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Too Quiet the Révolution

Richard Lanoie

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in
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of
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ABSTRACT

TOO QUIET THE REVOLUTION

Richard Lanoie

Communication, a bilingual word. These nine stories confront barriers to communication and attempt to cross them by using unconventional techniques to present particular voices. The characters express and affirm their identities when they are challenged to exercise an individual voice or when they really hear their own voice for the first time. The stories examine the raw materials of communication; they are voice stories, stories about voices.

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Lyrics to "Complainte du phoque en Alaska" and "Le blues d'la métropole" copyright Les Editions Bonté Divine. Used by permission.

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I'M DREAMING OF BILL GOLDSWORTHY

"My mother and your mother were hanging the clothes. My mother punched your mother right in the nose. What colour was the blood?... Wishar, the blood!"

"Blanc."

"Wha...?"

"BLACK!"

"B-l-a-c-k spells black and you get first pick in this game of hockey because the king and queen say so."

This is how I learned English, through songs about my mother and engine engine number nine going down Chicago line and if the train went off the track did I want my money back. For a long time I believed all in the balligin yadoncomoutyarit! was the proper cry to

end a long game of hide-and-go-seek: if you say it loud and fast enough it works. Usually, the king and queen didn't say so, so I'd be it. But for ball hockey the rule changed.

"Okay, Wishar, you get first pick."

"Greggy."

"Aaaaah, I want to play for the Canadians!"

Everybody wanted to play for the Canadians: a whole backyard full of Mahovliches (whoever won the fight was Frank, the loser Pete, until Frank's last season when the winner became Pete), Lafloors, Hools and Lapoynts. Chuckle Charly, the kid about whom the new kid would always ask me "Wishar, what's wrong with him?" and then nod understandingly, was John Ballivo, making sure you knew who he was by screaming Ballivo! Ballivo! each time he scored because he could never understand Ballivo had retired three, four, five years ago. But when the king and queen said so, we would be the Colorado Rockies, the Atlanta Flames, the Kansas City Scouts, the Cleveland Barons or the California Golden Seals. For a while the other kids didn't mind because my team was the Toronto Maple Leafs: I'd received a pair of Maple Leafs gloves for Christmas. Eaton's was out of Canadian gauntlets.

The next Christmas I found a table hockey game under the tree. Everybody wanted to come up and play with me; they'd never seen one like it. It was the best table hockey game money could buy: legs, an

automatic puck dropper in the scoreboard, battery-powered little red lights behind each net for when a goal was scored, and you could pull the goalie for that all-white sixth attacker to be set in the permanent peg hole behind each blue line. It was a Bobby Hull model that featured the Chicago Black Hawks against the Minnesota North Stars and each player on both teams had a Bobby Hull face, the goalies a fat Bobby Hull face. It was the first Christmas nobody got new clothes as presents, but every single table hockey I'd ever seen featured the Canadien.

The next year I spent my Christmas money on more metal players for it. I could have picked the Eastern Division, the one with all the established teams like the Bruins, Hawks, Leafs and Canadien, but I picked the West Division assortment, fascinated by the new colourful uniforms of the expansion teams: Blues, Kings, Stars again, Penguins, Seals, and Flyers. The faces and fat goalie faces on each player on all six teams were the same, but I never figured out what famous player served as model; they kind of looked like Chuckle Ballivo.

I did get a Canadien line-up of metal men, a whole team of Jean Béliveaus, but the goalie was missing so there was no fat faced Gros Bill, when I spent a few weeks at the Montreal Children's Hospital and coaxed them out of the nurses and the game-room attendant. I mask-taped the five Jean Béliveaus to the bars of the bed until Dragon Lady, the night nurse I didn't get along with because she only spoke English and I addressed her in French, came into my room to untape them; it just wasn't done. I might have been able to keep them if I'd

explained, in English, that having Jean Béliveau circling my bed made me feel safer. I'd just set them back up the next morning and Dragon Lady took them off at night.

I got the table hockey game because my parents often watched me play with my hockey cards held upright by the cracks between the floorboards in my bedroom. When a marble hit a card, that player got to shoot by coming out of the boards, bending and flicking. I rarely used my Canadien cards, always preferring to line up other teams and changing the players from time to time with other cards from that team: I didn't want to damage the Canadien cards and setting up a Canadien formation meant they had to win; they always did in real-life.

That was useful. I always was a Canadien fan, listening to René Lecavalier show me the game in the pocket radio under my pillow, and the milkman and I had an ongoing bet on the Saturday night game. Since the Canadien always won, I'd find a quart of chocolate milk by the door every Monday morning. When the Canadien were no longer a sure bet, he moved to the States to run his own dairy farm.

For years I collected hockey cards. I'd check off new acquisitions on the checklist O-Pee-Chee provided and always end up with twelve Lafleurs, sixteen Pète Mahovliches and ten Jacques Lemaires but never get Bill Goldsworthy of the North Stars; Bill Goldsworthy was the card I wanted most: I wanted to see if the French version of the blurb on the back of his card would finally make sense. In English, Bill Goldsworthy learned to skate at seventeen, so even if I was fifteen and couldn't skate I could still dream of an NHL career.

I would finally get Bill Goldsworthy, but in the middle of July when some other kid had abandoned last year's collection and I'd begged this unknown off him, sometimes throwing in a dime so he could get baseball cards. Every year, Bill Goldsworthy learned to skate at seventeen and didn't make any sense in French.

I too learned to skate at seventeen, on Guy Lafleur specials bought with some Christmas money and two sizes too big because I still believed my mother was right about the virtues of four pairs of socks. Until then, weak ankles, poor balance and a succession of used skates too big or too small stopped me from being drafted by the Canadien.

But I could have been a star, or a Bill Goldsworthy. I was always great at ball hockey, the one and only sport in which I could ever be team captain. We would play six or seven hour games, coming back out after supper and playing even if we couldn't see the ball. The dressing room where we'd take breaks was Chuckle's basement. While we curved the plastic blade on our sticks by inserting its tip in a crack in the foundation wall and twisting, we picked new teams. They all prayed I wouldn't pick them because it meant they wouldn't be Jock Lamayre, Yvonne Kernoyeah of the Montreal Canadians. Only Chuckles didn't care: he was Ballivo no matter what. I often picked him first, for strength down center.

I like to think those were great games. But when *La Soirée du Hockey* decided to do a between periods spot on kids playing street hockey they filmed it in St-Henri. Richard Garneau asked each kid on both Canadien sweatered team who he was and the kid said Guy Lafleur,

Sergé Savard, Yvan Cournoyer... and then give his real name: "J'sus Guy Lapointe." Richard Garneau asked him for his real name. "J'sus Guy Lapointe." Garneau shook his head, "Ton VRAI nom." "J'SUS GUY LAPOINTE! D'mande à ma mère."

If Richard Garneau had asked my mother, she would have told him I was Henri Richard; Emile Henri Richard. Emile and Henri were my grandfathers. I never knew either of them. If Emile, my paternal grandfather, hadn't passed away a few days after I was born I would have been named Joseph Henri, like all other good Catholic boys, and Jocelyn because my mother wouldn't have given in to my father and named me Richard. Henri was inevitable: he was my mother's father and died eight months into his marriage, two months before my mother was born, so I could never ask her about him.

I was Henri Richard for one day, the day after the Pocket Rocket said coach Al MacNeil couldn't communicate with his players -- and everybody but the kids in my backyard knew what *that* meant. Of course, the next night the Pocket Rocket scored the Stanley Cup winning goal. I, Henri Richard, never played so badly.

I think I met Henri Richard, I'm not sure. If I did, it was at Expo 67. I was there with my friend Dennis. Dennis spotted him first and said, "M'sieur Richard, could I have your autograph?" and this guy said "It's Henry Richards, kid."

I've stopped playing hockey. Henri Richard retired too. He opened a tavern on avenue du Parc. Outside, looking towards Sherbrooke, is a wall painting: number 9, right shoulder holding up

the roof, looks on as in the background the Pocket Rocket tries to
deেকে a Maple Leafs goalie, Johnny Bauer or Terry Sawchuck.

I wonder if he scores? How long will number 9 hold up the roof,
watching his little brother to see what he'll do with his pass? I'll
never know because Henri Richard closed down the tavern last Christmas
Eve; none of the Richard sons wanted to carry the torch.

Even today, when the Canadien are trailing, someone will say, "Ca
leur prendrait un Richard!"

THE HEMINGWAY STORY

to the '85 Waitroids

"Take this story for instance. It caught my eye because I like stories about professions. But you don't tell me anything about this man. All you do is show me what this man does. Why does he do this? What happens when he goes home? I don't even know his name. You're too impatient, kid. You have to take your time to tell a story right."

"I didn't think it was necessary. He's a métro musician, the kind of man everybody sees but never bothers to talk to. Why should they know his name?"

"I want to know. I'm the reader. You can't play tricks on the reader."

"I wasn't playing tricks. I just didn't think it was important."

"It allows reader identification...."

"But that's the whole idea! This guy's got no identity. He just blows sax, you know...."

"I don't know, kid. That's the whole point. There are too many secrets in here. You can't have any secrets in a story."

"What secrets?"

"Well, kid, you got no character here. You've only got a voice. I can hear this guy but I can't see this subway...."

"Métro."

"I can't see it, whatever it is. And what's all this French stuff?"

"It's a Montréal métro. He overhears conversations...."

"I want to overhear them too. And I don't. You can't keep anything from the reader."

"I wasn't keeping anything, Mr. Wayne. It's Montréal...."

"Kid.... Tell me something, you like Hemingway stories?"

"Well," he says, wondering what brought that up. Marshall Wayne just spent a good part of their meeting telling him his short stories weren't up to scratch, saying Off the dime, off the dime. Get your character off the dime! over and over again.

"Good, I like telling this story. But there are so many Hemingway stories now I don't get to tell it anymore." Wayne pauses, watching him fidget with a cigarette, "Aren't you going to light that up?"

Is that what he means by "Off the dime"? Maybe that's how he feels every time he's around Marshall Wayne. A few mornings ago every

time he poured Wayne a cup of coffee he'd somehow manage to kick at his cane. He thought the discomfort came from being homesick. That's why he went to the hardware store in town and bought a Canadian flag, paying for it in U.S. funds with an American Express traveller cheque; so he could replace the Stars and Stripes at the top of the flagpole. Even though he's enjoying Camels, Rolling Rock beer and Jack Daniels, all these Americans and their costume party with thirty-one Scott and Zeldas or their Sunday afternoon croquet in white with thirties' music from a ghetto blaster gave him the joke he can only share with T.J., the sole person he feels connected to up here, the one black guy: "I know they said there were no mosquitoes, but there sure are a lot of WASP's!" But after lunch, where he had announced Canada had taken over the conference so please rise and sing the national anthem, he heard Marshall Wayne humming "O Canada" as he was going to his car and he'd figured this would be a good time to ask Wayne when he wanted them to meet to discuss his stories and Wayne had told him he hadn't done too good a job with his singing. He had been so surprised he hadn't been able to tell Wayne all these Americans singing the anthem had thrown him off. Just hearing about Marshall Wayne had him wondering: he would tell people he had Wayne as an advisor, they would say "He's dying. That's why he's so grouchy, he's dying." and then at the tail end of last night's party he would notice Marshall Wayne was there, sitting in a corner, following the beat by tapping his feet or his hands. Maybe there were two Marshall Waynes: the man who got a standing ovation at his reading and the one you only heard

about. "I wasn't sure if I should," he says.

"Go ahead, kid. I can't smoke, but I love the smell."

Wayne watches him light the cigarette. "This writer friend of mine had just graduated college. Now, you see, this friend was a fan of Ernest Hemingway. He'd read all the stories and novels. So he asked his father for money to go to Cuba and meet Hemingway."

Mel Sharples. That's who Marshall Wayne looked like, Mel Sharples on Alice reruns. Wayne even sounded like him. He had expected something different. When the people from the writer's conference had asked him to choose a reader he had scrounged up all the material he could on the authors scheduled to be there. He had bought a Marshall Wayne book, had liked it and, although he only had time to read half of it before the deadline for his list of readers had forced him to make a choice, what had really influenced him was the author's picture on the dust jacket: it wasn't a picture, but a caricature of Marshall Wayne in a bathtub with a typewriter propped up on his knees. He figured that if this man was the kind of writer who would let a caricature be used on the back of a book, Marshall Wayne would make a good reader for his material. It hadn't worked out that way.

"My friend goes to Cuba...."

"What's his name?"

"It's not important. Once there, my friend starts looking for Hemingway. He goes to all the bars and asks if Ernest Hemingway drinks there. Everybody tells him no, Mr. Hemingway doesn't come here.

After a while, my friend gets worried because he's been to all the bars on the island and hasn't found one where Hemingway drops in. He figures that the people are lying to him so he won't annoy Mr. Hemingway. At the next bar, he tells the barman how he's come all the way from Chicago to see Ernest Hemingway and how much of a fan he is. The barman tells him, 'Si, Senor, Mr. Hemingway comes here sometimes. He might even show up tonight.' My friend orders a beer and waits for Hemingway to show up."

He lights another cigarette. Once at the conference, when he mentioned he asked for Marshall Wayne to be his advisor, just about the only positive comments that had come from those who seemed to know of Wayne were that he was a great storyteller. Although he hasn't fared too well -- Wayne began the meeting saying none of these stories were memorable and finished by saying something about linear development -- he isn't sure the whispered stories about him are true. The comments Marshall Wayne made on his stories were usually right, perhaps brutal, but since he came to the conference to learn it's okay because he feels he can get more out of that than nice comments, but right. In fact, the only positive comment Marshall Wayne made, after saying he didn't want to sugar the pill, was he was quite evidently an intelligent writer.

"Well, by closing time Hemingway hasn't shown up. My friend asks the barman if he's sure Ernest Hemingway drinks in this bar. The barman says 'Yes, Senor. Ernest Hemingway comes here. Maybe tomorrow?'

"The next day, my friend shows up bright and early and spends the day in this bar waiting for Hemingway."

"Hemingway doesn't show up, does he?"

"I told you, kid, you're too impatient.... So, no Hemingway. Before closing, the barman tells him the same thing: Maybe tomorrow.

"Again, my friend shows up bright and early, and again no Hemingway. By now he is getting pretty worried. There's only a few days left to his trip and he still hasn't met Ernest Hemingway. At closing time he asks the barman...."

"What's the barman's name?"

"It's not important. He asks the barman if he's sure Ernest Hemingway comes to this bar.

" 'Si, Senor,' the barman answers. 'If it's so important for you to meet Hemingway why don't you call him?'

" 'Call him?' my friend says.

" 'Si.' And the barman writes a number on this piece of paper and gives him a token for the phone.

"My friend goes in the phone booth, dials this number the barman gave him. The phone at the other end of the line rings quite a few times. My friend hangs up and comes out of the booth.

" 'You must let it ring, Senor!' the barman tells him.

"My friend tries again. Finally, somebody answers. 'Could I speak to Ernest Hemingway?' he asks, expecting the other party to tell him there's no Ernest Hemingway there.

" 'Speaking.'

"Can you just imagine how I felt at this point?"

"How who felt?"

