentence worse than the sudden jar of Death, the event from which you now shrink with every fibre & moment of your being. Be warned.

& at once, let me offer some gesture of solace, some sign of solidarity to you, with you, for I, too - I hope you can realize, if not now, then soon, I am quite confident - walk this terror-filled path with you. Each time, the lessons of this ordeal erupt anew for me. & so, trust the wisdom of experience which yet in your eyes appears to be unbridled savagery. Trust, simply... trust the wisdom...

& now, about your vow of silence: I too was like that. It is, I think, a most prudent & necessary thing to do. This silence prepares one for & at once courts that deeper silence... time to reverberate with the drumswell & bloodsurge

of one's own heartbeat, the ebb & break of life itself
crashing & sounding within...

XI

He asked that I share a little poem with you, a prayer of sorts, before the evening got too far along. The words are his. Listen, & you will hear the music of the mescal beneath them...

Godishe Who spreads the waters
godishe Who walks upon the waters
godishe Who walks upon the air
godishe Who claims the air
(& the view therefrom, but
does not succumb)

godishe Who ascends into heaven &
sits at the Right Hand

& this (gesturing to the random clutter of dirty dishes & beer bottles, & there, within, to a hollowed space, & there, at its casual core, the vehicle, gleaming in the soft light), this is the Right Hand, reaching into time, reaching down, reaching into this temporal space, reaching out from the ineffably Other, in humility, in supplication, inert yet full of promise, a thing of beauty, a perfect wedding of form & function, at once the work of human hands & a sacramental,

through whose intercession we may seek, in a quick, trembling act of outrageous audacity, to be Delivered.

This is the altar to which we come: Introibo ad altari Dei, which screams out here, now, the mute, unwhispered, unuttered, unutterable promise: Come, come back, to The River, The River of Life, out from the small, mean, anonymous deserts into which you have wilfully delivered & abandoned yourselves, come, to The River, come, to Me, & drink deep...

XII

I have stood on a vermilion bridge of stone & wood near Fujisan, in the shadow of Fuji, & watched silvery trout rising to mayfly duns fluttering languidly in the surface film. I have watched the children fishing in the rain for them. But for some, perhaps grandfathers, perhaps, even, grandfathers of these, caught in the flashpoint folly of some blind collision, of another war in another time, all of this will be no more. & I didn't know enough to cry then. I hadn't read enough, nor fished enough, to know. Nor come home to my own grandfather lying there, nor been in the streets when the tanks & APC's have rolled by so close you can smell the metal & the fear as sharp as diesel smoke, hanging in the air... All tears must flow from knowledge.

I have heard & seen & fished enough these years between to weep, as I do now, with you, here, even without the fish rising as they did that afternoon to mayflies & the offerings of children in the rain in the shadow of Fuji, their strange, bright, liquid language remembered now in a surge of pain across all of those years...

&, if we are to live, first we must drown in the tears of our own grief.

XIII

Do you think this is the way the world ends, in the whimpering squalor of this, this pathetic here & now, that nothing, no thing, will settle, be settled, until this all resolves itself into the dew of some particular, Absolute Zero, the timeplace where all past & all future meet, coalesce, merge, fuse, become ONE in the irretrievable, irreversable, utterly unsustainable NOW, where there is no room to breathe, to move, to think, to pray, where all is reduced to the inexorable crush of God & man, here, within... that somehow you & I will talk & then, perhaps after a long while, pause & light up a cigarette &, almost relaxed, smoke in the communion of our splendid, reciprocate isolation, & then, that given & taken, talk some more, & then, pausing again, feel the inevitable winds build & fill the slack of the sail's bowl, now snapping, now worrying, but always, always, seeking the true line against, up, into the teeth of the wind, & talk, talk long into the long night & past that out her other side & into the dawn, postulating & eagerly seeking proof that there is a tomorrow, & that it will actually come, that the sun will come up, & that you will be there, stand there, here, framed in the sweet, unexpected, suddenly given, suddenly swung open door, opening like birth itself into a bright, crisp, frost-edged morning, quaking with the tenuousness of a new sun still tangled like the very bleeding heart of God in the lowermost

branches of the acacias, the benign recipient of God's casual blessing as the world stirs & stretches its way into another tomorrow... do you think... & if so, then just how so, when these hands, this mouth, this body, all of me who has known & seeks still to know you, dared to think, to assume, that it knew you, & dared to dream that it might, &, more humbling, more, infinitely more grace-filled, was known by you, had partaken, had known that kind of love, the only kind of love that any of us could ever have hoped might save us, of acknowledgement, had been touched by the trembling hand of She Who Is... O, yes, the world is afire, aflame, yes, aflame with Love, but not as we could have ever imagined it in the Garden of our Innocence: Paper & sticks & shovel & match, Why won't the news of the old world catch... all the scrap-ends, the detritus of this neat little montage of history, this curious little, intimate, small, enclosed world of two, for two, then for two only, &, in the paradox of Love, in one of her many paradoxes, become ONE, now standing room only, no photojournalists, please, though, knowing human nature, they will descend upon this out-of-the-way burg soon enough, when all of this has unravelled... the bits & butt-ends of our short days together, all gathered in a harvest for the immolation... & who will you play now, my inconstant one, perhaps a disconsolate Jeanne d'Arc... you like the ring of that in the original, the French, don't you, how it rolls off the tongue, how it suits the refined palate, how it

titillates, like a fine Loire wine, how it conjures up fractured cubist images of Cezanne's campagne, his planar, graperust mornings, the world scrubbed & given new... Ah, yes, I can see the sudden image this conjures up pleases you... regardless, I cannot be sure... let me pour you a drink, yes, here, a drink, let us drink, a toast to all that was & will never be... don't you think that's what the Divine would propose in this circumstance, having botched it All so badly... here, not something so subtle & delicate as a good Chardonnay; something stronger, to fortify us for the journey, a touch of Glenmorangie... here, smell the saltwind, the bogsmoke, the godforsaken, heartbreaking barrenness of the Outer Hebrides in this consummate distillation, this nectar of the Celtic deities... what more could one want in these final moments, for this closing scene... to us, then, to all the pasts which have never been, to all the futures which will never be, to us, to now, to Salvation, yours, mine, if that latter wish is not come too late, to these final, halcyon days before the Immolation... regardless, no matter whom you choose to play, whose persona you might wish to affect, whose skin you might strain to crawl beneath & assume, you will be stuck with who you are... & this is as it should be: It cannot be otherwise, for now, at this moment, more than ever in your life, you must risk being altogether yourself... paradoxically, you have had to lose your voice in order to gain it... this is why the luxury of the Concert Grand has

been so carefully engineered into this one-act piece... yes, the piano, by means of which you can give voice & even flight to that which no human has ever had the capacity to utter... surely, moved & inspired by the commingling of your abject wretchedness & joy, there is some inspired aria or libretto which your tutored hands & soul might play, just for us, the star-crossed lovers, something, this one last time, from Aida, perhaps, or Madame Butterfly, something fitting for this fated entombment, a sonorous grieving for this most recent & yet impending loss... but, of course, it is not like that... & yes, there is a place for tears in all of this... one cannot be expected to perform on command like a clever dog who has, with whip & prod, been taught to do her master's bidding, no matter what the cost... still, for all of that, ours is, perforce, a tragicomedy in search of its own unique voice, staging, music... & so, here shall we groan in this great travail which Fate & the cruel conjuncture of our own unique follies have visited & thrust upon us, as through this night we struggle to give birth to... to... well, God only knows what... but at last, enfin, with some modicum of honesty, yes, with the savor of buckling truth which vertigo delivers at the back of the knees, at the base of the spine when one dares to, or when one must, pushed to this last step by the way things are, stand at the Edge of the hitherto unapproached, unapproachable ... & yes, totter, life & the dizzying matrix of all that can & might be hanging in the balance, so sweet,

so moderately circumscribed by the parameters of personal ritual & the known world, caught in your throat as you stand, transfixed, at her stone lip, & gawk, mesmerized in the grips of terror, out at the face of the Innomable, confronted by the rude imperative of Death herself made immediate by this, that which lies mute, dumb as a stone, a gleaming centrepiece upon which I see you cannot help but fix the core of your attention... & so, too, I would ask you to dance, but that would be, as a gesture of what might remain, as a tatter, a remnant, outré...

Do not weep, my love, it is gone so far beyond that...

XIV

Incredible, isn't it? There is a tree which grows, just there, at the edge of the garden... there, there it is, yes, somewhat gaunt & forlorn, its leaves given back to the earth, gone to ground... & her branches there, bare, naked against the sky, mute, fixed, a witness to nothing but its self, perhaps dormant, perhaps it's simple, unobtrusive life already ended... Why, you could hang a man, a person, from any of several of her few stout branches... yes, any one of many would hold the weight of one hanged as, suddenly, the horse, on command, with the swift, most deliberate, cutting - ing of crop to taut flank, starts, leaving her passenger twisting with just enough space, just that modicum of ether which is Death, shallow but successful, withal, in a situation such as this... or the Hangman, so much a marriage of science & art met in the firm, dispassionate grip, the closing of fingers, thumb, around the fateful lever, the inevitable creak the last thing heard, the quick unloading of the spring, the resisting rasp of the bolt, at last unburdened... & the swinging free... free, at last... & all this for a handful of coins, all this for the cheap promise of prime real estate, its view (in prospectus) from some high hill in the choked suburbia of this New Jerusalem (East), not so far from, not more than a healthy stone's throw from, Golgotha, overlooking & giving out upon the blank valley of this black pastoral...

& was it you, was it not you who kissed me long & deeply, kissed me... there, you, as they looked on, hunger sharp to know who... & you turned me out, there, in that public place, with that final, other, light, glancing, noncommittal, glancing kiss, like a fly brushing my cheek, like a firebrand marking Me, There, as The One...