"I said you were intelligent, kid.... Can you just imagine how my friend feels?"

Oh yes I can, he thinks, happy there's finally something in this Hemingway story he can understand. When he opened the letter confirming he's been awarded a working scholarship to the conference, he'd gone totally hyper. He was going to spend two weeks working with the best young American writers, get to stay in the States for a while, and meet Marshall Wayne.

"My writer friend tells Hemingway how he got to Cuba and mentions there's only a few days left to his trip. Hemingway explains to my friend he hasn't been to town lately because...."

"I can't hear him."

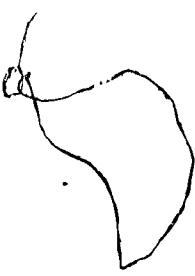
"It's not important, kid...."

But it had been important in that sax player story, and he'd got it right.

"So, Hemingway says he hasn't been to town lately because he's been busy working on some new material...."

"What new material?"

"I don't know, kid. If it will make you happy, you can think it was ... *The Old Man and the Sea*. But when he's not working, Hemingway says he *does* go to this bar. Hemingway then asks my friend if he's doing anything the following afternoon, and when my friend answers no, Hemingway tells him that if he wants to he can come up and see him.



"So the next afternoon he takes one of those buses that fall to pieces, and goes to Hemingway's house."

Nothing like the Greyhound that brought him here. It was still dawn when they got to the border and there was a wait while the driver looked for the customs officer. There was a longer wait while baggage was X-rayed, identities verified, purposes enquired. An even longer wait while the one black girl on the bus opened her suitcases, answered even more questions, shut her suitcases. "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the United States," the driver had garbled over the speaker before he started up the bus. Soon, Marlboro ads, interstate red, white, and blue shields, signs for cheaper gas and cigarette prices had started to appear as cars with American plates passed the bus.

"Now, all this time, he can't believe he's actually going to talk to Ernest Hemingway. Either the bus is going to break down on its way or he took the wrong bus in the first place."

He almost didn't make it to the conference. When the bus stopped in Burlington -- right across from the Nickleodeon, a theatre he'd caught ads for on WCAX TV, Channel Three, Burlington, after playing with the rabbit ears for ten minutes to get rid of as much snow as possible -- the driver told him he had to switch buses and that his connection would be there in thirty minutes. He left his bags at the depot and decided to do some sightseeing. He got cigarettes with a free trial coupon inside the summer fiction issue of Esquire, went in a store and gazed at all the different beers they carried, watched a

cop ticket a car with Québec plates, and ended up losing track of time so he had to run for the bus, catching it as it was pulling out.

"Finally, the bus lets him off in front of two huge gates."

The bus had let him off where the information sheet said he should get off: Keeler's Gulf, a gas station just like gas stations in American movies, including the two old guys sitting outside on deck chairs. He fed two Canadian quarters into the Coke machine -- ten cents cheaper than back home, even less considering two Canadian quarters were worth about forty American cents, less still since American Coke cans held two more ounces -- and was surprised by the larger size of the can and the flimsiness of the aluminum.

"He watches the bus leave."

"You Dave Jones?" a young guy had asked.

"No."

"You going to the conference?"

"Yeah."

"The shuttle bus is over there. Here, I'll take that suitcase. You're lucky, you know, the only person they told me to pick up is Dave Jones."

"How'd you know I was going to the conference, did I look that lost?"

"No, but I can spot writers."

Dave Jones showed up fifteen minutes later: tan, beard, shorts, barefoot in running shoes, backpack, mirror sunglasses, muscles.

That first day the drive up the mountain to the retreat where the

conference was held seemed much longer and steeper, more in the wilds, than after he'd made the trip up and down the mountain a few times. One time, making a special trip to that bookshop run by two little old ladies and their two cats where T.J. had spent a long time looking at a round-cornered poetry book and visiting the college town at the foot of the mountain they took a wrong turn around the college and ended up walking down unpaved streets with shacks with plywood windows here and there. They got a lift to the foot of the mountain, riding shotgun while this farmer kept insisting they make sure not to trample the corn at their feet, told them about the local escaped convict, and spat out "Commies" when they told him they were going to the conference.

"He rings the bell. Somebody comes out of the big house behind the gates. The man asks my friend what he wants and he answers he's got an appointment with Ernest Hemingway.

"Now, my friend thinks, is where this whole thing falls apart. He's sure a lot of people pull this stunt so the man won't tell Hemingway he's here or Hemingway won't remember talking to him in the first place."

They waited at the foot of the mountain for a lift but cars just passed them by.

"The white hills of Vermont!" T.J. said.

"You really think that's it?"

"Well, you don't look like that escaped convict, do you?"

"You got a point."

"Yeah, I sure do. Got any more of those Camels left?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Christ, that feels good.... That's strange, you know.

"What is?"

"You like Camels, and I'd give anything to get a regular supply of Player's."

"You want strange? I'll give you strange: When I looked at the list of waiters, I saw your name, T.J. Washington IV, from Boston, and I figured, fuck, if this guy's got numbers and lives in Boston I'm sure we won't get along...."

"I couldn't even figure how to pronounce yours. I finally got it right though."

"Yeah.... Decided what you going to do at the waiter reading?"

"I don't know. Like, do I give them the heavy stuff or just do the other ones. Damned if I do, damned if I don't."

"Well, you're lucky ... sort of ... I get five minutes to read a whole goddamned short-story...."

"Yeah, but you give them Montreal shit and you're off the hook. Here comes another car...."

"Yeah, you're right. But I can't do any of the French bits."

"I'm never off the fucking hook."

"Is that why you didn't buy that collection by...."

"My godfather? ... Yeah, probably. Anyway, I know them by heart."

"I know what you mean."

"Next thing he knows, there's Ernest Hemingway coming down the path to let him in himself. Hemingway greets him and invites him out back for a few drinks.

"So, they spend the day drinking and talking about baseball, the weather, my friend's trip to Cuba, his studies, what he's seen, what he's heard. Hemingway sometimes suggests a place to see before he goes back to Chicago...."

"Like where?"

"It's not important. Now, all this time, the only thing they don't talk about is writing. In fact, each time he tries to bring up the subject, Hemingway changes it. By now it's getting pretty late in the afternoon and my friend, afraid of taking advantage of Hemingway's hospitality, tells his host he has to leave. Hemingway offers him one last drink. Again, he tries to get Ernest Hemingway to talk about writing and Hemingway changes the subject again. He finishes his drink, gets up, and thanks Hemingway for his hospitality. He then starts walking towards the gate, aware Hemingway is watching him leave.

"Just before he opens the gate, Hemingway yells something

"'What?'"

"Hemingway waves to him to come closer. He does. Hemingway yells again.

"'What?'"

"There you are!" Dave Jones yells. He swings over the guardrail that encloses the wraparound porch. "I've been looking all over for

you. Look, I've drafted this letter. I'm hoping to get it published in tomorrow's daily events flier...."

He reads the letter. It asks the people running the conference why, considering the conference is such a great opportunity for a beginning writer to trade experiences with other young writers and meet and learn from the established writers (in his case hear long Hemingway stories) there is, on campus, only one Black and one Oriental. "You forgot there's only one Canadian too," he comments.

Marshall Wayne laughs.

"Will you sign it? All the other waiters have."

"T.J. know about this?"

"Not yet, I can't find him. Will you sign it?"

"Yeah, of course. But, Dave, they're not going to let you run it."

"Sure they will!"

He signs.

Two days later, the director of the conference will tell the waiter-scholars how glad he is they've brought this up but unfortunately he can't run the letter in the next day's daily events flier (the conference's last one) but that it will appear in the fall newsletter everyone gets. He'll whisper to T.J. "Ah, the white hills of Vermont!"

"And their flying pigs.... Well, that settles it. I'm going to set them up with a funny poem, a technical one, and then I'll kick their ass."

"Again, Hemingway waves to him to come closer. My friend goes to where Hemingway is standing. Hemingway smiles, 'Hey, kid. There's no secret.'"

Marshall Wayne looks at his watch. "Well, we've just about run out of time." He shuffles the stories and hands them to him.

He thanks Wayne for taking the time to read the stuff and commenting.

As he goes down the steps that lead to the porch he hears Wayne open his screen door.

"Hey, kid!" Marshall Wayne calls.

Even before I turn around, I know what Marshall Wayne will say. I'm off the dime.

"There's no secret."

TOO QUIET THE RÉVOLUTION

In the movie *The Hotel New Hampshire* sorrow floats: Place Jacques-Cartier appears as the Vienna flower market when John takes Susie the bear for a stroll. The *Gasthaus Freud*, the second Hotel New Hampshire, facades on rue St-Paul, close to Marché Bonsecours and near where the national, Canadian, Parliament used to be before the English burned it down and moved it to Ontario. At the heart of the old square mile where the fur and rail barons could live a full life without ever coming in contact with the city, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel poses as the Stanhope where the Berry family lives while in New York: A scene right before the exterior shot of the Stanhope proves it's New York: John sees Chipper Dove, Franny's rapist, coming out of a building on Avenue du Président Kennedy and leans against a larger-than-life U.S. Mail box while in the background a Canada Post/Postes

Canada truck pulls away (this was cut out of the video version for screen-width requirements). When Winn Berry is given a medal for saving the Centaur Theatre on rue Saint-François-Xavier -- serving as the Vienna State Opera -- from a revolutionary bomb, the crème-de-la-crème of Vienna gathers in the ballroom of the Windsor Hotel. The Windsor was closed then; my oldest sister says its downfall started with the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in January '58, just before la révolution tranquille. In *The Hotel New Hampshire* the only time Montréal is seen is in a panoramic shot of the centre-ville taken from the top floor of the Ritz as Lily, the writer, looks out to all the new head-office buildings going up in '82 or '83. Right after that she commits suicide: *Just not big enough.*

From the vantage point of the Nelson monument at the top of Place Jacques-Cartier a different angle on Montréal is possible. To the left, the four towers of Complexe Desjardins house provincial government offices. The federal complexe, Guy-Favreau, is too small to be visible. There are many other buildings, some going up, some coming down, but the complexes are typical of the city. When the federal government found out about the provincial complexe they wanted one too. It took them ten years to rip out some of Chinatown, build a building named after a citizenship judge, but they got their complexe all right. The federal government wanted to use its complexe for government offices but few civil servants wanted to work there: the roof leaks. They turned most of it to housing, probably thinking those who live under the federal government's roof don't care if it

leaks. Montréal is a city of the underground: Place-d'Armes metro station is connected to Complexe Guy-Favreau connected to the provincial complexe connected to Place-des-Arts metro or métro Place-des-Arts leads to the provincial complexe which leads to the federal complexe which leads to Place-d'Armes which leads me to think of the October crisis. Nelson himself doesn't see all this. He only sees old Mun-tree-all and the river that is not a river when it is un fleuve.

At Nelson's feet lies Place Jacques-Cartier. In the summer of '79, the last summer before the référendum for which I would turn eighteen in time to cast my vote as to Oui or Non the Québec government should start negotiating, no "come to a new agreement in which Québec would control its destiny. The results of such a negotiation being put to another référendum. Consequently, do you give the Government of Québec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement?" yes, a loose translation, I admit, Place Jacques-Cartier: the flower market, the square with benches, and, at the bottom where rue St-Paul crosses, the square with those round display cases for affiches seen so often in French movies, bordered on both sides by the cobblestoned street leading to the fleuve, by the Hotel Iroquois, the Hotel Nelson on the left, and the buildings that step down after them towards the fleuve, is where I found myself.

Rain falling on a cobblestoned street at night in an early forties film noir, I know what that feels like. Now, the elements are fraught with double meaning, symbolism not seen then. I was

seventeen, not even legal drinking age, but that never stopped anybody. We were here on la fête nationale, the new name for la St-Jean-Baptiste, and seven days later on Canada Day . . . the symbolic possibilities if it had been clear and warm one day, cold and miserable the next! It was cold and raining on both.

We is Marie-Claire, Michèle and I. I had broken up with Marie-Claire a few days before la fête nationale but we remained friends long enough to see Supertramp's *Breakfast in America* show at Parc Jarry in the last week of July. Michèle, . . . in Michèle I now see the sower of seeds on le dictionnaire Larousse. They wore long skirts, Chinese sandals, cotton blouses; the clothes and hard-to-describe look of . . . my generation? Everybody wore that then. I had on jeans, Wallabees, the Université de Montréal sweatshirt my folks gave me as a hint -- I did go there a year or so later to study English -- and that helped me get in bars. We went to Vieux-Montréal on la fête nationale to celebrate, we came back Canada Day to see the big bash the federal government had planned at le Vieux-Port, a big waterfront facility they had just opened up, one of the many projects that government started in Québec after the election of the Parti Québécois.

Le 15 novembre 1976. In his book, Ken Dryden recalls being in nets in a game against the Saint Louis Blues that night. He mentions the soft murmur of the crowd he describes as like that of a visiting team's supporters as the early results of the election come on the p.a. system. At the beginning of the third period it announces "Un nouveau

gouvernement". Dryden sees the clear split between those season-ticket holders in the reds sitting while their neighbor, someone they've sat next to for many games, cheers and sings. Les Canadiens won the game, as they would win many others in the next four years, but I know how Dryden felt: My family sat together watching the election results on Radio-Canada.

I had looked forward to la fête nationale all spring. In the past, the St-Jean-Baptiste celebration had been held on Mont-Royal where thousands of québécois and québécoises spent the day and night, once the long weekend, partying and watching the show at Lac des Castors put on by Vigneault, Leclerc, Charlebois, Ginette Reno, Ferland, Forestier, et cie. At one of those shows Deschamps made the people swear they would speak only français for a year. At one of those shows, in 1973, my oldest sister, Dominique, turned sixteen as Vigneault sang *Gens du pays* to replace the clumsy French version of "Happy Birthday". Dominique was always lucky, when she was a kid they would put on the St-Jean-Baptiste parade for her. Since "*Gens du pays*", and now still to a certain extent, you can tell who's who at birthdays: someone starts singing "Mon cher . . . c'est à ton tour de te laisser parler d'amour" while others would start on "Bonne fête . . . bonne fête . . . Bonne fête, bonne fête, bonne fête . . ." My birthday is usually lost between Noël and le réveillon du jour de l'an, but two birthday songs . . . We're five: two sang one, one the other, and Renée, the middle child, didn't sing anything. Dominique, my nationaliste oldest sister, went on both occasions. Too young, I had to watch it live, on Radio-Canada.

Canada Day: As miserable as it had been seven days earlier. The only difference between the two nights spent in Vieux-Montréal is the Canadian flag was more evident the second time . . . or did I notice it more because it was Canada Day?

Rain falls on the cobblestoned streets of Vieux-Montréal. Richard, Michèle, Marie-Claire, run from bar to boîte de nuit looking for entertainment. In a dimly lit street they listen to a chansonnier in a porte cochère. He's pretty bad but there's a crowd and trente-sous flash in their flight towards his guitar case.

-Tu t'es pas perdu? un péquiste asks un libéral standing next to him.

-Ben non, c'est toi qui t'est trompé de fête!

Le péquiste laughs, -T'as du feu? _

Le libéral cups his hands around the flame.

When Richard asks Michèle for a light she's no longer there. He looks around, hoping to spot Marie-Claire but knows she follows Michèle. He tries to look over heads to see where they might have gone; there are too many people in front of him. He walks backwards, away from the crowd, and sees two girls walking away.

-J'pensais vous avoir perdues! The girls turn around: it's not them. When he asks if they've seen two girls go by; one with a fleur-de-lys painted on a white face, Michèle, and one with a fleur-de-lys on her forehead, they smile: they too have a fleur-de-lys on their face.

Fleur-de-lys everywhere. Fleur-de-lys as capes flapping in the wind or flying straight as people run for shelter. Fleur-de-lys canopies when held by a group over their heads as they march by him shoulder to shoulder. Fleur-de-lys buttons. Fleur-de-lys pewter pendants on a leather necklace. Fleur-de-lys in shop windows everywhere. Fleur-de-lys of different sizes next to a smaller display of Canadian flags: -J'me demande combien y coûte le gros là-bas? Il serait parfait pour le mur du fond. -Oui, mais on n'en a pas les moyens anyway. -Peut-être si on coupait un peu sur les dépenses . . .

-Salut, Richard! Comment ça va? says Jean-François from philosophy class.

-Mal 'stie. J'ai perdu Michèle et Marie-Claire, he says.

-Ah, je pense les avoir vu entrer dans une boîte. Regarde, c'est Jacques et Josée là-bas. Jean-François cups his hands in front of his mouth. -Jacques!

Jacques waves to them.

-Quoi que tu fasses, Richard, va pas chez Queux, ils n'ont plus d'Etiquette Noire.

Jean-François is a nice guy, worth talking to over a few beers, but has the annoying habit of franciser everything. None of the barmaids ever know he means a Black Label so bars tend to run out quite often of his favorite beer. For Jean-François a 7-Up is un "Hop la vie!", the slogan in the commercial. Often he has to repeat the name of one of the many philosophers he quotes because Heidegger becomes Hèdegé.

-Bon, moi j'me barre. Salut! Jean-François runs across the street, turns around. -Oublie pas: OUI!

Richard watches Jean-François pass by an Arrêt/Stop, whip out a can of spray paint, and sign a blue Oui on the red sign.

Aux Deux Pierrots, rue St-Paul. Le Nelson, facing l'Iroquois. Chex Queux. L'Air du Temps. In front of each a crowd ten deep waits to get in. Richard tries to look over heads to see if Michèle and Marie-Claire are there but he's not tall enough.

-Maudit vendu! somebody yells to someone walking by on the other side of the street.

-Mange d'la marde! The flag-bearer shouts back.

A big guy, long hair in a pony tail, holds back his friend. - Hey, s'pas l'temps d'brasser d'la marde. Y'a autant l'droit qu'toé d'être icitte. T'aimerais-tu ça si quequ'un t'appelerais un frog?

-Ca s'rait pas la première fois, 'stie. Crisse, qui vienne Canada Dé. Lâche moé! He says, yanking out of his friend's grip.

-Tranquille!

A fist swings out. A hand grabs a fleur-de-lys hanging on a leather necklace, pulling a face towards a rising knee. The crowd moves in closer to the fight, blocking it out of view. Shouts rise until all is quiet again.

Outside Aux Deux Pierrots a smaller crowd sings along with the chansonnier on stage while other songs from other bars, down the street from a chansonnière under a restaurant canopy, from groups of friends walking by, drift into the night: *Le blues d'la métropole:*

Mais qu'est-ce-qu'un gars peut faire
Quand y'a, pus l'goût de boire sa bière?
Quand y'est tanné de jouer à mère avec la fille de son voisin?
Tous mes amis sont disparus pi moé non plus j'me r'connais pus
On est dix-mille s'a rue St-Paul
Avec le blues d'la métropole.

Motel 'Mon Repos', Complainte du phoque en Alaska:

Ca n'avaut pas la peine
De laisser ceux qu'on aime
Pour aller vivre ailleurs . . .

Vigneault's song: *Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays . . .* All the songs of the sixties and seventies that pushed the révolution tranquille to what might be the next one. Music, singing in every bar. Bars everywhere. This is now, an actual moment like those he read in history books. He is here.

-Richard!

Marie-Claire stands next to Michèle. Paul-Antoine who runs the Parti Québécois office at school has his arm around Michèle.

Paul-Antoine knows the doorman at l'Iroquois and gets a good table. Smoke so thick he can't see his own when he exhales. Tables filled with Laurentides, 50, Black Labels, Molles, Bleues. They sing along as the band does *Dans la prison de Londres*.

-Crisse que c'est beau! Paul-Antoine exclaims, Gitane stuck in a corner of his mouth.

Marie-Claire lights a cigarette. "We saw Jean-Francois. He was going wild with that spray can."

"Asshole pisses me off," Paul-Antoine says.

"He's just jealous 'cause Jean-Francois winked at me." Michèle whispers to him.

Paul-Antoine bursts out laughing, "Is that what you think? You wouldn't stand a chance with that guy."

Michèle slowly blows smoke in Paul-Antoine's face. "I can get any guy I want," she points out in a sensual hoarse. "Well, almost any guy," she adds, kicking Richard under the table.

"Michèle, the only way that jerk will ever get interested in you is if by some miracle you can transfer to Marie-de-France, learn to speak FrOncais de FrOnce and your parents become FrOncais de FrOnce overnight."

"I still think you're jealous . . . /He is cute, you know," Michèle teases.

"So, who's stopping you? He's easy to find: just follow the Oui's on the walls . . . Well, what are you waiting for?" Paul-Antoine turns to him, dismissing Michèle. "Got in this argument with him once. He kept saying what a great man de Gaulle was for saying 'Vive le Québec libre!' I pointed out de Gaulle sure didn't believe in Algérie libre. Fuck, I speak a better French than he does but he always speaks pointu . . . Shit, I'm not in this thing to go from one colonial mentality to another. No goddamned way. . . . No way."

Paul-Antoine waves to the waitress and circles the table with his finger. "That is, Richard, if you don't mind drinking a separatist beer?"

"As long as you don't mind it being a Molson," he answers.

"Touché!" Paul-Antoine pays the waitress. He takes the Molson and switches it with his Bleue, "I'll convince you one of these days . . ."

"You'll never get him to say yes . . ." Michèle says.

Reclining on his bed with her legs swinging over the edge as he sits on the floor they listen to Queen's "Get Down, Make Love". Michèle says she really likes that song. He gets up to get something to drink. When he comes back Michèle is lying back on the bed with her head on his pillow.

-Richard, aime moi.

He wants to, he really wants to. -Non.

-Viens, viens m'aimer. Je veux t'aimer.

-Non. It comes out slowly, softly.

-Pourquoi?

-Je sors avec Marie-Claire.

-Vous êtes des amis, vous sortez pas steady.

-Mais . . .

-Viens, viens on va s'aimer.

When he thinks of a first lover he wishes for her. Why can't he say yes?

"I'm not going to try," Paul-Antoine says, "Not tonight."

"Why not"

"Because one of us will end up hating the other's guts . . .
That's the way it always ends."

"As long as you don't pull the Pas un Québécois si tu votes pas
Oui I promise I won't."

"I wouldn't . . . Look, I don't want to go on with this."

He takes a Gitane from Paul-Antoine's pack. "Come on, we're two
reasonable adults."

Marie-Claire lets out a sad laugh. "Yeah, right, so were my mom
and dad."

"No, not tonight." Paul-Antoine pours some Molson into a glass.
"Half full or half empty? It's still an . . . eight ounce? an eight
ounce glass with four ounces of beer in it."

"I figure you'd say . . ." for a pause he lights the Gitane,
enjoys the bite of the first drag, "half empty."

"That's because I'd be saying . . ." Paul-Antoine smiles as he
takes a Gitane, runs it under his nose like a fine cigar, lights it,
"There's a way of getting it full, and you're a fédéraliste."

He laughs.

Marie-Claire grabs the glass and downs the beer. "There. Could
we talk about something else now?"

His parents also argue. His father, the péquiste who buys jam if
the store owner says he doesn't have any pots de confiture, and his
mother, who won't speak English to the Eaton ladies, quite ready to
wait ten minutes while they search for a French saleslady; a
fédéraliste, but they've never tried to sell him anything.

Paul-Antoine looks at him for a moment. "Okay." He pours Molson into the glass then adds more than four times the amount of Bleue until it is half full, half empty, "Québec."

"What about the foam?" Michèle asks.

"Say . . . the political climate." Paul-Antoine smiles, "Because it hasn't settled yet. But you could go back to '74 and say it's the Anglo reaction to Bill 22."

He is vague on 22. He knows it made French the official language and that Bourassa lost his next election over it for going too far, not far enough.

"For some strange reason they couldn't accept being asked to put their signs in both languages, or that immigrant kids would go to French schools so they could become part of Québec."

"But Cue-Bek is still part of the Dominion and of North-America," Michèle ironically says.

"Not really, old chap," Paul-Antoine answers. "And with all that room, why did you come here?"

Because Montréal was where the boat had stopped?

"Because they didn't know, didn't want to see the difference!" Michèle exclaims.

"Immigrant kids don't go to French schools . . ." Paul-Antoine pours Molson. "They didn't understand why bilingual signs were so important." He shakes salt into the beer.

The foam rises.

"And what English-only signs do is . . ."

He waits, trying to figure out Paul-Antoine's point. The band is on a set break. Garçons and Mademoiselles rush around refilling tables with more rounds.

The beer went flat.

Paul-Antoine picks up the Bleue. "La loi 101."

After Bill 101, city crews put white stickers over the St. at the end of, and over the Ave. at the bottom of, street signs. Anglos had screamed it symbolized the further denial of their culture, but when he was a kid, Frédéric lived on King Edward Avenue, close to Prince of Wales Avenue, and the bookshop was four blocks past Harvard Saint, three past Oxford Saint.

"The Anglos react!" He pours beer back into the Molson bottle.

"401! 401! Toronto here we come! 401! 401!" Michèle chants.

"Isn't it easier to figure out if the glass is half full?" Paul-Antoine asks.

It was as easy to figure out it was half empty. "The problem with that is some of the beer you poured . . ."

"And making a mess," Marie-Claire comments.

"I know," Paul-Antoine sighs, "some of it was Bleue . . ." He slowly brings the bottle of Bleue towards the glass and pours one drop at a time. "But the most amazing thing is the Anglos scream how dare we take away their right to have their language on their signs, how dare we tell them that if they employ more than fifty people they must get a francization certificate to prove they deal with their workers in French . . ."

"You know what their reaction to that was, Richard?" Michèle asks. "Their reaction was to fire enough people so they employed only forty-nine!"

"They scream how dare we oblige anyone coming here to go to French schools . . ."

"And the immigrant parents still send their kids to English schools. Illegally. And the Anglos are so fucking proud of that! . . . What the hell are we supposed to do? Arrest the kids? Arrest their parents?"

Marie-Claire watches Paul-Antoine still pouring in the Bleue drop by drop, "It's going to spill."

"Fuck. We asked them nicely with Bill 22: Look, you come here? Why don't you send your kids to French schools so they can become part of Québec and we don't get drowned out in the long run. Look, you own a store? Why not put up a bilingual sign so we know what you're selling, so Montréal stays a French city . . ."

"And they don't. They say fuck-you!"

"Come on, Michèle, you're exaggerating!" He cuts in.

"No, she's not. But you're right, Richard, not all of them said fuck-you . . . because some of them had managed, somehow, through all the years they've been here, to learn to say Mange d'la mardel

"Jesus Christ! Was the révolution tranquille so quiet they didn't hear it? Maybe they had their heads in the sand and didn't see it was time to change their Pretorian attitude?

"No more fucking around. We asked nicely and you didn't do fuck-

all? Okay. Signs in French only. And, unless the parents went to English schools in Québec, everybody goes to French school . . ."

"But, what about, say, a family from Manitoba that comes here?" he asks.

"Look, the day I can move there and send my kids to a French school they can move here and send their kids to English schools. ... And what about the immigrants? What's to stop them to come in through Ontario just so they can send their kids to English school?"

"How dare we oblige them to put their signs in French? How dared they . . ."

"Could someone drink this beer before it spills?" Marie-Claire asks.

"How dared they," Paul-Antoine continues, adding Bleue very slowly, "not recognize our existence and put French on their signs in the first place! Look, I'd give you your goddamned bilingual signs . . ."

"What?" Michèle exclaims.

"Yes, I'd give him the bilingual signs." Paul-Antoine turns to him, "But first set up a ruler and ladder squad."

"A what?" he says.

"You heard me, a ruler and ladder squad. A ruler and ladder squad to make sure the English letters aren't bigger than the French. And they are! . . . Make them agree that things like what used to be their favorite 'bilingual sign': Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Kosher Meat Mart isn't bilingual."

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"But they finally have their goddamned bilingual signs. Through bill 101! . . . See, John, of John's Auto Parts takes down the Parts. We say: No, John, John's Auto isn't bilingual. John goes back up his ladder and takes down the 's and it's sort of French: John Auto . . . But you bet your ass John will make sure to never give his sign a fresh coat of paint so the . . . ghosts? the ghosts of 's and Parts is still visible. There you go, a bilingual sign, French and muted English. So, why allow them if through . . ."

"Such ingenuity?" Michèle cynically suggests.

"Such ingenuity they already exist!"

"Look, either you think we've fucked around long enough and vote *Oui*, or you continue getting fucked."

Michèle stares at him for a long, long time, "Dis *Oui*."

Why can't he say *Oui*? Because he always see glasses as half full? Because he still believes the necessary changes will come, slowly, but come? Because he grew up in an English neighborhood? Because when he was in sixth grade the teacher couldn't give the one hour of English every week because half the kids in the class were from English families and half the French kids could speak better English than she could, to which a radical *séparatiste* would say: See? A quarter of the class was already *assimilée*! Because when the kids in the backyard called him a frog he could always fight it out, not always winning, but at least make them respect him? Because he could see the wrong in nurses and doctors in Montréal hospitals not able to speak French and the stupidity of the English, the Anglos, that

screamed that their freshly graduated McGill doctor had to practice in Ontario because he or she couldn't speak French and could also see the stupidity of the written French test nurses and doctors now had to pass before they could practice in Québec, a test some French people couldn't pass? Because the radicals on the Oui side scared him more than the radicals, and there were many, on the English side who still believed in the sanctity of the Queen and the Dominion of Canada?

Because some of his best friends were English?

"Real fucking brilliant, Paul-Antoine. Hope you're proud of the mess you've made." Marie-Claire cynically comments.

"I was waiting for his answer . . . Look, what I'm saying is I want to order a Bleue and pay for it. But, Richard, what will you have?"

In the movie *The Hotel New Hampshire* the final scene is a brightly lit one where everyone in the Berry family is at Le Grand Hotel Tadoussac, on the côte nord, the first and last Hotel New Hampshire, and Egg, Coach Bob, Freud, State O'Maine, even Lily, the writer, are alive again. Lily, the writer, grows and grows. Even Sorrow looks happy.

Hollywood likes happy endings.

The novel *The Hotel New Hampshire* ends when John Irving has John, the writer, quote Coach Bob's You've got to get obsessed and stay obsessed.