But this proceeds with too much momentum. A review, first, but with some necessary haste, for the dogs, though distant, have, I wager, locked in upon our scent & so threaten to undo us, before this, All of This, has run its inevitable course...

Look, there, through to the bedroom, yes, there, to the unmade bed... like Hamlet, my history condemns me, cries out for the justice which only my own hands can deliver...

Is this all that life is to be, to emerge from the earth, to sweat & groan, to pack around some several pounds of dirt & water & traces of that & this, to flail & swear, to hurl obscenities against this dumb firmament, to rail against the absolute dumbness of Cosmic indifference, to be driven by Chaos Herself to this Inn, this small consortium of rooms, this shallow, closed stage, with only us, this most confined & diminished of pluralities, as actor & audience... was it all to be, is it all to come only & always & forever, to... This....

XV

& now, we are going, with your indulgence, to engage ourselves in a little théâtre à deux. Actually, you have already provided, created the prologue. Out of your selfless, giving silence, you have woven the voice, the chorus of human history. With music. No, the compositions cannot be named, for to do so would defame & despoil them. Their essence lingers, ginger & honey on the whetted palate, & so, we are enticed, prodded, led inexorably towards an inner sanctum as yet unknown... to either of us.

You see, this is a play within a play. As old as the Garden of Eden story. The old shell game with a new wrinkle: Who will save us if we are not busy & about saving ourselves? &, as in any war, some must die so that others might live.

My brother Luke was just such a casualty of this latest installment of this war on, waged by, against, & on behalf of humanity. Enough of it, enough war & you can get hooked on this life & death stuff. Without it, you feel dead. With it, you suffocate, it is impossible to breathe, you lurch from one breath to the next, drowning in an amorphous sea of fear. But you must have it. You crave that adrenalin rush, the face of Death breathing in yours, Death waiting at every turn, & you, reciprocating, waiting for That Moment. He got hooked on The

Wheel in Saigon. Ixion's Wheel, he called it. The game is simple, timeless. You hold a revolver to your head. & pull the trigger. First time, the odds are one in six, & from there, diminishing with each round. In the aggregate, it's one in two, you or the person sitting across the table. Russian Roulette, the Slavs came to name it in one of its incarnations.

Now, in my training for the priesthood, we were taught to see ourselves as conduits of God's Love, his grace, his forgiveness. & taught, too, that He doesn't forget. & the place of solitary remembering is called Purgatory. But I wasn't about to wait around to be fired like some precious metal in the white hot furnace of The Father's Heart, to be drawn into the mysterious, flaming Heart of His Love, across a thousand million years of unbearable agony, all in the name of Love, of purgation, so that I could, finally, shining brighter than a thousand suns, stand pure, vindicated, worthy, before my God, Father & Creator. No, I decided, & perhaps wrongly, that I had had enough of that God & was ready to take matters into my own hands. Once in Nam, one becomes quickly convinced that Hell is here. & deliverance but a simple act of human will.

XVI

This is the heedless cipher of love, written across your aching body in an indelible script, branding you forever, marking & signing you until the sad inevitability of your End, giving witness to the world & all those who would lay claim to you in some fictional, as yet undreamed future, proclaiming that the hand, the body, in all of its elaborate design & manifestation, the Mind of the lover, has touched you, here... & here... & here... the kisses, now bruises & welts, turned as soon to maculate scars that soap nor water nor years of regret, nor yet a million years of wishing will ever take away... All the sign, the seal of this brief, cataclysmic encounter...

You see, I have been all things to all people in my life & always ended up being no one to nobody. Until now.

The first, last & only bullet slips into her chamber with such absolute certainty, the zero-tolerance snugness of her nestling there, polished metal on polished metal, her silver wish & abstract desire honed by long years cartage to this single purpose, shaped into being & conscripted for this purpose only, for such single-minded endeavour, for this absolute event of culmination, so long so still, so quiet, utterly inert, awaiting only the compact, the will, the Act,

the fall of the hammer, the strike of the pin, sealing forever the fused fates delivered of these crossed paths, these lives bound, entwined... & when the fated hammer falls, death brings life, change, release... nothing, no thing will ever be the same for either of us, ever, again.

XVII

Why the fuck were we in Nam, why were we in fuckin' Nam, what a fucking rhetorical question. We were there for the same reason that bullet has come around in its snug little chamber to that point of proximity in relation to the hammer. The gun was loaded. We either met them on their ground or they had the gun at our head... it's all so very simple...

I offer you this rare gift: The secret of the warrior is to wake, travel, sleep with Death at his shoulder. Here. Here it is. Death & Life commingled, fused in the imminent oneness of possibility: The Lady or the Tiger... which shall it be... & you get to be in such an immediate, raw-scrubbed way as indolent life never allows, wallowing in its anaesthesia of slovenliness, in the way she grinds us all down into the senseless nothingness of age's terminal moraine, left to lie there, at life's edge, like a dog in the ditch, a minor footnote in our children's legacy of lies... here, seize it... only at Death's door, tottering at the edge of the abyss, can we feel, inhale, become kindled & burst into the full fire of life's immolating flame, only here, when Death awaits with such wanton expectancy, can we rage &, spitting into her face with all the surety which only our total abandonment & collapse into the eager arms of uncertainty, claim: I am alive, finally, fully, here, at the very utmost edge, in the

Here of Now, Alive. Take me, death, if you dare, for I finally Live.

& for whom did you pray, just now? Or, perhaps I should say, to whom... You were praying, weren't you, with that expression of rapt detachment transfiguring your face... I could not make out your words, your plea. Was it the Angel of Mercy? Or, would you dare it, the Angel of Death? It is no matter, it is all the same, it is all one, of a piece, your prayers are here answered, you are to be delivered from all, All... of this... for they are one... & the same... for Mercy would deliver you from this... with Death... & Death, in her turn, would be as merciful... Yes, my love, I am your Angel of Mercy, your knight errant, your new sun rising on that fresh, bright Garden just now & for the first time glimpsed... you will come to thank me... & more, to love me, to seek me out in the furthest dark recesses of your unexplored life... you already do, in that heart of hearts within you, where I have always dwelt since the beginning of Time: When your heart has been battered by the insistence of my love to unleash you, to remove the fetters of your self-imposed bondage, there, there you will find me, there, with you, in a garden within, a place of which you have only until now dreamed, a place where you have always been, asleep, that Sleeping Beauty... Behold, my love, I am your knight, your pale rider, your deliverance. & this, yes, I will in my own way be gentle, this bright, cold,

precise instrument is the sacramental which bonds us, even as I speak, binds us, in Life, until Death does cleave us asunder... & that, soon enough...

& what would you teach me, what is worth sharing with the other, here, on death's row, in this, the final hour... I guarantee you one thing, my love, this is where it happens, on the edge. Survive this & you will live forever. I have. I do. I will. The knowledge of all things will be yours. That knowledge is immortality. Problem is, you may not want it once you have gained it... What would you teach me? Cat got your tongue? It happens in a moment such as this...

Let me tell you a bit more about how I, a humble journeyman soldier in Intelligence, cut loose on R & R, came to this lesson. But first, now, the first sacramental: Hic est inem Calix Sanguinis Mei... qui pro vobis et pro multis... This is the Chalice of My blood... which shall be shed for you & for many... Yes, here, soon, in the consummation to be commingled... this fruit of the vine, this work of human hands... a little wine, a little of the sangre de toro, as the Spanish are wont to call it... some fire for the blood...

&, as we go, as we approach the penultimate possibility, there is some raw element in us which seems always to seek expiation: We seek the forgiveness of some unspecifiable,

unprovable entity, for our self-perceived sin of having lived, breathed, fucked here, in all the honesty which our bare flesh will allow, here, sweating on the cave floor, looking up & out at Night, at the stone sky of stars rolled in tight against the collective inner sea of mounting fear... Here, now, Love, these are only words... besides, the night sky is now at bay, banished to the wings by the brightness of our burning... why, one might conjecture that this, this newly forged honesty, entre nous, entre deux, could kindle some such small corner of the universe as... as this...

XVIII

& now, for one last little detail. You have of course noticed that stack of papers to the left of the gun. I have placed them there for reference, in case I need them. You see, there is no one in the wings to prompt me, should I lose my way. I have led a fast life, one into which I have managed to cram all manner of odd & disparate things. In addition to being a priest, an Oblate manqué, & a warrior-soldier, the soldier part, at least, as well, manqué, I have, now, so late in my short life, turned my hand to the task of the playwright. & this, this script, is a collaborative effort. Oh, do not be surprised when you hear who my co-author is. Or of the nature of our little play.

Here, let us end the unbearable suspense. Pick it up, leaf through, & please, look only at the page numbers, upper right hand corner, until you arrive at page forty five. Now, read it aloud, if you would, from the top. It begins: & now, for one last little detail...

Yes, my love, it is you. & me. Or, at least my part in this holy charade. And you, yes, as much by your silence, by implication. What is withheld is so often the greater presence, & speaks all those volumes the labouring mind & voice, straining in tandem, cannot. & our mutual co-author, of course, the co-author of your love, & now, of your deliverance, of necessity in absentia, though present in text & declaring his unflagging devotion, in these so many words...

Now you know why we had to be away so much, together. We did promise you a surprise, didn't we?

& here it is.

No, your voice will not be found in the text... this is all Gestalt: I am the figure, you are the ground. & now, your voice is yours. Claim it & use it as you will. Recall, the Raven stole the Lover's voice. Not that of the loved.

& I know you could not help but recognize his voice beneath mine, from not so far away, at the edge of the clearing.

He has given himself to me so that you can be free, free as a bird to claim the air, to go in search of the land of eternal spring... & so, as our friend Pozzo says, Speak, Misery!