What do I have?

Silence.

Silence so you don't hear anything. Where did the chansonniers go? All those sous entendues double-meaning songs, where did they go? You couldn't get a hit unless it had political meaning. From the forties and fifties hits from France and the American top-forty translations to our music . . . where are the songs? I can't remember the lyrics, I can barely sing along if one of them plays on the radio. They never play them anymore.

Silence of those friends you can talk to about anything but . . .

Silence of my own generation -- am I that old? -- so disillusioned few still dream or take anything political seriously. What awakening leads to such torpor?

Silence. A bilingual word meaning sourd deaf.

Dominique, my oldest sister, has stopped believing the parade is for her.

The night of the référendum, le 20 mai 1980, we sat in front of the television, Radio-Canada, again. Dominique sat next to my father, Renée, the middle child, sat in the middle of the sofa, I was sitting next to my mother. We all knew: ~~Whatever the results,~~ half of us would lose.

The night of the référendum, when we all went to sleep, reminds me of an October night a few years before: I was nine when the police found one of the places where Pierre Laporte had been kept by the Front de Libération du Québec. Radio-Canada showed the closet where Laporte had been kept and a diagram of how the closet connected with

another closet in a different apartment. All I could think of was what was behind my closet door. And how afraid I was to open it, just in case.

It's a bright Sunday afternoon. I'm sitting on a bench in one of the squares dividing Place Jacques-Cartier. I still wear Levi's, Wallabees, the UdeM sweatshirt. Down the cobblestoned street a girl-clown on stilts hobbles on the cobbles as she plays flute. A box juggler gets oohs and aahs. The Nelson and Iroquois up in smoke are being replaced by nice boutiques and galleries. In back alleys they still sell those pewter fleur-de-lys: Only the tourists buy them. There's a Harvey and a Swiss Chalet facing the Nelson. I can smell the burgers from here.

At the left of the Nelson monument there is a Bureau de Tourisme. In it one of those trivia computers: Multiple choice questions on history and Montréal scenic spots. I answered all the questions right, even the Qui suis-je/Who am I? When all the answers are provided, when two out of four choices are impossible, there are only two possible answers to Qui suis-je/Who am I? left. A simple choice, non?

Next to the Bureau de Tourisme a life-size cut-out Reagan. Five bucks and you get your picture taken with him. Acid rain and acid rain graffiti ate out Jean-François' Oui's.

In the few bars not replaced by t-shirt shops bottles of Coors, Budweiser, Miller, Michelob, get picked up.

I've been sitting here for a few hours, I still haven't recognized anybody.

Bourassa is back. He said he'd make it okay to have bilingual signs: *As long as the English isn't bigger than the French.*

Bring out the ruler and ladder squad. In Westmount, Côte St-Luc, Hampstead, Pierrefonds, Pointe-Claire, St-Anne's, Roxboro, Dorval, Montreal, Montreal West, TMR, NDG, DDO, English-only signs date back to before 1976, more than ten years ago. The mystery merchants who changed their sign from Ed's Hardware to Ed's, Fred's, Ted's, Ned's, are getting nice new signs: ED'S HARDWARE in two-feet-red, and, maybe, *quincaillerie* in six-inch-black at the top left corner, maybe even as big as the phone number. I haven't had lobster in a long while because the Greek restaurants on Sherbrooke haven't had a Festival du Homard in a long while although they regularly have lobster festivals. As a matter of fact I don't eat much because when I drive down the one-way boulevards I only know it's ALL YOU CAN EAT if I pass the sign and look in the rear-view mirror to know I can *Mangez à volonté*. The Eaton ladies moved to the suburbs, Mom still won't speak English to them and she still waits.

QUI SUIS-JE/WHO AM I?

A: Un Canadien-français/A French-Canadian?

B: Un Canadien?/A Canadian?

C: Un Québécois?/What does Quebec want?

D: Just not big enough?

Back to the Nelson monument, at the top of Place Jacques-Cartier,
I look at the river. John Irving was right: Douleur, chagrin,
tristesse, regret flottent.

BLOWIN' MAUVE SAX

a suite for métro, commuters, and saxophone
to J.S.

"Dix-neuf quatre vingt-sept. Dix-neuf quatre-vingt-sept.

Communiquer."

As you come down the escalators at the Villa-Maria metro station a series of huge, almost full circles of steel affixed by large stainless steel hubs to the beige wall move towards you. A separation in the circles that begins pointing upwards on the one at the left ends pointing downwards on the one at the right in some kind of direction, "Par là?", or, "Oui.", time, "Eight?", sequence

Wwwwwwwwwwwwwwwooooooosssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

"Seven thirty, if that's okay?". These circles are of the same colour as the oranges used on the platforms and benches but the last circle,

where the musician is allowed to play, is mauve. Nothing else is mauve in the metro except, maybe, the music from my sax.

Blowing sax at rush hour allows me to feed a passion: People-watching. Sometimes I feel I blow sax just to watch you without being bugged by the metro

wwwwoooooosssshhhhh.

cops for loitering. I'm interested in the general feeling that builds among you after a while. Maybe it's not evident, or there, in such large stations as Berri or Lionel-Groulx where there's a lot of traffic, but in smaller stations like the Villa a familiarity between strangers is noticeable.

Most of you end up on a predictable schedule so that after a while the same faces

Wwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwoooooooooooooooooosssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

can be seen at about the same time. You start glancing at each other wondering if you know the other person, afraid of being rude if you do and don't say hello, just as afraid of saying hello and finding out you're perfect strangers. You strike up friendships of sorts, talking "I searched the office two hours for that file." "Where was it?"

together while waiting for the metro or going up the escalators. You feel if a person is seen at a certain place at a certain time each

wwwwoooooosssshhhhh.

and every workday she must be okay. It's a sort of general acceptance out of routine, as if you're saying we're okay because we see each other every day.

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everybody knows about those two, and the tourists enjoy them.

But for every bozo sitting on a floor with his hat next to his ghettoblaster or playing "Boléro" over and over, solo, there's a new face that's pretty good. Some study music seriously and pay the rent with the money they take in, others work for that big break, a few just always wanted a live crowd.

It's almost normal that the "classicals" only started to play after us jazz players broke all the rules.

I like the challenge of metro stations. Unlike most nights in a jazz club I compete with real-life elements like the p.a. system, the metros coming and going, the ghettoblasters, the grouch who yells why dontcha work instead of begging?

"I mean, who does she think she is?"

"What did you do?"

"I told her...."

The tough thing is figuring out what will work, say blues, hot jazz, or sometimes cool jazz, and should I try to do shuffles with the
wwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwoooooooosssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
beat of a lady on high heels. When I'm lucky I hit the perfect combo of music, mood and colour. If I can get that it's real good, even better than when I played the Brummel in New Orleans a couple of weeks before it burned down.

"What about Fred?"

"Hey, he's the one that wanted an open relationship."

The Villa has a great sound for a concrete box. It's an okay place for money but what I like is it's my neighborhood's station and it's easier to pick the music

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because—I know the people who live around here. In other stations you can only play one kind of music if you want the sound to work, or make good money, but the people around the Villa are different enough that anything goes.

Ah, right on time, the pink panther. I wonder if she knows I play a few bars of Mancini's tune for her? She's never shown any sign of it anyway. Bet she thinks it's the only song I can play. She always wears something pink; sometimes just a scarf and sometimes that pink jumpsuit. "The Pink Panther", that's all I know about her.

• But the Villa can be a bitch. It's not easy playing good hot jazz in a station whose colour scheme is beige and tones of orange trying to upstage concrete grey. Sax doesn't go well with orange tones and beige, never mind concrete. You see, when properly played a sax puts out shades swinging from a nice sort of mellow mauve to deep and very erotic purple tones. Purple tones don't blend well with beige, or concrete.

"Catherine!"

"Bonjour! Ca va bien?"

"Bof.... Ca fait longtemps...."

"Oui. Alors, quoi de neuf?"

The acoustics are pretty good here. I'm far enough from the

finger snapping

Dix-neuf

purse swinging

quatre-vingt-sept.

or swaying

Communiquer

your way up the escalator after maybe pausing

wwwwoooooosssshhhhh.

for a second in front of the guy blowing

"How about a movie?"

sax.

Yeah!

"Well...."

"I know a place where they use real butter for the popcorn."

I've even enjoyed a bit of fame when the local paper did a small thing on me, even put my picture in. That week, people sometimes said hello or called my name. I miss that small moment of glory.

I wish I had some great anecdote to tell my friends about how my playing sax changed someone's mind about suicide, how a song I played became an "our song" for two people who met while listening to me play.

One afternoon I was blowing sax early because I wanted to play for myself and check the acoustics without all the extra noises of the rush of crowd and the metros that come and go more often between four and six. A guy in a three-piece suit, he was holding roses wrapped in

Wwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww0000000000000000ssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

I wonder if the guy knew Nocturne was big with the strippers when it first came out, in the early fifties I think. That's a deep purple tune if I've ever heard one.

it's gone. Sometimes I'm really lucky, or in really good shape, and I blend weather, the mood of the crowd, the pace of modern life or the rhythm of a few strollers and things like the long breath of incoming metros and their short exhale when they leave. But nobody knows what the p.a. messages mean so I don't mess around with them too often.

I know a few people who've told tourists the messages were jokes

"Code jaune sur deux deux trois. Code jaune sur deux deux trois."

in code. metro employees tell each other.

I once told someone they were the French version of "Attention K-Mart shoppers...."

Time to call it a day, pack it up. Let's see, for three hours of work I've made seventeen dollars, two bridge tokens, a button, a book on Hare Krishna -- it was the Watchtower last night --. I'm still waiting for that Mini Loto ticket like in the commercial....

Hope you enjoyed the show.

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By the way, that closing piece was a Strayhorn, "Take the 'A' Train."

'Bye.

www0000ssssshhhh.

"It's death out there."

"Hey, Sue, it happens to the best."

"God! I bombed so badly both the States and Russia went on red alert!"

"Shit, that's a good one! ... But, hey, it all comes with experience."

"My timing was off."

"Your timing was fine, but you let that fucker in the corner impress his date by psyching you out."

FUNNIER THAN TEST PATTERNS AT THREE A.M.

"Kill 'em."

"After what they did to you that's exactly what I feel like doing. ... So, I guess I'll see you at home."

"I don't know if I can take this much longer, John. She's your

mother. And that nurse...."

MORE SINCERE THAN AN INSURANCE SALESMAN, AS DEEP AS A VALLEY

GIRL'S SMILE. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: JOHN TEMPLETON!

Thank-you! ... Thanks.... Thank-you! ... No, wait. Wait. ...
Sshhh, listen. ... No, listen.

...

Can you hear that?... Listen: /

The sound of your friends when your sitcom bombs.

Christ! My show bombed so hard both the States and Russia went
on nuclear alert!

Hey, I don't know what went wrong. I mean it had a great title:
The Ruffy and John Templeton Show! The ongoing adventures, well they
would have been ongoing if the show had run. I still don't understand
why it didn't. I mean, the adventures of a blind private-eye dog and
his seeing-eye master.... Nobody watched it. Not even AIDS patients!
And they'll watch anything.

Hey, we had all the good ingredients for a good sitcom: A good
actor ... okay, so Ruffy got the part because he slept with Lassie ...
but he could act! Shit, we even had three kids fresh from the Beaver
Cleaver Wise-ass School. ... Sounds like a porn-horror movie: A new
low in slice and dice epics ... Beaver Cleaver!

Damn! I just realized something! It was the dog that ruined the
show! It stuttered!

But, hey, my agent was right. And he called from South America to remind me of that. ... A sitcom does great things for your career! ~~Especially if it bombs.~~ Like, just las week I was offered the biggest role in the next Star Trek movie: First expendable crewman.

And the offers just keep pouring in. Stallone wants me as an acting coach, Ruffy wanted more money. Woody Allen wants me to play Mia Farrow's next lover. The Expos want me in left field.

Hey, that's what you get when your show gets a whole Nielsen rating point. I mean, eight hundred and seventy-four thousand Ruffy and John Templeton fans can be wrong! So I decided to thank them. They're all from New York and live in Bellevue ... where the tv's are bolted to the wall and nobody can change the channel. The warden said there was a riot the night my show played. But the guards gave in and shut me off.... Talk about captive audience!

Yeah!

Damn, it's nice to be back in Montréal. Like, they have snow in California, but you cant make snowballs, so what's the use? ... I did learn a few things in the States: Never do a sitcom.... No, really. I speak perfect Californese. You want to learn? No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o problem! Start everything with Oh, wow! and end with bitchin'. Like: Oh, wow, what a cute bitch, bitchin'! Of course, all the proper ladies say witchin'. You want to learn to speak like a New York native? Fuck you, leave me alone!

You know, Americans don't know that much about free enterprise after all. Like, I was in this small town where the cops went on a

one-day strike? Five donut shops went bankrupt! ... That would never happen here: the cops own all the fucking donut shops!

You know, when I was growing up in NDG there were only two things at street corners: banks and gas stations. Now it's banks and old folks homes. But, hey, there ain't much difference between an old folks home and a gas station....

Yo! would you mind turning down the lights a bit? The lights, man! ... God, you can tell this used to be a disco, they still have the condom machines in the john.

NDG, where the cops know it's your dog that took a crap because you're the only one not leaving brown footprints behind.

Like I was saying, it's nice to be back home. Yeah, I grew up here.... What? You don't believe me? ... Okay, I'll prove it: Tabarnac! Sacrement! Speed up, the light's red! ... See?

Hey, I'll tell you something. Don't ever try to translate French swears. Like, if you're mad at somebody you look at the guy and say Monostiedetabarnacdesacrementdeviargede baptèmed'enfantd'chiennne! And that's telling him, you know. But if you're English and say Hey, old chap, My eucharistic host of tabernacle of virgin of baptism of puppy?

...

Yeah, language, man. Careful how you use it! Like, when I was a kid growing up in NDG.... That's Notre-Dame-de-Grace, in English: Our Lady of Crisco. ... The anglo armpit. Poor Loyalists from Westmount, the Jews too rich for St. Urbain and too poor for Hampstead and Cote St-Luc, the unemployed WASPs from Montreal West and the rich French

from St-Henri! ... I went back there last week. The only thing that changed is its the Vietnamese and not the French who own all the dépanneurs. But, hey, the cops still own the donut shops.

Yeah, NDG. When I started going out with chicks the first thing I learned, after sex, of course, was never to say I was from NDG. You could see it on her mother's face: NDG? No damn good! And they were right!

The second toughest question was: What do you plan to do with your life, son? I want to be a nuclear physicist, Ma'am. That's good, son. You can provide a good future for my daughter.... And, like, if I answered Well, Ma'am, I want to be a comedian? Yeah, right!

But living in NDG was great! The French kids went around saying Mozerfuqueur and the English kids said Mengedlamawrde. ... Well, not all the English kids. I told this real proper English kid Ta soeur a des gros tétons was the best French greeting? ... Yeah ... well, Le Journal de Montréal yesterday had this thing on this Anglo meeting this Hell's Angel in the east-end? This Anglo's car stalled? And you could tell it wasn't an east-end car: No pom-poms and no furry dice.... The Hell's Angel gets off his bike and says Hey, man. Ton char bloque mon drivewé pi si tu'l move pas m'a t'arracher un bumper pi t'scratcher l'winshiell! ... And this idiot thinks since the Hell's Angel was kind enough to speak to him in English, okay, he had an accent, but he tried, you know? So this dumb Anglo smiles and says Ta tie sewer ah day gross taytons!

He's dead now.

Speaking of sisters, I was looking at four by fours yesterday....

"Great follow through!"

You again! It's not enough you ruin Sue Lanthier's act you have to try to piss me off too? Look, mac, just shut-up and blow up your inflatable date ... her tits are sagging.

So, I was looking at new cars yesterday? Cars talk to you now! They say things like Fasten your seatbelt. ... What good's that gonna do you if you only speak French, eh? Your right door is open! ... Shit, there's a line-up at the pen because the drivers thing their right door is au pen....

Anyway, I can't afford a new car.... I mean, the Ruffy and John Templeton show never made it to syndication and I still have to pay off Lassie.... So I bought a used car instead and hired my mother to sit in the back seat. ... So I got: Do you have clean underwear? ... Don't pick at that! Don't do your stop signs, eh? Wait 'till your father gets home! ... I went right through the next ten stop signs, I never saw the motherfucker! But Mom wasn't doing a good job, so I fired her. ... What do you mean oooooohhhh? I paid her good money and she wouldn't bob her head up and down when I slammed on the brakes?

Anyways, they're coming up with a second generation of talking cars for next year. Yeah, they'll have cars to match your personality ... if you got one.... My accountant and Elvis fans will be riding buses from now on.

They'll have hypocondriac cars.... Hypocondriac? That's when your girlfriend says she had a headache. Hypocondriac cars: Did you

put it anti-freeze? Only to minus 45? God! I mean, I know this is July, but.... I'm running out of oil! I knew it, I just knew it!

Paranoids: Rush hour traffic? Great! I'm stalling right here, right now!

Jews: You want I should cross da road? Go ahead, break da speed limit, be my guest. ... Vadda ya mean going out on a Friday night? Aren't you going to put the top up at least? KILL THAT VOLKSWAGEN! KILL THAT VOLKSWAGEN! And dese roads, oy vey! In Israel all the roads have plastic covahs so dey vont veer out! Vadda ya mean, stopping here for gaz? The guy don't look Chewish to me! You sure it's kosher gas?

Catholic cars? Jesus Christ! Did you see that? Oh, God, please, God, turn the light green. Holy shit, not another parking ticket! Oh, God, don't let that Mack truck hit me! Please, God? Look, I promise: Church every Sunday. No, please, God, don't let him hit me! Look, I swear, no more swearing! ... Christ, that was close!

Special Montréal cars: They speed up at red lights. The parking brake only works if you triple park. When you turn right the left flasher goes on....

And they'll have options. An automatic bus stop detector so you have enough time to speed up and really splash the two accountants and three Elvis fans. A cyclist detector that opens your doors into him just as he pedals by you in rush-hour traffic? A gizmo that picks your nose and scratches your balls.... And when you're driving down to Old Orchard? Everybody will know you're from Montreal because that

third parking light will go

And we all know what that means!

And, hey, just my luck, I'm going to be in town for a while so I might get one of those cars. Yeah, I'm going to be in town for a while 'cause Mom isn't feeling too well....

"Must be all that drivin' around!"

... Ah, yeah, right. ... But you can never get away from your mother.

"You sure can't!"

I see you've finished blowing up your date. ... She looks like she could give aerial shots at the Super Bowl....

Anyways, it's like I said to my good friend Norman Bates: I hated going out with my mother in the back seat....

"Holy Oedipus complex, Batman!"

What, you related to the asshole in the corner? ... But, hey, you're right, lady. That's exactly what my wife said. But her and mom get along fine.... Like, last time I went out with my wife? Her and mom started on all the things I do wrong? Not putting the seat down after I use the john? I mean, after I went to all the trouble of bolting a handicapped bar over the paper dispenser for when they fall in? ... Drinking milk from the carton? ... Tell me, guys, what the hell are we supposed to do, use a cow? ... Replacing her birth control with banana Tic-Tacs? ... What? What's wrong with that? I mean, it's a proven fact unwanted pregnancies produce more intelligent kids, look at me! ... Okay, okay, I'll give you a better example ... Did I ever

tell you about Ruffy? ... Soooooo, after a couple of hours I get real fed up. Like how important can her birthday be? She has one every year! She sure as hell should be getting used to them by now, right? Like, I'll never understand women: You remember their age, they get mad. You forget their birthday, they get mad.... Ah! But then she said I never take out the trash? Ahahahahaha! Ahahahahaha! What do you mean I never take out the trash? I just bought you dinner!

But, don't get me wrong, I love my wife.... Twice a week. Like, to me my wife is like a good pair of jeans: A bit tight after the wash but as soon you get in it, they wrap your ass real tight!...

"Fucking chauvinist!"

Oh, honey.... I thought you said you were going home to take care of Mother! ... But you're right, lady, you're absolutely right. ... But, hey, the guy in the corner liked it!

But, lady, it depends on who says the joke. You'd have laughed if Sue Lanthier said something like ... Men are like buying a pair of jeans.... If you put them on and you can fit a hand inside they won't fit tightly enough! ... See?

Yeah, so I fired Mom....

"What the fuck is it with these mother jokes?"

You again! Listen, mac, if you want to go one on one here it's fine with me. But if the SPCA slaps Return to Sender stickers on your ass it's not my fault. I mean, don't fuck with me just because little kids point at you: Look, Mom, the boogeyman! It's not my goddamned fault Arab sheiks kidnap you to guard the harem! And when your

broad's working do I move the mattress up and down for her?

Yeah, so I fired Mom. She took it well,... She also took the car, the loan was in her name. But it's all right because she hasn't been feeling too well lately so I get to use the car anyway. But, hey, I'm a good son and I'm taking care of her ... I mean the only other job I could get was token white guy on one Cosby.

Taking care of her means doing groceries! Ever notice TV Dinners seem to be made for people with six-inch screens? ... But don't get me wrong, I can cook. Fifty macaroni and cheese recipes! All of 'em with beer!

I fucking hate doing groceries! There's all these things I can't understand. Why are people in NDG the worst shoppers? In NDG, when there's only five minutes left to closing on Saturday there's always only one pack of hot-dog buns left. And you better have a black belt in karate if you want them buns! Shit, last week I had to fight off the manager, three cashiers, eighteen stockboys, seventy-nine artists and six CBC people. And the CBC people won the fight? And they just stared at the hot-dog buns ... they thought it was a new comedy special!

Shit, if my sitcom had been on the CBC it would have run for twenty years! But I still can't figure out how to shove in all that Canadian content shit. I mean, you try to explain the indianwheat-farmerandtunafishermanlumberjackhockeyplayerMountiefromWinnipegwho-wearsaMapleLeafsweateraOilerscapandspeaksEnglishwithaFrenchaccentand-comesfromEasternEuropeandhasanAmericancousin!

God! Lemme catch my breath!

But maybe if I figured out the CBC I could figure out shopping. Why is it that in supermarkets the little old ladies all head for the dented cans basket? And, between you and me? If they don't find a dented can of the stuff they want? Little old ladies pick up a good can and say Oooops! ... And why is they're the only ones to buy prunes? ... Like, this afternoon I dented this can of prunes? I was getting some for Mom.... So I dropped the prunes? The manager ran up to me, shook my hand, gave me his hot-dog buns, took the dented prunes and marked the price UP!

Three little old ladies died for them prunes!

Thanks. ... Thank-you! Hey, hey, no need to applaud so much, I'm the main show and I can't get off until you all wipe-out your cover charge. But if you're from NDG you can leave now so you can get a good spot in line for them hot-dog buns tomorrow.

But I'm not the only one who shops for his mother, so it's all right. Like, the whole society is getting older. And all these new commercials on TV prove it: You'll live to be eighty, bet on it with Liverspot Life. But you know what the latest ~~strange product is?~~ Garment protectors! Well, that's what they call them in commercials, garment protectors. Shit! They're adult size diapers!

But they just started advertizing them, you know, so the commercials still apologize about the stuff. You just wait a couple of years when every diaper maker will have an adult size too! I can just see it:

You enjoyed them as a child, you trusted them as a parent, you'll love them in your golden years: Safebuns.

The family that diapers together stays together.

Bridge the generations, use Drybottoms.

From the makers of Smoothbutts: Wrinkledbutts.

All purpose Bunjohns, if granny croaks you can use them for little Joey.

I wonder if they'll have a blue liquid test with two wrinkled butts on two large diapers.... Let me tell you, if I changed my mother and that blue liquid showed up? I wouldn't wait for the next diaper to compare it. I'd go to the hospital!

I wonder if they could use the Topol commercial: See these ugly yellow stains?

Maybe they could use that Madge lady: You're soaking in it!

Yeah, diapers!

Hey, you've been a great audience..... Except for you, mac.... No seriously, it's nice to be back home.... And I must thank you for drinking your eighteen drink cover so fast.

Thanks. ... Thank-you! ... Thank-you very much!

"John...."

"What. What's wrong?"

"Sue just called...."

"Shit...."

"She said the nurse says you should go home right away..... Hey, John, I'm sorry. ... Look, if you want a couple days off, you know...."

"Thanks, Chuck."

"Hey, John, I never told you this, but she came in one night, and we started talking. She was real proud of you."

"Yeah, and she still forgot what channel and what time my show was on...."

"They want you back out there, John."

"Come on, Fred, can't you see he's in no shape..."

Thanks.... Thank-you! Thank-you! ... See what happens when you drink your eighteen drink cover too fast? .

You know, people always ask me: Did you always want to be a comedian? ... Okay, okay, what they really say is How long have you been an asshole?

Seriously. No, I didn't always want to be a comedian. I wanted to be a rock star and have thousands of teenage girls throwing themselves at me. So I talked mom into paying for lessons. Music lessons, singing lessons, leering lessons, lessons on how to swing the mike stand without killing anybody? On how to rub-up against the mike stand? ... But I couldn't make it as a rock singer.... I never figured out how to get that zucchini to stay in my crotch....

Thank-you! ... That's it for tonight.... Like a great philosopher once said bidy bidy bidy bithat's all f-f-f-folks!

And one last thought: Why aren't there three socks to a pair? Think about it on your way home..

-Hey, do me a favour? ... Tell your kids you love 'em?

THAT LOVE AT LENGTH SHOULD FIND ME OUT

10 p.m. in Winnipeg and 7 a.m. in Moskva. ... You are slowly waking up. ... You keep your eyes shut, stay still for a few minutes, then open them very, very slowly. You stretch your right arm, then the left, right foot, left foot, before you extend your arms above your head and stretch your whole body as if for an offering. You hold the pause for a minute then release every muscle. ... We were in a farmer's barn outside Leningrad the morning after my military service the first time you did this. Twenty-six ... no, twenty seven years and your awakening is what I miss most.

Haven't seen you in such a long time.

"Another vodka, Fred."

Harry and I know things, they know other things, and it all evens out in the end. An unending chess game. The king and queen are

invisible. There sure as hell are no knights.

Vodka. I'd trade all the vodka in Winnipeg ... no, nobody would want it.... I'd trade all the vodka in Moskva to have you by my side, ride the ferry on the Moskva as we did when we were students.

11 p.m. and 8 a.m.: You've been up for a while and are getting ready to go teach school. Are Evgeni and Vsevolod fighting at the breakfast table again? I can never say much and you write everything is fine. You say I shouldn't have to worry about your small problems when I'm doing such an important job. A good woman, you are, my Vladeлина, and our boys are good boys, but what kind of men will they be? How I wish, my Vladya, I could be there to help you guide them. Maybe you should listen to your sister. Tell them I've died, go on with your life.

"Hello, big guy. Need company?"

No, I don't need company. A loner. Maybe that is why I'm still in one piece. Or am I? How can I know? It's not easy living these lies. Always listening in, never saying much myself. No wonder they call us Quiet Harry at the office. "Harry's a good man", "Harry's dependable", "You can count on Harry", "If anything goes wrong, see Harry. He'll fix it". Harry, I wish I could see you. I wish you could tell me why it is I love them so much I cannot set them free.

Harry, you could have had all the advancement we wished for but we have to keep a low profile. Not that their side doesn't know who we are by now. They keep tabs on you and I keep an eye on the man who's keeping an eye on you. It all evens out in the end.

The Mountie man is Hans and they made sure we had a Canadian sounding name. And they knew you would be in Winnipeg where my real name would have been as innocent as yours.... Hans can, he has, checked up on everything I've told him about yourself. You're forty-nine, I'm fifty-one. You were born in Moose Jaw, public schools, the high school hockey team, the works. Your childhood memories are mine, I just change the names for Canadian ones. You even get to vote and I get a kick out of voting Conservative.

We get along well, Hans and you. He knows I know, he knows I know he knows. We all pretend we don't, it keeps it interesting. At the office he calls you Mr. Smith and I treat him like an aging and somewhat sour accountant should treat his junior. After work we go to a neighborhood bar and we talk about his family, your school days, your first loves ... how I wish we could tell him about Vladya ... after all, he knows about that part too ... does he know about the boys? ... all the things men bitch about over a few drinks. Harry, I'm tired of you stealing my past, and I'm tired of keeping track of yours....

We've been to Hans' home a few times. Met the wife and kids: two little girls, cute as buttons. ... How I wish you could show him a picture of my family....

You're giving the last of one hundred hair brush strokes to your long black hair. ... There was a grey one last time. And when I asked you why you didn't pull it out you said you wanted me to see it. At

the time I thought it was because you wanted us to grow old together. But now I wonder, Vladka, why was it so important for you that I should see it. I wonder if there are many now.... I wish I knew. I wish I could spend a night counting them.... Fifteen after eleven. It took us a long time to make that natural, telling time. We could never figure out why you had to say fifteen after eleven. It makes so much more sense to say fifteen after eleven when it's eleven forty-five. After all, fifteen after eleven sounds like the fifteen is chasing the eleven....

Where the hell are you, Hans. And what can be so important that you would want to arrange a meeting?

Vladelina ... you should be on your way to school right now. Unless one of the boys is sick ... Vsevolod never was too strong.

You've got a few grey hairs too Harry. You're going bald and you've got an ulcer to keep us company at night. You drink a little too much, but I don't really care.... I wonder, Harry, will you lie about your age when you reach fifty? That is something I wish I'd had to decide.

"How's the insurance business, Mr. Smith?"

"Up and down, Fred. Up and down."

"That's nice. Freshen your drink?"

"Yes, thank-you."

Harry, Harry, Harry, our days of chasing enemy spies around the world are over.... Not that I ever believed we would be ... James Bond?

Christ it's a dirty business.... Lying, preying on weak men until they fall and give you their secrets. A damn dirty business. LeCarré was right about that.

"Evening, Harry."

"Good evening, Hans. Cleared up the Black account?"

"This one's a bitch, Harry. I don't really want to close it."