XIX

It is done. What follows is in essence mine, though you may notice the occasional dark, nihilistic lapse. You may still detect that dark, florid voice creeping in, for he has touched me & has become a part of who I am. & how I speak. I of course had to tell him everything I now share with you. You had to see us up there, at the cabin. Me. Him. & the gun. He was like a dog dancing 'round a rattler. & if it was I at first who in a sense stole his voice -mescal can forcibly rip language, the very throat out of a man, given the right situation... he has been paid back in full. He has his wish, the gift of clarity, to see the world anew, to walk again in the Garden, to return to that point of utter stillness at the moment of Creation, before things were named, before this, this Potter's Field of shards & remnants... he has dined in the shadow of the gods, he has tasted of Paradise, & would now become One with that himself... yes, to apprehend, to see, to experience the world anew, made, washed clean, cleansed, & above all, unnamed. This is the moment to which the koan delivers us. There, the hands can plunge up to the elbows into the primordial ooze, & there to shape out of the undifferentiated morass that which will separate this Paradise from Hell.

But this collaboration, this co-authoring, is of no mere text to stand as an island, isolate & orphaned, a voice crying in the wilderness. It is our island & fortress, an encompassing buttress against the pressing, rude intrusions of a world gone mad, tangled in the lunacy of her collapsed religions, defeated idols, bleeding armies of failed hope... this is our humble island, ringed about by the now calm waters of our imminent silencing, when the words, the world itself, slips away. What was to have been the hour of our impending defeat, the exposing of our Achilles heel, the stamping & sealing of our common fate, all of this is undone... & this, simply, later or sooner, the acceptance of our mortal condition, that we shall die... why it is incumbent upon us to take arms against this erstwhile sea of troubles, &, by opposing, end them. In this lies the pathway to Salvation.

Without Death, the circle is never complete. & so, we invite Him in.

VI

DOWN FROM GOLGOTHA

Thus says the Lord God:
I will throw my net over you with
a host of many peoples;
& I will haul you up in my dragnet.
& I will cast you on the ground,
on the open field I will fling you,
& will cause all the birds of the air
to settle on you,
& I will gorge the beasts of the whole
earth with you.
I will strew your flesh upon the mountains,
& fill the valley with your carcass.
I will drench the land even to the mountains
with you flowing blood;
& the watercourses will be full of you.
When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens,
& make their stars dark;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
& the moon shall not give its light.
All the bright lights of heaven
will I make dark over you,
& put darkness upon your land,
says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 32.3-8

I

I have placed you upon that stone altar, a holy & perfect sacrifice, a holocaust offering... & this, this is all there is, the smoking embers of love's funeral pyre....

O lost innocence, O Garden of our Youth... My god, I say, my god, I can only say, laying all of this to smoulder in its ashes at my own feet: My god, why have I forsaken you. Did I not deny you three times before the eclipse of our Love rolled her ending stone across the shallow mouth of my grave... & is there only the Tree now, only the tree of ultimate undoing, of unremembering, is this the final resort, to undo, to deliver myself at my own hands... O that it should come to this... & where are you, now, at this dark juncture... do I play the Endgame prologue alone? Is the End Scene reduced to this charlatan, one man show, this thin, pathetic monologue delivered across the floodlit abyss of years, this lyric script which only you could ever begin to understand? & for what purpose, to what end? To forgive? To be forgiven? & what, then, to what end... This is not the redemptive love of Aida's entombment, there is no lingering, bittersweet aftertaste... this is all blood, ashes, dust & death...

The cat lies on the bed. Strips of cerulean cloth, blazes of vermilion flowers, shooting stars, stuffing, a smashed music

box... Lara's theme plays no more... This innocent victim, a silent witness to the unspeakable carnage of Eros blood-drunk in the rough boudoir of her final hour... is she to be the final witness to our love, now broken & cast on the scrapheap of uncaring, our love... & do I play the End Scene to her now lapsed music...

I see it, I can finally see some of it now: We are, we were, in the figure of a dance, the movement of a fugue with counterpoint... Now, in the final act, you slip away, assuming the role of the disease for this small town, summer stock tragedy... & in the end, when the rusted, creaking apparatus delivered her deus ex machina, her horrible, dark god downstage centre, in the horror of that last moment, in that final, blinding flash of illumination, when it was all too late, irrevocable, collapsed beyond imminence, all lost, lost forever, I saw it all as it really was... It was your flesh, not his, which bled. & mine. & so, in my utter folly & weakness, I sacrificed you, my first & only love, there, on that altar, high on the Mountain of Megiddo, for that thin promise, for that handful of petty change, for those few words: You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased; I will sit you at my right hand...

I stagger to the bar, soaked in the blood of this rupture. What will it buy, what will they serve me for this, the price

of your purchase, this small pocketful of change? I stagger, soaked in the blood of this unleashing. I stand, framed in the doorway of room # 12, the end unit, at Rosie's, the Sacred Heart Motel. Reeling. I stagger that endless half mile down Riverview, backlit by that fading, pulsing, floating core of fire, neon orange, the Sacred Heart aflame, bright as a branding iron, floating in the enmeshed branches of the acacias. Across the bridge. Over her bed of rock the River rolls below. In & out of the muffled roar Lara's Theme plays. Every step is a step away from all that ever was, a step towards the tomorrow which will never break... No, there is no weapon, no sword (it lies broken in the dust), no gun (like that silverplate Colt .45), none but this: Love, Love which will conquer all, Love in red all along this shirt front, the sleeves, these jeans, even these boots, for I am fresh from the graveyard shift at Love's abattoir... I stagger, the price of the next drink a dull silver in my eyes, brave, courageous, emboldened by the capricious notion that at least one thing will be set right this night... but, you see, most loved, my beloved, my betrothed, you who were in joy to bear our children, in this bait & switch version, where Gary Cooper plays opposite Frankenstein's Bride, he still gets the leading woman. Beneath the dimming stars' light, encouraged by the thought of no tomorrow, I stagger toward that place of final reckoning, over the bridge... the bridge of my yearning, the bridge of my loss, towards the hotel...

II

When I arrive, Biily will tell me that you are there, in the upper room, still drinking with friends.

As I near the crossing, the bell's warning strokes sound her brassy countdown. The dark scrub plain pulses & fades beneath the signal lights' alternating flash. A southbound train blares the warning of its awful, piercing moan. The night close about is filled with the hot rain of a thousand meteoric sparks. I can smell, I can feel in my guts the screech of steel against steel, straining to curb the blind desire of so much inertia, unstoppable, rushing headlong into the inevitable, her headlight a deathray, a beacon of insatiable lust searching the night, cutting with a thin swath of sharp light across a hidden world of sagebrush, rock, Ponderosa pine, telegraph poles... I can reach out & touch the metal skin of this screaming beast as she shakes & rolls wantonly along her tracks, sparks trailing, catapulting headlong into the waiting, embracing cavern of dawn. I can reach out & touch the fallen face of the heavens...

But I cannot ever again touch that face. Nor ever hold...

I fall backwards, into the tangle of sagebrush, into the darkness. I look up at the stars. Darkness descends.

We are inside a movie house with six projectors all cranking out their narrative sequences, superimposing, layering a discordance of slithering, stuttering, sliding images across a broad, passive screen; the conversations, the music collide, mix & fuse in a hopeless cacophony, a black hole of meaning from which nothing can emerge... & then the images begin to converge & coalesce & suddenly it is all so clear, so sharply in focus, there you are, the masked avenger, triumphant, & no one except me knows who is there beneath that mask, because I alone have sold my beloved into slavery, I alone have wielded the two-edged sword of Love & have delivered her, I alone have dared to gaze upon your face & presume to know you & name you, for I alone have dared to bid this high, to pay the ultimate price... & when I wrench that mask from your face, it is merely my own which meets my incredulous gaze.

You loved me well. Well enough & long enough for your own purposes. But I swear there can be no sunrise for you to ride off into. The Sphinx's riddle is at this turn undone. The price is paid. This night, the ancient curse is lifted from the land.

You are there, naked, sitting in the balcony, wrapped in a sable coat. The cat sits in your lap, unmoving. It is a broad, curved screen. Lara's Theme plays to a snowswept wasteland: This is the Siberia of Pasternak's longing & loss,

painted large to dwarf & humble us in our insignificance, & so facilitate the lie of romantic tragedy; drifts begin to form & build, peaking in ambitious crescent dunes in the aisles & between the empty rows; the music becomes Ravel's Bolero (remember, Ingrid used to play it on oboe); the images are of a blazing, sandswept Sahara; You stand & shrug the coat off, away from your shoulders, & toss it out into the crowd. You stretch, now languid in your nakedness, the sand gathering in shallow pools about your feet; Charlton Heston's chiselled profile appears in The Greatest Story Ever Told; He is there, Moses beneath the skin, to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land of Dick Nixon's Amerika (I, too, shall soon enough stagger out, lost, wandering into the high, thin desert which awaits & beckons backstage of all of This, seeking out my own small trinket of consolation); the music is innocuous, brassy shlock...

All this separately &, at once, simultaneously. Then, piercing the deep silence, comes the heart-rending, breaking voice from the projection booth: "Where is Didi... we must play the End Scene... before it is too late... we must... " & I, in character as the Red Horseman of the Apocalypse, bathed in the blood of our deliverance, so unprepared to play opposite my reluctant Bride of Babylon... & the other, the White Horseman, laughs, &, in that stagy, true-grit bass voice, yells Hiho, Silver, Awaayy! & bolts up & out from the

screen, out, over the audience of screaming, idolatrous teens, & like a fading hologram, vanishes, evaporating utterly, into the thick, smoke-filled air...

& you rise, emerging from your sea of sand, in the splendor of your nakedness, a wreath of small, white roses constricting about your crimson heart, your hair aflame in a tangle of morning stars, your belly round as the full moon with child, arm, hand outstretched, as if to intercept him. &, beneath your foot, the ruby-eyed snake, lipless, grinning... You do not see me there. Your eyes, which gaze out into the void, into the neverland beyond, are only for him.