Are you getting sentimental on me? Black accounts.... That McGee guy was one of Harry's Black accounts, until he killed himself. Poor McGee.... Your wife doesn't satisfy you, you look elsewhere, your mistress starts asking for more, you take an option on your life insurance. Harry finds the unusual movement in your portfolio. He goes to McGee's favorite bar, buys him a few drinks and he tells all his troubles to his new found friend Sal the bus driver. All we had to do after that was run a check on who McGee worked for.

Unfortunately, he worked for an outfit that was awarded part of a subcontract ~~from a subcontractor to the defence department.~~ McGee was sunk: if he didn't give you, now Mark Jones, industrial spy who was using Sal the bus driver as a cover, some information you would tell on him. ... Why must they always end up revealing something? ... After that, it was all over: Now, one of you could tell McGee's boss he had been indiscreet ... unless he told you more....

You got lucky, Harry. Then again, everybody's a McGee. Guess there's no need for closet space now that all the skeletons are computerized, on file in one place or another. ... A neat expression that is, skeletons in the closet.... Ah, McGee ... if you'd known how little Harry and I cared about your mistress and your wife finding out. And if you really did love her, why couldn't you tell her once you were found out? Why did you want it to go on? Like Sal the bus driver said: We're all human.... A damn dirty business.

It's not as if I saved the world from certain doom ... or stopped a mad scientist from ruling the universe. ... What wouldn't I give for a mad scientist....

"What's so funny, Harry?"

"Oh, nothing, Hans. I just got the joke Peter was telling the secretaries this morning."

"You've always been a bit slow on the uptake, Harry. Hey, Fred, bring Harry another drink and my usual."

You and your goddamned Martians. I don't know how you do to drink those shot glasses of lime and vodka all night. Damn shame to mix vodka with crap like that, even Canadian vodka. You know it annoys me and I know you do it on purpose. ... Wish I could think of something to annoy you, haven't found anything yet, except rooting for Team Canada when we come to play them and that's only because Harry would. You're always taunting me to try one of your goddamned Martians but I never will.

"A bitch account, Harry. A real bitch."

You belong in Winnipeg, Hans. You don't look much like a TV spy either. But if it wasn't for those Coke bottle glasses you'd look like ... what's his name ... not Roger Moore, the other one.

We make quite a pair, don't we. "World freedom rests on your shoulders while I support whatever it is I support. And all we really care about is filling in our quotas and keeping our cushy covers. Isn't that what it's all about, our cushy covers? But I understand Hans, Harry has a good life too. And if it wasn't for his real occupation he could be happy.

It's 9 a.m. back home.... Vladelina is teaching, and here I am, thousands of miles away from home doing my job by drinking Canadian vodka. Six more years, Vladka, six more years. By then, my sons will be men.

"How's the wife and kids, Hans? The little one getting her braces on soon?"

"She had them put on Friday. She bragged all bloody weekend long about those goddamned braces. Shit, I still haven't paid off Stephanie's."

"She's a real cute kid. She's what, ten, eleven?"

"Frances is thirteen now, Harry."

"You're kidding! Last time I saw her she was this high."

"Kids grow fast. And you haven't been over for supper for a while. Sarah's been asking about you."

Good Christ, Hans. Isn't it enough we always end-up at the same

parties because we both like to know what we're up to? It was nice for a while to go over to your house and spend time with your family, but you're not the only one who needs a break from Harry, you know. "Yeah, well. You know, us bachelors. Give her my best when you get home tonight. She's a real sweet woman."

"Yes, she is. Harry ... tell me something, don't you ever get lonely here?"

You've had one too many, Hans. You shouldn't have put it quite that way.... I wish I could tell you. And I wish I knew too.... I don't know why I never married a Canadian girl. Vladya would have understood, or so she would have said. Maybe that's why. Because I didn't want to hurt you once more, my Vladya. That, and maybe even not wanting to live one more lie, wrecking the life of another innocent woman I would have had to desert when I returned home ... in six more years ... if I go home. I've already deserted my Vladelina, have I deserted my sons? Can absence be felt if presence was never there? Could I have lived with a married Harry Smith? Could I have let you fall in love, Harry? What would I have done when your wife did all those little things you found endearing, the same endearing things my Vladka does? Maybe not being married is one less thing he, they, can get at me with. Married men are easy targets, McGee found that out the hard way.... I don't know. All these reasons are good ones. What is the real one? Maybe it is I just cannot love anybody anymore. A damn dirty business that kills all illusions. "You know how it is."

"Hey, Harry, I'm zorry. I shounna menzionned it."

Those Martians are really getting to you, aren't they? You usually hold your liquor much better. Something's up.... "Something bothering you, Hans?" Black account.

"Ah, Harry. Izza long story. I wooden wanna bore ya."

"Hans, it's me ... it's Harry talking to you, we're friends."

"Geez, Harry."

"Hey, Fred, bring my friend Hans another Martian."

"Thanks, you're a good guy."

"I know, Hans, I know."

"One more Marxian bites the dust!"

"Now, tell Harry what's wrong."

"Aaaaaah, Harry."

"Hans, it's me."

"Well.... It's the wife. She wands me to getta raise an' I've been tryin' to dell her raises aren't like raisins. Get it? Raises, raisins?"

"Yes, it's a good one."

"Anif I can't getta raise I'll have to work overtime. And you know how she hates it when I work late."

"I know, Hans, I know."

"So, we've been fightin'. Not infronnadakids, a course. It's pretty bad. Sarah's been havin' cryin' fits for noddin' anekids know somepin's wrong so they're worried and id's affectinem."

A McGee variation. One more Black account. Six more years....

"Set them up, Fred."

"Yeah, Freddieroo. Imma gonna wipe out the whole fuckin' planet Marx tonight. ... But firz, firz, I godda call the wife so she don't worry."

If it's two thirty in Winnipeg it's ten thirty. You're walking up and down the schoolyard, supervising recess. You like doing that, or so you write. But, Vñadelina, what do my sons do, during recess? Last time, you wrote As you know, Vsevolod and Evgeni are going out with the two Firsov girls ... I didn't know, Vladka. ... Shit, Fred, can't you look over here from time to time, I need a drink....

Sarah is a good woman. Frances and the oldest, Stephanie, her birthday's next Wednesday, should get her something, are beautiful kids. ... And Hans is going to blow it all away because he wants to keep everything nice for them. He's not going to get a raise: he already makes more money than a junior usually gets, thanks to me. ... Damn it, Fred, I need a drink! ... Since he can't accept advancement in another department, or another firm.... Oh, what the hell, just this once.... Wouldn't it blow his cover? His real job is to keep an eye on Harry and me.... The only way he could get more money to provide for all those things his family needs is to get my job.

Goddamn! ... You're right, Hans, a little slow on the uptake.... Yes ... a man can get in a lot of trouble if he drinks too much. And what is it you've got up your sleeve for me?

Can't leave for another six years.... No! It's four years, just four years; I'm fifty-one, it's Harry who's forty-nine. Four years,

four years, four years and I go home, get a few medals, a pension to live off on with my Vladya. We could go shopping at GUM, the place Catherine the Great built so she could shop to her heart's delight. God, it's been so long since Toronto.... Everybody's anonymous there, even more anonymous than in those European cities we used to go to our separate ways, so we could meet. Ah, my Vladekina, how you liked the Eaton Center because it reminded you of GUM, just bigger and gaudier, and how it made you homesick. The boys wanted ... oh, what was that name? ... oh, yes, Iron Maiden, Iron Maiden records, and you wanted one of those coffee machines you could program to make your coffee so it would be ready when you woke up.... Wish I could see you do that again. Maybe that's why I keep forgetting to get an adaptor. No wonder we ended up spending most of our time in your hotel room....

"Hey, hey, Harry. I'm back! Where'd my Martian go?"

"You don't say Marxian anymore, Hans? "He's right here, Hans."

"Bgrh, bgrh. Oh, God!"

"What's wrong, Hans?"

"I swallowed it sideways, Harry. Fred, another special!"

"Hans, call a truce."

"Aaaah, Harry...."

"Call a truce, Hans. It's getting late."

"Aw, shucks, Harry."

It's a good thing I know where you live, isn't it? ... A left or a right here? And he's too busy snoring in the back seat to give me

directions. Yes, oh yes, a man with a small drinking habit can get in a lot of trouble. But if ol' James Bond can get into trouble, who can't,... "We made it home, Hans."

"Huh? Where am I?"

Yeah, right. "You're in my car. I drove you home from the bar." Recess is over by now. What are you teaching them? "Looks like Sarah's up."

"You hafta come in wid me to splain."

"I don't think so,"

"Please, Harry? For old timezakes?"

The place hasn't changed much. They had the sofa recovered, a few more pictures of the girls and of Hans and Sarah on the mantel. It says something if you still take pictures of your couple.

"Oh, God! I'm going to be sick...."

Nice touch, Hans.... "I'm sorry, Sarah. I let Hans have one too many Martians."

"Martian?"

So, he doesn't tell you.... "It's a long story."

"Well, it's good to see you, Harry. I just wish it was under better circumstances."

What do you mean by that, Sarah? "Sarah, it's all right. You look even more beautiful than when I last saw you...."

"You're still the charmer, Harry. You must have it pretty good, an old bachelor like you?"

How much do you know, Sarah? And how much is really innocence?

"God! I'm sorry, Harry.... Sarah?"

"Well, I guess I better make coffee."

You're not usually that ... submissive? ... Is it because he knows, or because he doesn't know and you think he needs coffee?

"Hans, for old times sakes. Just tell me what you want."

"What, what do you mean, Harry?"

"Hans, please. We've been playing this game for too long now, discussing Black accounts, keeping tabs on each other. You know I know."

"I know you know?"

"Yes."

"What is it I'm supposed to know, Harry?"

Well, at least you're not doing the drunk. Why did you do it in the first place? "You know."

"Harry, would you mind speaking English?"

Very much so. I've been speaking English for the past eighteen years now. "Hans, what is it? What did you find out? How, how did I become a Black account?"

"You do know."

"Yes."

"How?"

"I tasted your Martian."

Why are you laughing?

"Oh, I wish I'd been there. I would have loved to see your face

when you brought the Martian to your lips and your expression when it went down. Of all the fucking times to take me up on it!"

"What do you mean?"

"They were always like that. I can't stand vodka. I was just setting you up."

"You've known about this for the past fifteen years?" Why now?

"No, no, no. Harry, Harry, ah, it was just this joke I'd been playing on you. That's why I kept daring you to drink one, you know? And after a while I figured you knew, and I figured well, if he knows why doesn't he just say so? And then, well, I thought that you were getting pleasure out of my drinking those goddamned Martians when you knew it was just water. And I played along because I didn't want you to know I knew."

"I didn't know."

"How did you find out?"

"Fred didn't want to bring us drinks anymore, and I really needed one."

"Here, I didn't bring the sugar, I didn't remember you taking any in your coffee, Harry. Hans, what's a Martian?"

"I'll tell you later. Sarah...."

"No, Hans, let her stay, it doesn't matter anymore. And by the way, congratulations on your promotion!"

"You got a promotion, dear?"

"Aaaaah shucks, Hans, I spoiled your surprise! You see, Sarah, ah, I've decided to go work for this other company and I put in a good

word for Hans so he can have my old job. Nothing's certain, of course, but it looks like he's got it all wrapped up. Especially since he nailed that Black account and I'd been trying to for so long."

"That's great! We should celebrate! The kids will be so happy."

"So, Hans, you going to show me those pictures?"

"What pictures, dear?"

So, she doesn't know.

"Oh, yes! Sarah, would you mind getting our vacation shots?"

"Now?"

"Yes. Sarah, it's probably the last time I see you both so I thought it would be a nice way of saying our goodbyes." You see, Hans? I'm not always slow on the uptake.

"The pictures, Hans?"

I never thought motel room specials could look that sleazy. You were right, McGee: a man is never as naked as on an eight-by-ten glossy, and his woman loses all her beauty.

"I've waited a long time for this, Harry? I always wondered when you would finally cheat on your wife."

There has been another one, Hans, and almost another. And I'm glad you don't know. "Hey, we're all human, aren't we? ... Tell me something, what are your people going to say when they find out I'm gone?" Because I know they don't know, Hans. You wouldn't have been

the one to confront me with these. And why didn't you tell them?

"I told you, Harry. I've waited a long time for this. The whole thing's been set up for a long long time. It doesn't matter if you're there or not. Along with my reports, in quadruplicate, of course, about your latest moves, I've been sending reports on some of your moles

You know about that too?
so that when I finally nailed you, I could get your job, keep my cover because they'll want me to keep an eye on your so-called moles and so keep my real job. I've figured it all out, Harry. I get everything."

"Why the fake drunk then?"

"Human nature, Harry. You should know about that. I just wanted to see if you would try to take advantage of me, and you almost felt like it for a while."

I was going to. But when I tasted that Martini I figured out the fake drunk and assumed you were setting me up.

"Why didn't you, Harry?"

"The same reason you didn't give these pictures to your people, Hans, because we're friends."

"That's nice, Harry. I wondered about that, you hadn't been at the house for a while, you know. But, Harry, if you don't figure out a way to get out, I will give these pictures to my people."

"Don't worry, Hans. I'll figure something out."

"Hey, Harry, if you want, I can arrange for you to collect your

pension from Monolithic."

"Sure. Where's Sarah, I want to say goodbye to her too."

"She's probably in the garage looking for those slides. I hope I can come up with a good explanation about why we decided not to look at the vacation shots."

"I'll think of something. So long, Hans. And, thanks."

"For what?"

"I can go home now...."

"Sarah?"

"What's going on, Harry?"

"I'm leaving."

"Harry?"

"Yes, Sarah."

"I'm glad we didn't."

"I'll miss you, Sarah."

When it will be seven a.m. it will be five p.m.. I'm coming in. Probably kissed the Order of Lenin goodbye.... Maybe not. If I can make up a good story without admitting Hans got the better of me, I can probably think of something for that too.

Moskva is very beautiful this time of year. I wonder how Vladelina looks now. Will I be able to get to know my sons? Vladka, you write the sun still shines through the bedroom window in the

morning. What about the other rooms?

Musn't forget to get an adaptor.

MOONSTRUCK

On a clear day you can see forever. Why can't you see forever on a clear night? The city lights are bright enough to make the horizon into something as palpable as a string of christmas tree lights. It is summer; the horizon is an electrical fence.

She takes a handful of pebbles from the roof covering and throws them one by one at the full moon spinning overhead like a frisbee tossed nonchalantly by some giant or a Greek god with even weirder hobbies such as rolling boulders up mountainsides knowing they will only soundlessly crash eighty floors down. Sweat trickles down her back following the gracious line of her spine. She lifts her summer dress over her head. On top of the world and nude.

A long time ago, when she had still been comfortable with the innocent patterns of pink and white flowers on her bedspread, she had

wanted to fall in love with someone who would promise her the moon. He, the realist, made her see she had no place on her walls to hang it. Let someone else want it, he said, adding she shouldn't be so selfish and, instead, should be very happy knowing it was there casting spells over lovers, inspiring poets and being promised by less scrupulous people than he. Then she had wished for the moon. Now, when the flower pattern on her bedspread is wilted, all she wants to do is fall.

A few stars had been out. Not that many, but a few more than usual. Her bedroom window gave onto a quiet residential street on which streetlights weren't powerful enough to light up the sky and light out the stars. On the roof, they had made love and, in a scene out of a romance, he had shown her how to tell the stars.

"Look. Right up there. The great bear and the little bear."

"Where?" Bears were really cute. A couple of them forever roaming the sky was a nice thought. She lay back on the gently sloping roof to see them better.

"Right there." He sat beside her.

"I don't see them." She opened her eyes as wide as possible. Panic started to creep into her mind. What if she couldn't see the bears?

"See that bright star?" His finger was pointing at the stars, but which one? Just his fingertip covered millions of miles.

"She squinted, "Ah ... okay. Yes, I can see it."

"Well, it's one of four irregular corners. See?"

"Uhuh." Maybe the bears were inside that celestial cage, like that lamb-in-the-box about the little prince.

"See the handle?"

"Yes, I see it." So? Where are the bears?

"Right beside it there's a smaller version."

"Okay." Get to the bears.

"Well, there they are. The two bears."

They looked like frying pans to her. Imagine that; even the sky could lie. Space was a male chauvinist void. The only thing you could really trust was the moon. You could trust something like that. White. Pure. One face. He sat there with his back to her, the one thing about him she could describe clearly from having seen it so often day and night. He looked at the sky while a tear slid down her cheek; a tear through his dried wet kisses and her sweat, the salt from the tear leaving a stinging sensation as if he had opened yet another wound she would never be able to heal. She tried to stop the next tear but, not knowing its reason, she couldn't tell herself everything would be all right. She looked away, kept her eyes fixed on the frying pans hoping they would metamorphose into bears for her.

Perhaps it was her fault. Could being a woman permit only certain perceptions? Maybe he really did see bears. Maybe they really were bears. Had she been trained to only see frying pans? What else was there she couldn't see by some sort of sadistic birthfright? Would the bears forever roam the sky, changing into frying pans when they felt her eyes looking for them? Questions, so

many questions which the best books wouldn't answer. She wished for a women's magazine article called "The Special Spacial Perceptions of the Modern Woman." She would never be able to lie on this roof and be loyed by him at night without looking over his shoulder and seeing bears that weren't.

Autumn. They had set camp somewhere in a forest somewhere off a dirt road leading nowhere. Cold and rain had washed the green off the leaves to leave room for a psychedelic pyromaniac's palette until some less imaginative painter would whitewash everything.

Like people in scenes she had read by flashlight so long but not so long ago (she would sometimes hide in her closet just so she could read by flashlight, the yellowish white circle of light on the pages seemed to bring out the best in her favorite books) they had bathed in the river. Since it was autumn they had started a small fire and wrapped themselves in a blanket.

Sometimes it seems there's a poet in the sky whose only job is to make sure people on earth will find everything to their taste; an experience similar to going to a small, still undiscovered restaurant and finishing the evening with a wine never to be found again. It was the sky poet who had hung a full moon.

"... kill the moon...."

"It's 'Kill the envious moon.'"

He turned to look at her. "What?"

"The passage you're trying to quote, 'Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon.'"

He laughed. "I wasn't quoting any passage. I just said we were going to kill the moon one of these days. What, with modern technology and space...."

"Oh. I thought you were quoting Romeo and Juliet." Something she had read by flashlight, 'Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon' something Romeo had said to her, Juliet. She had cried over and over again reading the end of the death scene. Sometimes she would pick the book off the shelf and read the death scene to feel herself cry.

He raised a beer bottle to his lips, emptied it, and sent it splashing into the lake where it bobbed until it sank. "I read it, you know."

"Read what?" She felt like the beer bottle.

"That book of yours."

"Why?" She didn't bother asking him if he had liked it.

"I wanted to see what was such a big deal about it."

The sky poet became an interior decorator: A white styrofoam ball over a black velvet sky. The water shining like a freshly Windexed glass-top coffee table. Trees standing guard as wooden soldiers. Something was missing ... the Rice Krispies sound of the fire?

"I'm not surprised you can quote passages from it," he said.

"Oh?"

She suddenly wished she could.... No, she couldn't. She waited for sunrise; at sunrise they could go.

"It's your kind of story. Impossible love and things like that."

She sighed, "You're right., It is my kind of story."

Something like a laugh came out of his throat. "Impossible love!
All they had to do was turn their backs on it."

She noticed his arm was around her waist, holding her tightly against him.

He fell asleep beside her after a long moment of silence. She watched him sleep, trying to find something endearing about the way he looked in his sleep. All she came up with was that he didn't snore.

If only she could leave him during the night. Leave him there, unconscious. Like in the movies they never went to see because, he said, such things never happened in real life, he would wake up and find her gone. Perhaps that was why he could sleep so peacefully; because he knew such things never happened in real life. He didn't know she spent each and every night watching him sleep and wishing she could leave. Could it be like the bears in the sky, could it be that the privilege of leaving at night was restricted to one sex?

Tonight was her best chance. There were no floorboards to send up loud squeaking protests when she was able to step out of his bed. There was no door to open, to shut behind her. Nothing could betray her escape; even the moon had slipped behind a cloud so she could slip away unseen.

She couldn't leave. Only he knew where she was, just as he had been the only one to know where the bears were. He had the keys and was the only one who could get in the driver's seat.

There was a lake in which she could wrap herself for one last slumber....

There was still hope. It wasn't as if they were married. He could still walk out on her, and save her.

Just before stepping out on the roof of the tallest building, she had read the sign on the huge door that had barred the way: EMERGENCY EXIT

This was an emergency. When the calendar had declared it was spring he had asked her to marry him. Or something like that; he had said it would be a nice thing to try and see what marriage felt like.

Tomorrow is the wedding day.

On top of the tallest building Juliet looks at the moon. What would it be like to try and catch that huge, glow-in-the-dark over-easy egg, and miss?

She sits on the parapet with her bare feet dangling in nothingness and freedom.

She opens her eyes again to look at the full moon one last time. You cannot leave a good friend, almost a lover, a friend who always understands moods and sighs, who, whenever you look is always looking at you and you see instant empathy. You cannot leave a good friend without saying goodbye. Every night that friend had paid a visit, peeking down from above unless the clouds had gathered for some stormy partying. She would tell Moon the day's events, her moods, feelings and joys. Moon always looked down from above. Sometimes she could see a smile, a playful wink as if Moon really expected the cow to

leap over, or a frown, a pensive look. Moon played the part of the grandparent; she could even see the wrinkles when that was what she needed. Moon, the confidant who forgot nothing yet never remembered anything if someone asked. Moon, a reminder she had first made love on a new moon. Knowing Moon could not come had made her feel safer.

A gust of cool wind prods her out of her reverie and nudges her forward.

She stands, a foot away from flight. She drops one last pebble over the edge. Way down below a siren howls in pain.

She raises her arms in front of her; palms open, arms together, as if an offering.

Moon gently alights in her hands.

She allows the illusion of holding, caressing, embracing.

Moon smiles, grows brighter.

She lets her arms fall to her side.

Moon waits.

She tries again. Palms up, arms together.

Moon alights. White. Pure.

She steps off the ledge, onto the roof. The pebbles hurt her bare soles,

She looks at Moon and touches herself.

Moon, full, grows brighter.

She closes her eyes.

After Moon slips behind a cloud she slips her summer dress down
over her head.

Moon lights her dress white.

Frying pans?

Kites., Free flying kites.

PRETTIES FOR YOU
for D.B.,

Fast cars, fast foods, quickie motels: The St-Jacques strip.
Neon blue Sirens Sirens Sirens wash out in a blur on the wet pavement.

*Baby, baby, baby
Why do you say maybe
Be my lady baby
Hey show me you love me.*

He says we should sit over there at the small stage. He says Lilac is over there by the bar. He says it's always this busy, busier on paydays. He says hey, over here. He says, with his hand waving, hey, over here. He says hey. I say sorry, I was looking at the lady on the stage. He says leave a seat to your left, a seat between us so we won't get crowded out. He says hey. I say sorry. He says you ain't seen nothin' yet.

*She left me, ooooooh ooooooh, she left me
So I'm standing here in the rain
A cold shower for the pain
Never get hurt again, believe you, me.*

Two Buds please. Applause for the main stage dancer. He says that's Zoe.

"And now, Sirens is proud to present the always alluring ...
Alice!"

Long black hair. Black eyes, from here anyway. Killer black eyes. Music blasts out. Alice shakes her head round 'n round. Black hair does 360's

*Tonight, tonight, tonight-ight-ight
We'll make it last all night-ight-ight*

Alice stands. Caresses her legs. Up to her thighs. Up her stomach. To her halter top. Back down over her breasts. Shakes her head. Long black hair over her breasts. Down. Down. Down slowly over her stomach. Thumbs hook into G-string. Hands down her legs. Up. Up. Up. Halter top lifts. Comes back down. She turns around. Caresses her back. Hands on ass. Grab tight.

New song.

Alice smiles. Lifts the halter top. White breasts. Dark nipples, from here anyway. Lifts breasts. Grabs them. Wets a finger. Circles a nipple. Pinches it. A wink. Tongue licks lips. Hand down over stomach. Other hand playing with breast. Into g-string. Out. Inside of thigh. Other hand follows. Bends down.

Breasts plunge down. Hair hangs in front of her. Kneels. Sits on heels. Thighs apart. Shakes her head. Hair flows over left shoulder. One breast covered. Caresses the other. Turns around. On all fours. Cups G-string. Pulls. String sinks deep into ass. Swings around. Legs spread out. Bends. Head touches floor. Hair spreads out.

New song.

Alice stands. Caresses breasts. Turns around. Slides thumbs in G-string. Pulls. Down. Not too much. Turns. Hands wrapped around back. Fingers caress back. Slow dance. Hand down to ass. Other hand grabs it, smacks it back up. Hand goes down to ass. Other hand grabs it, smacks it back up. Hand goes down to ass. Shoulders shrug.

Turns around. Arms cover breasts. Hand down to G-string. Inside. Pulls it down. Down. Down. String catches on stiletto heel. Black high heels. Lifts leg. Hands on sex. One up to breast. Other playing with hair down there. Finger inside labia. Up stomach. Other hand goes down. Down. Finger to lips. Over nipple. Down to labia. Turns around. Bends over. Caresses. Over cunt. Up to ass.

Song ends.

Alice gets halter top, G-string. Steps down stage. Gets dressed. Grabs tray.

He says so, how'd you like it? I say wow. He says told you you'd like it.

"You want another beer?"

He says yeah. He says meet Doe. I say Doe? Doe smiles. I say

yeah, another beer. She goes. He says she's cute eh? I say yeah.
He says she has a little boy at home. I say oh. He says yeah.

"Six dollars," Doe says.

He gives her seven. He says next round's mine. Two guys over there talking to Zoe. One guy leaves with her. I say where are they going? He says to the bar for a dance. ... What, did you think something else. I say I don't know, I'm not a regular. He flinches. He says hey, I come here sometimes, to relax. ... It don't mean nothing. I say sorry. He says s'alright. He drinks. He says it's not that kind of place: no upstairs, no backstage. He says it's a private dance. One song, five bucks.

"And now it's time for the famous Sirens' Swingin' Sextet."

Six girls on the main stage. Arms over each other's shoulders. Legs swinging as they march up stage. Can-can. They break up. Start solos.

He says the swinging sextet is a showcase for the girls that don't get many five dollar dances. He says that's how they make their money. He says they only get minimum but make up to a thou a week on private dances. I say oh. I spot one girl behind the others.

Wearing a black t-shirt with Emile Nelligan's face in white. Long blond hair. They strip. Emile Nelligan last to take off t-shirt. Last to take off dress. I say who's she? He looks. He says don't know, she must be new. I say wow. He says she's five bucks. I say will she get to our stage. He says don't know.

Fat guy in white undershirt comes up, looks at stools. Parks it

on the other side of the stage steps. He says see why I wanted us to spread out? I say yeah. I drink. I say wow, this is a lot better than last time. He says so, you've been here before, eh? I say no, but a while back I got fake I.D. and went downtown. He says where? I say don't know, but it was pretty dingy. Dancers weren't as good looking. He says well, this is no dive. He says I mean, they keep a tight control on the guys in here. He says don't ever forget the rule: No touching. No matter what, no touching. I say what if? He says you die.

*I'm just an ordinary guy
Living an ordinary life
You're way too good for me, I know
But that's no reason to say no.*

*Saw your face on a Vogue cover
You were born on a lucky star
But for me it's always never
Getting away without a scar.*

*Midnight passions on Saturday night
Sunday morning wake up
With the sheets all messed up
Messed up like I'm fucked up.*

She puts the tray down. Gets on stage. Song begins. He says that's Miss Ellie, only thing she don't take off is the cowboy hat. Three song routine. Steps down. Gets dressed. Picks up tray.

"You boys want another beer?" Miss Ellie asks.

He smiles. He says you're supposed to say yes. I say I haven't finished this one. He says that don't matter.

The guy that went off with Zoe says 'scuse me. He says yeah?
Zoe's guy says me and my friend are having an argument. He says yeah.
Zoe's guy says is she eighteen. He says all girls here are over
eighteen. Zoe's guy says she don't look eighteen. He says hey, this
ain't kiddie porn. Zoe's guy looks pissed off.

He says assholes musn't be from here. He says hey, Lilac.

"Hi, how've you been?" Lilac asks.

He says pretty good.

"I haven't seen you in a while."

He says he's been busy.

"Too busy to come and see me?"

He says he's been real busy.

Lilac smiles, "That must be hard work if you're that busy that
you don't have time to drop in, say hello."

He says yeah. He says meet my friend.

"Hello."

I say hello, Lilac.

"He's cute," she says.

He says Lilac, you busy?

"I've got the main stage to do and then three dances. I'll come
and see you later, okay?" Lilac answers.

He says okay.

I say wow. He says yeah. He says she goes to McGill. She's in
communications. He says I saw her there once, well I thinks it was
her. Yeah, it was her. He says and she looked at me to say yes I.

recognize you, you're a nice guy, but I don't want to see you, I don't want to talk to you, not here, not now.

A dancer comes to our stage. It's not Nelligan. He says see the c-mark? I say what? He says the c-mark, look closely and you can see the c section mark. I say what's a c-mark? He says cesarean section, asshole. I say oh.

Another dancer. He says.... She kneels down, flies her hair in my face. Wow. He says.... She smiles. She lies down in front of me, plays with her labia. Wow. He says.... Song ending. She slowly crawls down the stage steps. Wow. Song ends. I watch her dress.

"Hi, you want another beer?" she asks.

I say yeah!

I give her eight bucks.

He laughs. He says I kept asking you if you wanted a beer. I say when? He says oh, you were too busy looking at her. I say yeah.

I say fuck, I want to see Nelligan. He says she's over there. I look to the bar. Nelligan is slugging down a drink. He says she's new, they don't usually let you see them drinking. I say they drink a lot? He says fuck, man, how do you think they get through this? I say yeah.

Fat guy has one of the sextet dancing for him. She talks to him while she caresses herself. Song after song after song after song dances for him. He says guys blow whole pays here. I say yeah. Fat guy keeps adding five dollar bills on her tray. She keeps on talking, caressing. She laughs at a joke. He keeps peeling fives off this wad

he holds. Song after song after song.