III

In the upper room, Lonnie & Tom are playing pool, on the small table. Hey, you look kinda shaky, partner. He gestures in my direction without making eye contact. Hey, Billy, he hollers down the stairs, bring this man a jug of our best!

He finally pivots to face me, upstage centre. Me & Tom here are playin' a serious game. He got me five straight last night. I was a bit shaky, to say the least. All that mescal. Owns most of the town now, lock, stock & barrel. This one's all or nothing. The whole shot. Even the bar. We always move up here, to the small table, when we play for the hotel, so the clientele don't get nervous. Makes for a nice, intimate game.

Tom opens his mouth to speak to me, but sees that something is happening behind the staged posturing & takes a haul off his cigarette instead.

The feast is over, Lonnie says, though to no one in particular, &, so, to everyone in the room, including that generous, anonymous crowd below, beyond the footlights. Last night you ate & drank for free. He pauses, looks at Tom, then, tilting back his hat & wiping his forehead as though it

were midday, looks at me. But it may just have been your last supper. Tonight, you pay.

Then, like it's written into the lighting script, a shadow falls over him. His expression changes to one of real concern. Rolling towards me with that understated swagger, he reaches out, preparing to put his arm around me in that sidekick, bar room, cowboy fashion of his. This is how he welcomes & pulls men into the fold. This is how the world ends, not with a bang, but with a staged embrace.

As he moves closer, his mouth begins to form more words. But I cannot hear him. The room is bathed in a suffusive red haze. Tendrils of smoke float & pull, hanging, wavering like rust-grey seaweed in an ebb tide. &, just like a shark has hit him hard & full in the midsection, his body jerks forward, he folds & goes under in a flash.

IV

I watch you get into the car & drive off down Riverview, as nonchalant & unhurried as you might have driven into Merritt or Cache Creek for groceries, a bolt of cloth for a summer dress... I watch you in cutoffs & that peach halter top, your hair bleached by the sun, iridescent with sparks, in a swirl of braids pinned up at the back. You have time & inclination even for these touches, I think, & for whom, for what, whose face before yours there in the mirror, for whom this work of human hands as you sat, to whom will you run... I am, given even the grace of this great distance of remove in space & time, aghast at the everyday matter-of-factness, the ordinariness of that final gesture. It plays like a paysage moralisée, one in which I plunge, like Icarus, into Breughel's bay of banal suffering while you, fiddling with your lipstick in the mirror, look out upon another shallow sea breaking upon the shores of another world.

Though I cannot know it, this is the last time... & as time has stretched out, away from that moment, that defining moment (the End Scene, as it never could have been anticipated, never have been rehearsed nor prepared for), the exertions of will & memory darkly, violently yoked in this twisted travail of love's final act, have etched, burned every freeze-frame motion (the closing of the trunk, the key in the lock, the

right hand pulling down the shift lever) in an acid bath of longing across the metal face of this private tableau, the template of my unrestrained grief...

I watch the car, my father's car, incongruously new (though no longer shiny) in the midst of our new lifestyle of violence & poverty, as it rolls in understated luxury over the bridge, then left, up Highway 8... I watch the car (later retrieved in a parking lot in Spokane) & you within, eclipsed in a dull brown cloud of dust, swallowed up, gone, as in the powderflash of some conjurer's closing act of incredulity.

As before. With even less. Not a single word. No clue there, as through the night I wait & wonder, the cold sea of inevitability crashing at the screen door. The first bloodviolet streaks of dawn catalyze the raw welter of fear, apprehension, the all-embracing knot of self-loathing within... the floor beneath swings away, the trap door which betrays the set & crack of the hangman's noose, away & free, a black ocean of distant stars all about, underfoot...

The executioner is professional, distanced, all in black, his head encased in a hooded mask, the bare flesh of his hand still on the lever beside the fridge. He has, for this brief, charged moment, propped his sword against the space heater. A half empty beer, still cold, sits on the counter top. The crowd swells in the stone field of the public square beyond, anxious to discover the going price for dimestore tragedy. A lack of interest in details has obviated the need for a jury. To a child, they are hungry, attentive, appreciative at the revival of this soon to be again popular style of public theatre. But soon enough, a general, collective ennui sets in, they turn their backs &, counting their small blessings against the backdrop lesson of this spectacle, turn towards their lives with all the paradox of renewed vigor.

You, who have made me to lie down in green pastures, have delivered me into the hands of my enemies.

Inside the white oven of desert days I hang. Strapped beneath the grey rainbow's promise I hang. Left to the inventions of capricious night, I hang. Like some cruel clockwork the carrion birds of yesterday's garden descend in tightening spirals, punctual, efficient, motivated, sharp in their blind desire, sharp of beak & claw, quick to search out the eyes, the genitals, the liver... for it is death without burial the triumvirate have handed down from their lofty mountain; they want me there, humbled, Prometheus fastened to his stone, defeated, in some broken, twisted attitude of permanent expiation.

As sun breaks on the third day she cuts me down from the scaffolding of my undoing &, lowering me from the unrelenting, pitiless sky, lays me down, there, amongst the stones beneath the bridge. She covers my nakedness & cradles me in her arms. Though I cannot see her face, I know these arms, the rise & fall of her breast, the subtle, electric feel of her skin against mine, the fragrance of breath, of hair, the power, the magic of these hands, holding me...

I call your name across the rough waste of stone beach, across the wreck & desolation of these years...

From this distant point far in the future, I hover high over the rubble of that canyon floor, scanning, until I see us there, a final figure for this dance, a closing pose as these lights dim, a sculpture in evening grey stone, a Pieta for all the world's misbegotten.

V

This new-sprung world is a full-cut diamond nestled in the farthest corner of my heart. Beyond the open window the bird-choir's hymn of consolation promises death beyond the life it coaxes. Here, out where the benchland drops away, the rivers meet in an arrangement of permanent collision. & still, the round world wheels, bringing night to day, day to night, delivering the condemned, without pity & on time, to the Morning of their Affliction.

Hear me, Love, singing in the high wild branches of the acacias, hear my words, dumb as stone, see me stumble in the wild tangle of hawthorn, bleeding in the reddening dawn, tumbling fresh-born into the arms of Chaos.

See the flies buzz about the afterbirth, a glossy, clotted lump of cold, purple promise discarded casually at the ditch's lip. See the high birds wheel in the canyon thermals, eyes like diamonds, lusting to plunge & rivet on any next random corpse. Outside my thin-curtained window the seed-pods rattle dry percussion for this impromptu dirge. A train moans & screeches, its cacophonous wail building as it slows through town. The stoke of ancient cinder, the cool balm of diesel anoints the morning air. I rise, navigating with body memory through this minefield, past the random wreckage of tragedy's

now struck set, staggering out through the lacerated screen door, its top hinge sprung, out, beyond, into the sagebrush, the scattered gravel, the broken glass...

What will be enough for heaven, what the price of atonement for this Blasphemy, what the expiation to be exacted for my sin...

The earth is without shadow. All beneath the press of reddening sky is stilled & transfixed in its communal terror. This great, creaking stone groans in the awful travail of a new birthing. Soon, she will disgorge her dead. Soon the fullness of our history will stalk & set upon us in our dread. Soon the great Unnumbered will gather us in, claim us, press us with bare-hinged clavicle to the sharp, welcoming emptiness of the fractured sternum.

O god the cruelty of your creation, the sick wilfulness of Destiny unleashed like a slaving dog upon this unsuspecting cosmos. We cower in our dread. Naked in the newness of our discovery we fall beneath the sharp Flame of Vengeance. Beyond the flush of jasmine, the blood-ripeness of the pomegranate, out past the perfection of the Rose in her wild, sharp beauty, past the now jewel-bright sky where the hummingbird hangs & hovers, its own perfect green jewel, a new articulation invades: The language of metal on metal, the

language of discord, the bloodrust voice of all the wars that have & are yet to fill our history with her blood, this Other Annunciation. The gates swing outward upon this other Place, this place in time which is Time's dominion, of disease, destruction, decay, Death...

VI

Excepting his own last dramatic gestures & exit, you were his last trick. You disappeared that crisp autumn morning, vanished from the face of the earth, headed off & out along # 8, up the valley of the Coldstream, vanished in a cloud of gravel dust. This is how my world ends, with neither bang nor whimper, but with dust in my eyes, my throat, with all the shallow world covered in a patina of dust... the world turned to ashes, numb, an empty set in a vacant, vacated lot...

You call out to me come here, come, in a low, almost too calm voice. You recount the events of the evening as though dictating to a court stenographer, as though I weren't there. What was it? A confession? I search for complicity down the sterile hallways of these fractured years, I call your name, I seek some crumb, some overlooked clue, some lapse in the tone of voice, in the cadenced measure of your telling, a suppressed flinching, something spoken in a code I might have realized...

Did you stagger, yourself mortally wounded, from that holocaust?

What happened?

Now love becomes death, the most bittersweet transubstantiation, the flow of honey become, in my now dry mouth, sodden ashes...

I reach back... I reach back to grab you, to shake you, to make you reveal to me... what... & what might I ever have expected, for no one has ever returned...

VII

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way:
the unclean shall not pass over it,
and fools shall not err therein.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come upon it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

Isaiah 35.7-8

I

You are not there. &, suddenly, you are. I can't believe that there's a problem. Must have been the pothole I hit coming out of Sault Sainte Marie.

Recorder. Something Celtic. Stirring. Joyous. These European touring cars don't have much clearance, a few inches, just enough to breathe, so as you approach, my angle of vision narrows rapidly. Your waist, thighs, knees disappear above the bumper line. Soon, all I can see are your sandalled feet, ankles & a few inches of skin & calf. You are a dazzlingly beautiful woman I think in that brief second hanging suspended there before either of us speaks, before either really sets eyes upon the other. More than beautiful. Something long untouched stirs in me.

Problem, you ask, yes, problem, I answer, tie rod's come loose. All I need is a bolt. My kingdom for a bolt, I say as I grasp the underframe & pull myself out into the light.

& I am right. & as we mix & fry bannock in the pan & smother it with butter & jam & wash it down with cheap, sweet Ontario wine, we are already, we will confess to each other the next morning, madly, deeply, irrevocably in love.

Somewhere in the night you turn from me & sit, naked, by the fire & play. More Celtic music. There are no names, you say, when I ask, the music is its own. The music is the earth & sky. It is us. Now.

I sit there, behind you, growing hard against the small of your back, cupping those small, perfect breasts. The wavering light of the dying flame plays across you, washing over you in a soft vermilion light, your copper hair like fire... Transfiguration. You are she, the work of human hands, now come to life beneath them.

Come to me, I whisper, kissing your neck, my hands at your waist. Come. Here. Half rising, you turn to face me, & swinging your right leg over, you sit in my lap, straddling me. You have come to life, I whisper. You throw back your head & laugh.

Look at this face, I say to you, look & deny that you have ever seen or loved me before this night. You are mad, you whisper, absolutely, but you are right. & clasping your hands behind my neck, you lean back, pushing down on me.

II

Before breakfast we swim out, out upon the face of the Great Lake, to a small island a few hundred yards distant. Though the sun is still low over the pines, the air is already warm. This will be the first hot day, you say, matter-of-factly, summer always has a false start, like this, then pulls back into spring, or even winter.

Winter, I think, seized by a sudden, inner chill.

Something breaks in me when I watch you run full tilt into the calm face of the lake, fall into a shallow dive & disappear. A cloud moves before the face of the sun. I look about, watching to see where you will surface. But you do not. Panic. I plunge in after you, stroking furiously in the direction of our campsite.

Then. Then, I hear your voice. Like music over the water. Laughing. You are sitting on a rock, back at the island, your knees pulled up to your chin. You wave casually in my direction.

Relief. Anger. Confusion. A bittersweetness cutting like a knife through me. I am rough with you, grabbing you by the shoulders. No words. I look into your eyes, those eyes, &

the tears come. I kiss you hard on the mouth, perhaps too hard, with too much desperation.

It is when the kiss is returned, deeply, & with great passion, that the dark welter of fear, of engulfing apprehension begins to slip away.

III

It's a Vanden Plas, whatever the hell that means.

What it means is that this leather gets hot as hell with the sun on it & the backs of my thighs sweat like crazy. Here, give me a towel from behind you.

You're trying to seduce me, I say, & you answer, hey, you seem to be in charge of that & I reach over & gently squeeze the back of your neck. That neck. Again, that chill of recognition, & with it, that unannounced, paralysing wave of fear. Again, the shaking. I put my hand back on the wheel. But it is no use. I can't conceal the violence of my agitation. I pull the car over onto the shoulder, get out & walk across the shallow ditch to the edge of the trees. I don't want you to see me like this.

You wait silently in the car, the passenger door open, your feet out on the gravel. I don't know how, but you seem to know I need patience.

It starts to slip away, enough that I dare to risk returning to the car. I'm not feeling well. A chill, I think. What they used to call the ague, I say with a weak grin. Will you drive?

You look at me with a childlike expression of guilt. I'm not old enough to drive. I don't have my license. Now you know.

Now I know. Now I know the price, & so soon, of love. & now that there is something real, tangible before me, a perverse, almost pathological calm sets in. They have taken it all from me once. The world, with its attendant sun, moon, stars. Never again, I had vowed. But this. Not this.

IV

Don't take me back, you pleaded. I can't go back, not now. You can't take me back to that. But I did.

It was dark when I let you off at the Gulf station. You had not looked at me the whole trip back to Marathon. Nor I at you, until you got out & turned away, leaving the door open. I watched you go inside, saw the flash of recognition, then concern on the man's face as he handed you the phone, felt the coldness of his eyes meet mine through the fluorescent dazzle of the glass.

I lasted six hours & thirty seven minutes without you. Five hundred miles. Exactly. Five hundred miles of hell. & another four hundred & ninety seven miles & another five hours & fifty four minutes back.

& there you are, sitting on a convenient deadfall by the side of the road, recorder to your lips, eyes turned skyward in a feigned posture of obliviousness.

You run over & begin before the door is even closed. I called my mother. At least that's what Charlie thought. I said no, it's okay, I'll walk. He knows we live only a few blocks from

the station, down River Road. You look at me, finally, & begin to sob uncontrollably.

I have lost you once, I think, tasting the salt of your tears, mine. Enough.

V

If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there. Lewis Carroll said that. It's my motto, sort of a tiller for my little sail boat as I head out on the rough waters of life.

Any road, indeed, I think. &, I think, my deep passion for you, my Love is, as always, the compass of my life. &, with you, now, there is a road, Highway 17 West, the Trans-Canada, & a destination which, as we travel, will reveal itself.

& what's your motto, you ask, with that wonderful, infectious, girlish grin. I think for a bit, five or ten minutes. The road is all curves here, with hills breaking on smaller lakes, rivers. In a few hours we will again be in sight of The Lake.

Then, from the past, it comes, shaky at first. The way. The path, yes, that's it...

The path is made by walking.

Whaa... you say, your mouth falling open...

VI

The nights are not enough to contain our love. How often have you impetuously grabbed the wheel & yelled, here, there, right there, see it, yes, perfect, isn't it... an old logging road, a broad gravelly stretch with a copse of birches, dipping down to the lake shore, anywhere where we could park the car out of sight of the road, anywhere we could find or fashion some rude bed beneath the trees, the sky...

VII

Props. Stage business. If there's a gun on the wall, someone's gonna use it. Theatre 101. Lesson 1. & so, fumbling, looking for something, gum, lipstick, I forget what, you extract a key from the map pouch along the door. Omygod, I think, there's another key. Yes. The other key. What's this for, you yell out the window.

I'm standing outside the car, shaking out the sleeping bag, & before I can say anything or reach in, you have inserted the key in the glove box.

My Pandora, what have you unleashed upon the world. There it lies, inert, obtrusive, a buff, gunmetal grey.

You turn & look at me with a mixed expression of curiosity & unbridled horror.

Goddammit, why did you have to do that. I grab the gun & lock it in the toolbox, in the trunk. I go down to the lake. Alone. It begins to rain.

I return about an hour later. You are there, asleep, huddled in a makeshift ball. Innocence. Passion. The world. & now, this.

Neither of us speaks again until night. We drive another four hundred miles.

I pull into the Sportsman's Motel, east of Kenora. I circle about the topic in silence. We lug what little we have into the room & try to settle in. Confusion. Fear. Anxiety. Cold, sweating palms. That tremor. & the confusion turns it all to anger.

You think this running away with a strange man in a fast car is the height of adventure, don't you. Do you like this, do you find it attractive, seductive? Dangerous? Living on the edge?

The gun was my father's. A family heirloom of sorts. A rather unattractive birthright. It's a good thirty years old. Army issue. He was an officer. Forestry Corps. Went over poor, & when he came back he was full of some powerful ideas about how the world should be. He settled right into looting & pillaging his way through half the timber left in the Eastern Townships. The Robber Baron. Money. What a joke. I have a trunkful. Legally mine. All stolen, the backbreaking work of bucherons & sawmill workers, the hard-earned land of rock-tilling farmers driven to the brink of bankruptcy. I'm rich, my love, infected with the seductive power that this tainted legacy brings. This, the road we are

on, is the road back, into the heart of me. Who I am, or at least who I once was... the gun is the riddle... & the answer is here, on the road... & there, outside, locked away in the trunk.

I don't need the gun to fend off looters. Morally, all I have belongs to the wide world. & that's where it's going. Back. The world is so twisted I need a gun to set it right. You see, they won't simply let you hand over things that are not yours so that you can get on with your life. You have to make them take it, at gunpoint. All I want is a fair exchange. What they have stolen is my past. I'm in search of that past. You are part of it. You know that. The rest lies days ahead, beyond tomorrow...

I can take you into Kenora & put you on a bus. This is no place for you. It is Love, & the world, & blind Fortune which find us here, in this bare room. I'm going across the road to get us some coffee & whatever else they might have. Maybe even some hot food.

You sit silent in the harsh light of the lamp beside the bed, unmoving except for the tips of your fingers, as though you are remembering notes, chords, playing music. You hum softly to yourself. I bend & kiss your tear-stained cheeks, the

palms of your hands, your thighs, wet, salty, where the tears have fallen.

Come, my love, to bed. I will be back soon. When I come back from the bathroom, you are already asleep, breathing deeply, with a disturbed, restless energy.

When I return with the coffee & food, you are still asleep, but less restless. I crawl naked beneath the sheets, to lie there, to be with you. Still. & as you sleep, I watch, the keeper of your solitude...

VIII

We make it to Winnipeg for lunch. You call your mother. When you return, you look relieved. She's okay. Strange, but I'm the one who's worrying about her. I told her I've taken off for a few days with a friend from Toronto, up to their cottage on the Nipigon. She's pretty upset. Of course, they don't have a phone, so I have to call in. I said I would, every night.

We stop at a laundromat & unload what we have. You stay & do some wash. I park the car about a mile away, at the end of a street in an affluent neighbourhood, where the car won't be too conspicuous. If & when they find it & make the connections, it will be too late.

I come back two hours later with a Mustang convertible. Perfect cover, I say, who would suspect...

The sky to the west of Winnipeg is a vault of perfect blue. The uninterrupted brownness of tilled fields lies in wait, stretching west to the horizon. The air suddenly fills with swarms of mottle-winged butterflies. Soon the windshield is smeared with them, streaked with black & yellow ooze & fine wing-dust, like pollen. When I pull over on the gravel shoulder to clean the windshield, the car fills up with them. & as we accelerate slowly away, they are caught, swept up in the intrushing wind, & blow away, up, trailing behind us... like confetti, you shout, like we're newlyweds... & it is like that for me, too... but it is so fragile, so tenuous, like the butterflies themselves, blossoming with mindless trust into the warmth of spring... & into what future... & when & how will I ever be able to let you share my life...