He says good, man, now we'll get to see a dancer on our stage. He says if a girl is doing a dance where this guy's sitting they don't let a girl on the small stage. I hear loud screams. I look at the main stage. He says that's Mauve. She's doing gym tricks on this bar hanging over the edge of the stage, like an acrobat. He says she got a gold medal in gym at the Québec games a couple years ago. I say wow. He says yeah, she makes a hell of a wad.

Mauve. Natasha. Prudence. Rachel. Sapphire. Tabitha.

"Hi, I'm free," Lilac says.

He says I'll be back. I watch them go. He sits in the corner elbow of the bar. Lilac grabs a small stool and dances for him. He comes back. He says Lilac wants to know if you want to join us. I say yeah.

"Hi," Lilac says. "You told him about the rules?" she asks him.

He says yeah.

"Look, see my ring?"

She has a gold ring in one of her labia. She pulls on it. "So, tell me about yourself."

*Mister Shy Guy, Mister Shy Guy
Too shy to say hello to you
In case you'll say to hell with you
Mister Shy Guy, Mister Shy Guy.*

*True Blue Suit, pin stripe special
Pin stripe institutional
Silk shirt, silk shorts, matching socks
Behind the stripes, feelings locked.*

"Hey, hey, hey. We're going to announce the winner of tonight's champagne bottle in a few minutes. Pay attention now."

"I hope I'll win," Lilac says, "If I do we'll share it. It'll be fun."

I say yeah.

Lilac gets dressed.

He says why don't you tell 'em you want to win?

"It doesn't work anymore...."

"Hey, hey, hey! Okay, here it comes.... So, tonight's champagne lady is ... Mauve!"

"She gets to win whenever she wants to now," Lilac comments.

He says maybe next time.

Lilac shrugs her shoulders, "Yeah. Next time.... Hey, it would have been fun, you know, drinking champagne together." She goes away.

He says Lilac's nice. He says you should see her boyfriend, man. I say he big? He says he could be a whole fucking defensive line on his own. I say wow.

Nelligan comes on the stage. Finally. I've always had a thing for her type. The song begins. She moves a little bit. Not much. He says you can tell she's not used to this. He says if she lasts she'll get to be as good as Lilac. I say yeah. Nelligan takes off the t-shirt. She wears a green dress with black spots. One shoulder strap cut off and the bottom in sawtooth at thigh level. The first song ends. Another song. She slips off the shoulder strap. White, white breasts. Nipples just as white. She doesn't move much. She

stares off into space. He says she's really not into it. I say nothing. Another song. She rolls the dress up to her navel. A ring of material around her waist. She shifts her weight from one leg to another. Song ends. I say yeah. She smiles. Nobody applauds.

He says time to split. I say yeah.

Lilac is upstairs at a phone. I say goodnight. She says yeah, right.

He laughs. He says when she's off she don't have to be nice.

I say oh.

He says what's wrong. I say nothing. He says don't let Lilac bother you, man, it's nothing personal.

I say yeah, s'cool.

He says so, what's wrong.

I say nothing.

He says yeah, right.

He says what, you disappointed in that Nelligan girl?

I don't say yeah. I am, but I don't say yeah. I don't say she reminded me of this girl I knew in high school. I don't say she was a dead ringer for her even if there's no way it was her. I don't say she was a dead ringer for this girl I saw at the metro a while back. I don't say she was crying. I don't say I suddenly felt like I really should go up to her and ask if anything was wrong. I don't say I really felt like she was in trouble, heard it inside me like my son's ghetto blaster at full boogie, and that I could actually do something. I don't say I didn't. I don't say I just took the bus and went home.

I don't say while the bus was leaving I couldn't keep my eyes off her as the bus pulled out and pulled me away from her. I don't say I got home and felt like shit because I didn't do anything. I don't say I didn't want her to say get lost and think I was another creep making a pass. I don't say I really wanted to see her strip. That I stayed to see her strip. I don't say I felt like the fat guy in the white undershirt. I don't say I looked around me and saw all these men looking at these women taking off their clothes for them and that if one of those men looked at me I was one of them. I don't say I felt like a drop in one big fucking sleaze puddle. I don't say while Nelligan was undressing, she was undressing, I thought of how she belted down those drinks before coming on stage. I don't say I knew what the next step was, or the one after that. I don't say she undressed like my wife on our wedding night. I don't say nude she looked as innocent as my nine year old daughter when she skinny dips in the lake up north. I don't say that even if I knew Nelligan wasn't there I got turned on by her body. Those firm young breasts. Those white, oh so white nipples with no corona.

I don't say I came.

NOW PLAYING AT A THEATRE NEAR YOU

for the New Age man

There's no opening theme. By the time I realized I was caught in a bad movie it was too late to think of one.

THE DIRECTOR

He waits for the bus with her. They exchange small talk. The bus comes, she gets on it. He sees her find a seat in the rear. The bus leaves.

She doesn't wave goodbye.

ONE WEEK LATER

Friday night. Six fifteen. He calls. There's nobody home. She'd said to call at six thirty so the fact she isn't home doesn't bother him. Six thirty-five:

"Hello?"

"Hi, it's me. How's it going?"

She sighs, something about work, "...and you?"

"Okay. Did you have time to figure out what movie you want to go see?" It shouldn't be difficult. Along with all the American box-office hits there are all the films that were well received at the Festival International de Films de Montréal a month ago.

"How about *La Femme Publique* at Le Parisien?" she asks.

He looks at the schedule in the newspaper. "Sorry, I'm not sure I can be there in time for the showing." He looks at the movie ads, "There's *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune* at eight."

"I don't really want to go see that," she says. He hears the rustling of a newspaper page being turned. "There's a nine o'clock showing of *La Femme Publique* at Place Ville-Marie."

"That sounds good." He should arrange a meeting place. "Where do you want to meet?"

"I don't know."

"Are you going by metro?" It's easy to meet someone on a metro quai or inside a station.

"No, I'm walking."

"Oh."

"Le Bistro, at eight?" she suggests.

"Where's that?"

"On St-Catherine, in front of Eaton's. It's in that new complex called Les Galeries du 7ème Art. We could meet there and have a drink before the movie."

"I haven't eaten yet."

"Oh."

"How does Le Tramway sound?" He remembers her saying she liked going there.

"No way. I used to go there when I was eighteen. Not anymore. Did you ever go to Le Commensal?"

"What's that?"

"It's a vegetarian restaurant-cafeteria below Le Bistro. They sell food by the kilogram."

A vegetarian restaurant. She knows he doesn't eat vegetables. A dare. "That sounds nice. I'll look forward to it but you'll have to guide me."

They exchange hanging-up lines.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT:

On his way to Le Commensal he gets caught up in one of those *It's a small world* moments. He meets Roger and his girlfriend at the bus stop. Roger worked with him on a summer job not long ago, spending days in front of calculators adding things up. Roger's pleasure at seeing him is once more a surprise. After all, he'd blown one of Roger's moves on a girl they both had their eye on. It wasn't that much of a slip when he'd mentionned to the girl Roger sure had a nice looking girlfriend. It might have been worth it if, for a change, he'd got the girl.

SOME TIME LATER:

Le Commensal: An open-spaces-neon-tube-lit place with white melamine tables. He looks like a melancholic hero stranded out of a forties movie: Bogart, perhaps, in his black cords and long grey trench; perfect colours as Le Commensal has white walls with black and white tiles on the floor. The framed prints on the walls look like a set decorator's touch; normally they would have been part of a bargain batch thrown in by a kitchenwares salesman. He gets a cup of coffee, black, and waits.

EIGHT P.M.:

She arrives. In real life nobody gets anywhere right on time.

"Have you been waiting long?"

"Oh, no. I just got here myself," he white-lies.

LATER THAT EVENING IN THE CINEMA:

They talk about favorite movies. Hers is *Les Ups et Les Autres*, a Claude Lelouch movie based on the assumption there are really only four or five different stories but that they keep repeating themselves.

Lights out. The movie, the one he's paid to see, begins. He watches the screen as it flickers the story of Ethel, *La Femme Publique*, who, if the price is right, is everybody's mannequin, mistress, plaything or whatever it is people hire her to be. Ethel gets the lead role in a movie based on Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed* only because the director-actor is in love with her. It is only when

Ethel stops being submissive and playing parts other people want her to play, when she decides to do things as she feels she should do them, when she is honest with herself and with others, when she no longer says lines written for her but feels every word she says, when she no longer plays part and stops acting, that she becomes a good actress. The punchline to *La Femme Publique* comes when those who were actors in *The Possessed* join the actors in *La Femme Publique* and take a bow before the credits are rolled, making it quite clear it was just a movie and repeating the old adage *all the world's a stage*, or movie screen.

Walking up McGill College street, he more or less follows her, trying to decide whether he should put his arms in hers. They discuss the movie they've just seen:

"I kind of liked that movie," he says. "I don't fully understand it but it was good."

She, who turns out to be the leading lady, has at that point understood much more of the movie. "I liked it very much. I enjoyed the way the director shows how Ethel can only fully realize herself after she stops acting for others. I can sympathize, you know."

"Mmmm." It's his standard response in such a situation.

She tries to see his expression before going on. "What I really appreciated is the way the movie in the movie, how *The Possessed* is thematically very close to the lives the actors and the director lead outside the soundstage.

"Yeah." It's his turn to find something about the movie he can

use to show he too can be an intellectual. Telling her he doesn't really understand why the director fell in love with Ethel would only make her think he's insensitive. "Did you notice how the English subtitles were sometimes faster than what was being said? And how one moment they were way off and the next moment were better than the original dialogue?"

After an awkward moment of silence, she says, "About last weekend....".

FLASHBACK (a tasteful nude scene):

Two people interlaced. The sheets cover part of her right ankle, most of his left thigh, then cascade onto the floor where their clothes are strewn. She asks him to describe what is happening to her; he softly speaks of how her breathing forms a cocoon around them, tries to put into words the silky texture of her skin under the light pressure of his hand, the sugary-bitter aroma exuding from her/them as the light from streetlamp filtered through a closed curtain allows them to see each other in the dark with the illusion the fire of their passion lights them from inside. He kisses her closed eyelids. Her lips brush his shoulder, "It's okay. It happens sometimes...."

FLASH FORWARD:

"I want to make sure you understand I just felt like being with you. It was very nice, but...."

"But it doesn't mean you love me," he continues.

"Yes," she says, relieved by his understanding.

STREET SCENE:

The setting is perfect:

Rue Sainte-Catherine, especially east of Union is unique. La Catherine, who once went disco, is now meddling into punk, jazz, and new wave. Whatever it is you want, La Catherine has it. Store windows display the riches of the world and the cheapest Taiwan souvenirs. Pharmacies advertize: Pregnancy Test - One Hour, and a special on a 3-pack of coloured safes. Everybody's there: Young couples in love, tourists from the prairies out for an evening of corruption they can talk about at the next church social. Punks, leather jackets, whores of both sexes sometimes camouflaged as belonging to the other sex. An understanding of safety that just might blow up in your face if you fail to respect the public privacy exuding from every shadow and half shadow created by the neons, the streetlights and, tonight, the full moon.

"Une nuit de pleine lune...."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing important."

He laughs.

"What's so funny?" she asks.

"I don't believe this is happening." He shakes his head. "Why are you telling me this? I knew there were no strings attached when...."

"I get the feeling you're expecting more out of this than you should."

"I'm just out with a nice person, having a good time. I'm perfectly happy with that," he says. She looks at him to see if his expression matches his words. "What's really funny is you're the lady and you're using the guy's lines. I mean, I'm the one who's supposed to say 'Thanks for a great evening, see you around.'"

"I'm being honest," she says. "I don't want you to see anything serious coming out of this. I told you I already had a lover...."

"Marvin," he cuts in, thinking of a fat nobody with thick horn-rimmed glasses.

"...Yes. And if you want to call me to go see a movie or something, it's okay, but...."

He never believed people really said....

"I don't...." she continues.

"Wait. Please don't say 'You're a nice guy but....'"

"I'm not in love with you," she finishes.

They've reached rue St-Denis where it is said all the *intellos* hang out. He wonders if one of the many unemployed actors said to be hanging around the cafés would run his lines for him.

"I don't believe this."

"See, you wouldn't be getting so emotional if it was true you didn't expect something from me," she points out.

He looks up to a full moon. "That's not it. I mean, we've only known each other since last Friday night. I like you, but I'm not sure if I really like you. At best this can be considered a first date and already you're going to all the trouble of dumping me. If

you were going to do this, why did you bother going out with me tonight?"

"I'm not dumping you," she says, now on the defensive. "Look, you want to go for coffee somewhere?"

INTERIOR SCENE. CAFE:

They walk into the first decent looking place. Café Américain. The place is crowded. The prints on the wall are tasteful. The people in the café look like a bunch of extras plunked down amongst the furniture. One respectable looking couple sits in the back, two jean jackets near the door, one punk waitress and a clean-cut guy behind the counter. They get coffees. Perfect timing, as they turn around to find a seat, the nearest table's occupants leave.

She tastes her coffee. "Look, let me explain. I like you. You're a nice looking guy. You're funny and I enjoy your company. But when I got home last Saturday afternoon I felt even lonelier. If I'd been in love with you I would have done the housework, painted the walls, been really active trying to funnel all that energy I would have gotten from you."

He shakes his head. "Oh, great. You want a bolt of lightning and earthquakes." She looks at him. "There was no lightning so you can't fall in love with me. Because of that, you won't even wait and see if 'time will tell', to use an old cliché."

"It's just that I know what's right for me and what's not," she says.

"And I'm not."

She lets his words float in between them.

"And I'm not," he repeats, louder.

"Not quite." She sighs, "Listen. You wouldn't want me to pretend you are." She waits for a reaction but doesn't get one. "If you still want to go out and see a movie or there's a show you think I might enjoy, call me."

"In other words, 'Thanks for a great evening. See you around.'"

"It's what I'm saying but not what I mean."

"Okay." He gets up. "Can you show me where's the nearest metro?"

EXTERIOR SCENE. ENTRANCE OF THE BERRI METRO STATION:

She gives him two friendly kisses on the cheeks.

A kiss is just a kiss....

"So, you going to call me?" she asks, walking backwards.

"I don't know," he answers, standing still, his hands in the pocket of the trenchcoat. A little fog greys the scene.

"Oh, okay."

"You have my number?" he asks

"Yes. I have your number."

They turn around and go their own ways.

INTERIOR SCENE. HALLWAY LEADING TO THE COLLECTOR'S BOOTH:

ROLL CREDITS:

Three young musicians are playing a classical piece: two girls on the violin and one guy on the guitar; an unusual combination, but they make it work. He stops to listen and joins the crowd: a few couples and lone men and women.

People walk by, slow their their step as they pass. Someone leaves, someone soon fills in the empty space. Sometimes, the lonely men and women make eye contact for a fleeting second as if to say it's nice not to be alone, before their impersonal barriers go back up. The music ends. They applaud.

He drops money in the guy's guitar case. "That piece you played...."

"Le Boléro de Ravel," the guitariste answers, "du film Les Uns et les Autres."

THE END