IX

You are the only one who can help me. You will be my angel, only you can intercede, only you can help to put all of this right... Won't you?

You see this, all of this, this is what's left of my life. She was just your age when we met, & as quickly as these few days have passed, we found ourselves there, in the Garden. Only you, who are here with me now, can understand. I know. I know by the way you hold me, it's there in your eyes, the touch of your hands. Deliver me, I beg you. You must. Look, here, it's in here - not all of it, but enough to build upon, to make sense of, to find the way back... surely there is enough here that I, that you & I, together, can find & set foot on that path. There is something in us, in each of us, which, fired in the heat of this new fusion, has already begun that journey. Will you, my Angel of Mercy, will you come with me...

& so, as we set out the next morning, you begin. At the beginning, with the first set of fragments. Holding each piece tenderly, as if it were fragile parchment, a scroll just discovered in the nether recesses of some sacred desert. My life is in your hands. It is hard to tell as we drive through the grey wall of rain: Is it the wind coming through the vent

which pulls at each sheet, or are you actually trembling... After several pages, I pull over.

What is it, I ask, my hand on your arm. You are shaking, aren't you... is it the cold?

You sit there, leaning away, your cheek against the rain-streaked window. Yes, the cold. The cold nights, the cold days, the cold years... Mine. & yours. It has been so long since either of us has been loved that I'm afraid we... me, at least, that I... I fear I have forgotten how. My heart feels it, my body screams out for you. You know that. You are perfect, so perfect... too perfect... for me... & I don't know how, I just don't know, how to love you... It feels as if it will rain forever... you know that feeling, like the whole world is being washed away, drowned, lost, & we, at the eye of the storm, about to be caught up & washed away with it... & this, oh Will, this... can this be your life... It's a story, tell me you're writing a story, that you're just a character in this, this fictional world of yours... let me see these hands, are these the hands of a sculptor, touch me, touch my face, my eyes, my lips, my breasts... What do you feel, is it stone waiting to be shaped, an angel waiting to be released... & are you... were you... there... in there, for all that time... look at me, into my eyes, I must see for myself where you have been, what they have done...

We awaken in the deepening grey of dusk. I can feel, hear the rise & fall of you breathing against me. Your breath is sweet with the scent of fresh strawberries. The drone of the heater keeps the outside world at bay. An opera is playing on CBC. Aida.

The world is too much with us, I say softly, my hand on the swell of your breast. Place des Arts. With you. So long ago. Winter, first year. They are entombed. He does not yet know she has sacrificed her life to be with him in those final few hours. The cruel irony of love, a dagger through the unsuspecting heart. It is too much, you say, the catch of tears in your distant voice, too close...

It is over. Nothing. Nothing but the drumming of the rain. Breathing. Silence.

We are both on the run, you whisper. Bonnie & Clyde. It's obvious: We need each other. I will be your navigator, your guide, your compass, your historian. & you... you will be, if you will, food for the journey, a place of safety, the hands I need to mend & put together all the broken parts of me...

Yes, I say.

Yes.

X

I am so desperate to consume you, to have you, all of you, so completely, so utterly, that there is nothing left. There can be no holding back, no secret places. I want you to be there, in the flame, with me, consumed...

You lie beside me. In a halting, fractured rhythm, you tell me about the others... I insist.

You pore over the sheets, the loose files. There is something missing here, isn't there? I have read far enough to know, it's like a big hole is opening up in the middle of everything, but I don't know why or what it is... you have to tell me. This stuff scares me. But I have to get through it, all of it... I don't want to be in here. I want to be in another one. Get rid of all of this. Burn it. I don't belong here... I don't belong... You begin to sob.

You need to start over, you say through the tears. We both do. You have to go back there, I now know you must. But then, when it is over, we just keep going. To the Island. Tofino. Wreck Beach. We need to be free of all of this...

I go out to the car & bring in the locked toolbox. This is the key you are looking for, the key to my life, I say,

holding it up. & here, under this array of commonplace tools, a most uncommon work of human hands, a collaboration unique in its intent, in its outcome. It's all here. I have only read it once since that time at the lake. It was the night before you appeared. It all stays there, bound, until the time is right. There is a place you are coming to soon. You will know when you are there. When you arrive, you will think to yourself, I must. Now. I must.

In the dark we lie separate, isolate, alone. This is no good, I think, no good. This, this has worked like a poison. She has come to drink, & now... the life ebbs out of her.

I reach out for you, my hand running along the small of your back. You roll over, pulling away. If we sleep, it is a restless moving in & out. Somewhere, out towards dawn, you turn towards me. I feel your breath at my neck, your hands on me, desperate...

XI

But I do have a place. Just for you. & for me. & it is this, us, here, now... Do you know any of the accounts of what happened to Jesus after his resurrection? Luke tells of Jesus meeting two of the disciples on the road. They walk together, talking. But, for some reason, they don't recognize him. Here, reach in the drawer. See if there's a bible. I'm sure I saw one.

You pull out the Gideon. I was a good Catholic, you know. Guilt, shame, fear, a twisted love, all of it. I still carry my beads with me, sort of a security blanket, though I often wonder how it can be. It seems to keep hell at bay, but at the same time, makes it seem so much more real, & even inevitable. Especially to someone who has lived the life I have... & do... Luke. Hmmm. Must be right at the end... here, here it is, the last two pages.

There is something incongruously beautiful about you sitting there, naked, crosslegged, the bible open in your lap. How could anyone do other than speak the truth at such a moment as this... & how can I hear anything but Truth...

You begin:

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening & the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread & blessed, & broke it, & gave it to them. & their eyes were opened & they recognized him; & he vanished out of their sight.

Tears now in your eyes, you repeat the last two lines:

& their eyes were opened & they recognized him...

& he vanished out of their sight...

This is about you, Angel, about how you fell from heaven that morning, on the road to Nipigon. It's about me, who at first did not recognize you. & how, later, by the fire, in that holy, illuminating light, you were transfigured... & I could see you for the first time, see you for who you really are. & you, me...

& that circle of passion begins, moves, of arms entwined, of hands in hair, hands upon the skull beneath, upon the warm, breathing, beating, yielding flesh of the other... & who leads & who follows lost in the flux, the constriction of awareness until there is no air, no breath, & all comes in hard, quick gasps... the falling away of words, the closing of eyes, the shutting away of all that is not essential... the entry now

gained into this mutual temple, this bright, blazing architecture of bone, of flesh... & at the core, beating, the pure, raw urging of that now single desire, mindless, driving... name me, you say, name me, with your mouth, with your hands...

XII

Can I give it a title, when it's done, you whisper into my neck. It's the wide-eyed innocence & openness which, when they are there on the surface, amaze & humble me. I breathe in the animal fragrance of your hair, your skin, all of you...

You know, we fit together so perfectly, lying like this. I imagine this is what it was like for Adam & Eve. In the Garden... What do you make of all that stuff about the apple & the serpent, you ask, tracing a widening spiral out across my chest & down, along my stomach.

Lonnie explained it in Zen terms. The Garden was the experience of oneness, of no-mind, before the knowledge of self-awareness, otherness, separateness created the illusion that we are not One. But we are, here, in this miracle. They shall erect a shrine to our passing, here, at Indian Head. They shall speak of it as the place of Second Enlightenment.

& they will erect a lovely, simple cairn by the road, like the ones we built at the turnoff to every old logging road we explored, made love up, along the way, but bigger. To commemorate that place where your car broke down, & where I fell to earth, there, on the road to here, to wherever it is

that we are going, now that we have found each other.
Again...

On the Road to Emmaus! Your face lights up. That's it,
that's what we'll call it. & it shall be ours... a chronicle
of our love...

XIII

The path is made by walking, he said... did you get that far yet?

You look across at me in desperation, slumping against the wall. Look, we have to bury him. There. In the past. This is no good. I'm going to stay up all night if I have to, to finish this. All of it.

I go out to the car & return in a few minutes with the bound stack of yellow sheets.

Here it is, the rest of it. All of it. Take courage. I'll be in the other room if you need me, writing all manner of nasty things about you. About how obstinate & changeable you are, how wilful, about how you fell from heaven with much to learn about the human condition...

XIV

& we did as we said, well into the next morning. At about eleven, you come into the room with a few sheets of paper in your hand. The yellow ones. The final pages. I have never seen you looking like this. As though someone had died.

You stand in the doorway & begin to speak in a low, flat voice. We have to leave. Now. It's a two day drive. Or a day & a night. Here, look at the map. This can't wait any longer. I have to see for myself, I must see & touch & feel... I can't know you, really know you, until that has happened. Your life, mine, ours together, hang in the balance.

XV

In this precarious, awful balance, I think, as we drive through Kicking Horse Pass. Rain. Heavy, blanketing cloud. Fog. As if the sky had collapsed. The heater, again, on. The windshield slapping time to music no longer there. Warning...

We make Cache Creek for breakfast. It's another thirty five miles. A little over half an hour, if we don't stop. I hate to say this, but you dont look so well. You ready for it?

The fog is heavy, obscuring the canyon all the way along. Still, the straw brown hills are visible through the scudding cloud. I remember the first time I drove through this country. It was like driving through the Mind of God, I had thought. & now, after all this time, the waiting, there is only a vague numbness...

We stop at the turnout overlooking The Bridge, upstream from where Rock Creek joins the main river. But this is still all a world of words. The valley is socked in. Tight.

I light up another cigarette. This won't lift today. Not with this rain. & the wind's from the southeast. I want you

to see it all. In the sunlight. Everything has to be right, just the way it was that first time.

We drive back to Cache Creek & check in at the Goldrush Inn.

It's old. Let's do it, you whisper, like a child about to do something forbidden. Maybe it's real.

I'm going to get some beer. & some food, munchies. I go outside & stand in the rain. Such an odd sensation. To be here. No shakes. Quite the opposite. & no more pills. Free at last, I dare to think. A pervasive calm seems to have set in. I feel this incredible strength, a power which allows me to do anything at will. Like when I would control Anton by placing everything, my books, the clock, the pill tray, the furniture just so. & he would come in & look about & sense something had changed, but didn't know what. Or thought nothing had, but had no way to be sure. Always off balance. I got to him. & then he would rave & plot against me. & here, the weather: It will stop raining by evening. Clear tonight. Breaking clear & bright & sunny & getting warmer & we'll be there, rolling down that last hill into The Bridge, & there will be nothing I can't do, nothing I shall look upon which I shall not be able to understand, no one I meet whom I cannot persuade nor dissuade from this act or that intrusion... all the power of the earth rises up into me... I

am coming back in glory, I think, trailing clouds, from the Father, who is our home...

We drink beer & eat & make a yet more passionate, desperate kind of love. This is the Garden, I whisper over & over, to me, to you... this is the Garden...

The ceiling is a dusty mustard yellow. I look over at you. Naked. On your stomach. Asleep. Breathing deeply. Away from the world. I am again struck by the simple enormity of your beauty. I can't bear to think about how young you are. The lamp on the nightstand casts a parabola, dark & light, up the wall. Dark & light. & me, now us, on a tightrope, suspended between the bright sky & the dark, rushing water below... Soon enough, they will find & descend upon us, intent upon destroying us, returning us to the cages of our own isolate hells. Never. You will never separate us... what God has joined together... He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword. Or, perhaps this time, by the gun. We will be sitting at the bar. In the upper room, if it is open. & they will want i.d. & will want you to name your father. & I, the names of the victims, the chronicled secrets of the War...

& we sleep, & when it is dark outside we awaken to the sound of semis braking for the weigh scale across the street. More

food. Cheese. Salami. Bread. Macadamia nuts. O'Keefe, in cans. & more love. & talk, the delicate lattice bridges we construct between us, across, when the world of words floods back in, when we fall away, when the isolation threatens yet again to set in...

You know, I never had a father. In grade school I used to fantasize that God had come down in the form of big, white bird & had made love to my mother, some kind of clean, pure love, clean & shiny & spotless & white as a supermarket egg. & I would imagine I was destined to be the same, that I would have a child when I grew up, a boy, & he would become a priest, & he would be like Jesus, telling parables & healing people, & I would be there, silent, loving, like Mary, always there, even when they took him down from the cross.

You get up & put on the blue & white dressing gown I bought for you in Thunder Bay. You go to the dresser & pick up the stack of papers.

I am in there, Will, all of me. I want to know how I got there. I want to know what I was doing there, in that other life. & how you could have known me before that day, on the road to Emmaus, when the skies opened up & I fell out of heaven... I don't want to talk to anyone. I just want to go back, to look, to watch, to wait, to see... & I don't want to

stay there... I couldn't stand that. We have to know. All of it. Or we will never be free. I used to think it was just you. Now I know it is for both of us...

You get up & head for the bathroom. I hear the water filling the tub. The windows mist up from the steam billowing through the open doorway. The water stops. Silence, except for the metallic, watery sound of you moving in the tub. Confession time, you yell out. I lied to you. I didn't know I was capable of doing that. Not to you. Especially not naked.

Actually, my uncle killed my father. A crime of passion, they said. My mother became the town whore. I had to tell you, before we got there. When we do, it will be your turn...

XVI

We descend into the valley. A fresh morning wind funnels up the canyon, green with sagebrush & the acrid odour of leafing cottonwood. A front has come through, moving out the low cloud. A few last tatters hang at the edges of the canyon wall, moving upstream, dissipating. There it is. The Bridge. Houses enough for a few hundred people. Two motels now. One on the other side of the highway, away from town. The bridge, gunmetal grey, spanning the rush of dark water below. & beyond, the hotel. An ache wells up within me, a flood, something unnameable. I hold back the tears, choking on their bitterness. I gear down & turn left, down, past the Acacia Grove Motel... where it would have stood. Burned. Burned to the ground. Partially bulldozed, some of the charred footings still visible. The square outlines of what once was, there, in place, speak like fossils out of shale bedrock... What once was... & I can see it now, burning, the flames reaching high out into the summer night, that redness like dawn, a bloodlit dawn, all across the sky above the river...

I look over at you. You look at me as if to say something. That look of incredulousness, as though to read, to believe in one's heart were one thing, but to see where the nails went in, altogether something else...

Down Riverview, left, over the bridge, right, & there, just past Pattison's general store, the hotel. The brass sign is gone. In its stead, flat against the front wall & above the broad front doors, a modern, backlit sign, in yellow, black & red: Tom's Place.

Only the bar's left, looks like. You ready?

No. No, I'm not. I'm not ready to go back five years in time with you. I'm not prepared to face, to see you face your past. Not yet. Please, let's go back out on the highway. We can see if that motel has a unit with a kitchen. Cook some lunch. Then maybe go for a walk.

XVII

It's as if something is folding up, closing in upon itself.

It's only a matter of time. A few days. A week at the most. & what will happen to you? Asleep. Again. Innocence. What will happen? You must not come to any harm. I would do anything for you. Anything.

Tomorrow. It must all happen just so. & so, the words, the gestures, all of it must be prepared. There must be an opening scene in which the characters, the events are sprung, set in motion. & I must be in control. Nothing can be allowed to go wrong. I must be the author. This is the watershed, the point of no return. This last stand must be taken. Here.

P.S. Please include this last entry with the others. You know where it is all to go.

XVIII

9:35P.M.

Love,

These are my final words for you. For now. Amor vincit omnia. Trite, perhaps, but I do believe it is so. & now, I put on my armour, I become for you the warrior you have never known, & from here, out into the night. To seek. To know. To claim. To vindicate. Forgive me for all that must come to pass.

1:05A.M.

Love, my Angel of Mercy, I have come back. For you.

Tonight, All has been revealed to me:

Beneath the empty sky It hangs, a Perfect Nothingness.

A pure, single Note sounding, held.

A word, The Word, uttered, without end.

The Heart of Being burns out of the Sacred Bush.

The World turns. The Sky slips away.

Stasis. Convergence.

This is the time of the Perfect Offering.

This is the time of Reckoning.

Immolation.

All is within the Flame.

XIX

Excerpts from a taped interview, made at the R.C.M.P. detachment office, Lytton, B.C., May 30, 1974:

In the beginning, no, he did not hold me against my will. In the end, those last hours, yes. He had the gun. His father's revolver. He woke me up at about two a.m. He crawled into bed beside me. He whispered he loved me, like he always did. Then he started stroking my hair & talking about the next day. About a pool game. About how he was going to take Tom on & about how he was going to win the whole town. For me. For us. & give it back to the Rock Creek Band. & about this act of salvation, as he called it. He kept talking about saving a woman from a burning wreck, about how that's what the scars on his forearms were from. & how he had burned down the motel across the highway. & now, it would be the Heartland Hotel. Lonnie's place, he said. He went on & on about saving me. He got up & took out a bottle of scotch & started to drink. He was gulping it down like it was water. Then he went to the toolbox on the table & unlocked it. He took out a manuscript, a sheaf of yellow papers, & poured scotch all over them & threw a lit match on it all. & I yelled, no, Will, don't do it, you're crazy, & I threw my pillow over it. He stared at me in a way he had never looked at me before. Here's the real answer, he said, & he reached into the toolbox & pulled out

the gun. We're going down to the hotel, he said, & wait until it opens up. He's in there. I went out under the stars tonight & I listened to the river, & the river sang blood, blood, tomorrow's streams shall fill & flow with blood, & the sky answered, only darkness, only darkness, & the wind whispered now, now. He was very worked up. I said no Will, God, no, you can't, you don't know what you're doing & he said get in the car. He said it cold, hard, businesslike. & I said don't, don't, then he grabbed me by the arm & forced me out into the car. He had the gun. In his jacket pocket. He put up the roof on the car, then drove us down to the hotel. We parked across the street, by the CN workshed, & waited. He took out the gun & held it against his leg with his hand. Don't talk, don't say anything, he said. We have to be quiet. We have to be calm for this. Then, he started to pray. The rosary. Some of it was in Latin.

At about ten, an older man came down the street & walked into the bar. You see this, he said. He held the gun up in front of my face. Empty. & this? This is the bullet. He stressed the word "the". The only bullet. It goes into one of the chambers. Like this. I took this bullet from the cabin & hid it in the roots of a cottonwood, down by the river. It's one of his. Silver. The last bullet. He was saving it for the woman who killed his brother. Into any random chamber. Close it up. Spin it. There. Let Fortune decide. C'mon, lets go,

he said. He grabbed me & pushed me ahead of him. When we got to the door he pushed me up against the wall & kissed me hard. Very hard, on the mouth. It cut my lip. I could taste the blood. All right. We're ready, he said, & pushed me in front of him, through the door. There was a man in a wheel chair by the pool table. He pulled the gun from his jacket, levelled it & took aim. All I heard was a click. That's one, he said, that's The Agony in the Garden. The First Sorrowful Mystery. & he did it again. Click. & the second mystery. I don't remember the other names. & he went on until, I think it was, the fifth time. The Crucifixion, he said. This is it. Vengeance is mine. & the gun went off. The person in the wheelchair had turned away & was moving down the hall. He got him in the back. I could see the blood & he slumped over...

VIII

THE KING BENEATH THE HILL

Yea, dogs are round about me;
a company of evildoers encircle me;
they have pierced my hands & feet -
I can count all my bones -
they stare & gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
& for my raiment they cast lots.

Psalm 22.16-18

I

I am the King beneath the hill. So late a crown. A spiked wreath of longing. Sharp. Hungry. Hungry for my undoing. The blood has caked in dry rivulets. Nothing of me has escaped. Nothing escapes. Except the bones. Not a bone broken. All intact. Whole. An odd blessing.

I am inside. There is at first no light. Time passes. Hours. Perhaps days & nights. Then blinding light. White. Pure. & they, too, in white. White robes. You are my angels, I say, gesturing in the direction of the door, now swung wide. You are here to deliver me, to roll the stone away. The angels, I repeat. Tell me it is so.

But your actions betray you. Not yet, a voice says. Not yet. It has been a long time, another voice answers. Such a long time. The angels in their mercy, I pray... in their infinite mercy...

Again, it is dark. Night. The music. I sit, propped against the wall... what is it... Ravel... a piano... oboe... violin... a single violin climbing to a single note. & held. Like a bridge. But from where... to where... & the thin, distant bridge becomes a thorn driven through the eye now hovering in this dark place... & the thorn now a spike... &

now, a lance... I am transfixed, I cannot move my hands, my legs... I scream, but there is no voice... I hear a loud, muffled flutter from behind, above my head... large wings beat & hover over me... Nothing. Then a dry rasp sounds in the silence, a wing brushes my cheek in a searing swath of hot pain...

I see a large bird, a raven. In a thorn bush, All black but for the golden eyes which fix upon me... the eyes of a woman, now of a man, now my eyes...

Suddenly, through them, I can see, see the world of the raven, the woman, the man, my world... & now, from the sky, on oily black wings, a river below, broad & raging, & across her back, a spidery arch of riveted steel. The Bridge. The River...

& the held note ceases, resonating in the dark, melting into the silence... & with that, free fall...

II

Each separate universe begins with the naming of things... & ends with their forgetting...

& so, this day, which in every respect qualifies as the most ordinary of days to be, when the flower-ends of summer past are about their business of rupturing parent seed & spilling them out, full, into the wind, & as the cliff swallows busy themselves erecting invisible ladders up through the dizzying blue canyon air, &, below, the beasts of the earth move in some rough stasis of accord, the world & its subsuming universe come to a grinding halt...

Somewhere between Rosie's & The Heartland Hotel, all of this begins to unravel, like the sleeve of a sweater caught, suddenly, on a crooked, hidden spike.

Eros has bedded down with Chaos. Their offspring of bright, insatiable violence lurks & pulses beneath the now translucent skin of everything seen or touched, heard or imagined... & in my waking dreams I come to know that the far-reaching eccentricities of outrageous possibility are but the palest irruption of a vastly greater, darker & all-consuming eclipse which awaits its hour to descend upon the world. & finally

comes The Angel of Mercy, The Angel of Death, announcing: The Time of Deliverance is upon the earth...

All of this, All comes to pass, though now so dimly & so incompletely remembered that, hour by day, I must remind myself that it was indeed so, just so, though it seems so impossibly long ago, & so much separated & lost & fallen away in the intervening welter of events... now so dimly remembered, looked back, down upon, as through a glass darkly... & so much separated & lost...

The great trick of memory is not that it haunts us with the myriad circumstance of particularity; rather, its great gift, for the spirit open to her bestowal, is that she sows a profuse anonymity of gifts, great, beautiful, blossoming things which root & rage in the most unexpected clefts & crags of our lives; it is less what we have lived & more what we have made of it, how one day builds upon another, which transforms the lived, &, by accumulation of grace, life itself. & so, in the most improbable of ways, the extratemporal & the hypodermic meet: The dog beneath the skin sniffs out the ineffable & runs down the bright, tattered kite of this last tomorrow.

You awaken me in the night. There are no words. It is a touch, light & fleeting as a small bird's shadow. Where it alights, there is kindling. You smoulder. The dark festers, the sheets ignite, burst into flame & we, wrapt about in smoke, ascend... & here, Now, so much later, again, descent... No one gets out of here alive... the barbs, the springloaded hinges of reality, the traps of being... time itself... inexorable, a one way street of ultimate necessity & denial... & everything white, so white, sterile, clean, everything pervaded, infected with the underlying, all-consuming rage for order: You must know your place, the fascisti blare through their bullhorns, or you will not survive... All in white, the Time Cops patrol the halls, ready to enforce the unavoidable dictum... just think it, a furtive, revealing sidelong glance & they are upon you, shaking you with the rage of electrostatic generators. Place this in his mouth, the big one says in a rough whisper, his hot, stale breath in my face. There, to be a reminder of his guilt, his complicity, his mortality, a denial of the human sacramental. Strap him to the speedwagon of brother Thor. Whirl him about in a snapping rage of blue, plumed fire. Set loose in him Lucifer's ravenous bird to wheel & feed in the high desert of his abandonment. Then, past days & nights, hurl him into the black pit of anonymity & unremembering. &, when he awakens to his bed of cold ashes, beg him rise & join the others, to feed upon the thin gruel of yet another endless tomorrow. Teach

him the first lesson: Crucifixion. That once He died, that was All & enough...

& you, the brightly burning, self-forgotten, are the salvaged... & they have their way, again & yet again, & the pain rolls in waves up from your feet this time, instead of the searing, white-hot rain standing in shallow floodpools behind the eyes: All of this is the rain of forgetting; all they instil is the transience of Now. They wield & scar you with the hot brand fired in the Beast's breath. His bottomless eyes fasten upon yours as he enters you, grinning his backward, lipless grin of the gargoyle's ecstasy. You are Inside, incommunicado, beyond the hand of rescue, of any thin gesture of love. Beyond Salvation.

& I pray for a vision, that vision, that you will reveal yourself to me... I smell you, ripe as wheat hungry for the harvest's knife, fresh as bread dough rising in winter's kitchen... I taste you as you hover close above me... I feel the cool, summer sweat at the small of your back, the earthy garden roughness of your hands...

& when they cracked & burst the sun behind my eyes, hanging blue sheets of flame across this shrunken sky, & when they made me the small god to answer for human history & pulled the

plug of time & raped me & threw me to the masked dogs of my own darkest despairs... only you were there when I returned... each of the endless steps taken on this, the Road to Golgotha, The Place of the Skull, endured for you, each frenzied round of the Stations of this Cross made endurable by you, here, on the bed of boundless breaking, where they strap me to the obedient engines of unquestioning affliction, where I am made to explore beyond the far reaches of human endurance how far we can run through the Minotaur's maze of confusing pain before we drop, before the very stars themselves drop from an incredulous sky & leave even the thin, unlit night of Absolute Zero black & aghast at her own illimitable savagery...

& I awaken to dreams of ripe wheat & risen bread, of summer's harvest time in the high, green fields beneath the mountain... these eyes, these ears, this place & time, the skin & hands & blood & tears, all are much out of joint... & I lie here, this coveted object of their science & practice, of restraint most violate, past nights & days...

He offers me a cigarette, a palliative, a proffered expiation... darkness comes... There is the clatter of a trolley, the metallic scrape of a tray... He returns with all that is sharp & hard & cold... there is a scream... I fall away, tumbling, freefalling into the black throat of Night...

They pick me up & whirl me about... what days... what months... no words, nothing can be named... I am in a room with a window... I hear a quick, harsh voice: For God's sake, you fools, you've gone too far this time...

Somewhere in my childhood, a dog barks... I once was a child... & there was a dog... There is something between my legs, blue as night's sky, swollen & threatening to rage... there is a sudden sharpness in my arm... bright spikes of pain blossom up inside me...

I am in a room without windows. It is of stone, a vault filled with coldest water. I have forever been here, entombed, somewhere beneath a northern sea, my memories the shadowy fragments of this dream, flickering in the wet forest of light & seaweed... & am now so very cold. The sea breaks in my veins. My heart is a tidepool of ice.

From blank-faced flowers the seeds of remembering fall, sharp shards whose barbed roots & razor leaves cut & sinew, bolt & weave sky to ground, heaven to earth... a fraudulent remembering of the bits & disparate parts of the nothing that never was. More bright, blossoming spikes...

I remember a golden, rolling field, under white, nuclear sky... I remember you... there is no face, no name... I

remember the smell of your skin as you come in from the garden. It is morning. I am there to help with the harvest. There is a man... he is busy with wires like thin, dark snakes, with screws & plates, & he puts something somewhere it should not be & sparks & spikes & shards of color & light & pain erupt & explode & he's gone, vanished in the blue incense of ozone & smoke. Such rare events are past redemption. We know it. Our silence beneath the cicada's lament is proof enough. & all that long week, the fields reprove us in their fullness. The wind, heavy with the scent of imminence, brings her high tide of motion to our eye, threatening all the unthinkable which cannot, must not come to be. Ever.

I can no longer love. The mooring chains of animal insistence fall away. They have done this to me. Death has riven like the axe which cleaves this universe of darkness & light. There is no raging against the wilful claim of this new Night. Dawn does not, will not come. I float face down in this shallow sea which breaks, so close, beyond, within...

A dog barks. It is Lazarus, driving them along the road, over the narrow bridge, up the final slope to the barn... Finally, a name... I pray against hope for him to deliver me the names of the Innocent. Before the next tide. & I pray against the glass wall of this rising sea... They wheel me away... In far rooms, I hear the crisp whirring of larger wheels, like

great metal things come unhinged, great winging androidal beasts escaping at the speed of light. The lesser gods of repentance lean out in this starless night to feed on the pure prayers of my suffering, these thin, desperate birds which fly from all of this...

Another room without a window. Again, I am strapped down, prepared upon this cold altar for the place of unremembering.

In that instant before the first crackle of that dry, swarming hum, just at the dawning of that blue-faced sun of absolute unrestraint, at that apex of silence & emptiness, your name erupts, a welling of sweet water up within me. With the blind logic of gravity & love, it seeks, then rests & pools at her ancient level. In some far, forgotten garden of my heart, in some newly-watered cleft or crag, a small, brave flower claims all of this cosmos wrapped in darkness, &, in the breaking of that instant, I know that no thing can ever be taken from me again.

Maria.