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Canada

SO MANY MEN

DOUGLAS JANOFF

A Thesis
in
the Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

May 1990

(c) Douglas Janoff



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ABSTRACT

Blood Brothers

Douglas Janoff

So Many Men is a novel about Andrew Lacasse, a cynical male prostitute from rural Quebec who works on Dominion Square. He is "discovered" by Bruce Barnes, a documentary filmmaker, who catapults Andrew into fame and notoriety. After their highly-charged relationship has broken down, Andrew gets involved with a political organization that advocates euthanasia for suffering AIDS patients. He is eventually charged with the murder of thirteen hospital patients, including Bruce, and is sent to a psychiatrist for examination.

The novel uses Andrew's point of view to recreate the crucial events of his life leading up to his arrest. Letters, diary excerpts and flashbacks are interlayered throughout the text – contrasting an earlier, simpler, rural life with a harsher, more complex, urban world. *So Many Men* is a *bildungsroman*; the protagonist leaves home, encounters adversity and finally learns to take responsibility for his own actions.

For my mother, and in memory of my father.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a story about the AIDS crisis. Ten per cent of the author's royalties will be donated towards the development and maintenance of an AIDS information network in Brazil.

"MAD DOG"

*...I'll never be a lapdog,
Licking dirty feet;
A sleek dog, a meek dog,
Cringing for my meat.*

*Not for me the fireside,
The well-filled plate;
But sharp stone and shut door,
And cuff and kick and hate.*

*Not for me the other dogs,
Running by my side;
Some have run a short while,
But none of them will bide.*

*O mine is still the lone trail,
The hard trail, the best;
With wide moon and wild stars,
And hunger of the quest!*

When it rains it pours. Andrew reflected on this as the police car snaked up the S-shaped curve lifting them into a sea of mist. Gobs of freezing rain thumped down on the blue-and-white sedan, splattering across the windshield and swishing away, only to reappear within a fraction of a second. In front, two policemen cursed the storm with a thick, steady torrent of blasphemies. The older, paunchier cop in the passenger's seat coached and prodded the younger mustachioed driver through the blinding torrent.

The grey outline of the city's towers disappeared from view. This November dampness was taking Andrew back to the musty attic over the barn -- crammed with glass milk bottles, legless coffee tables, dismembered mannequins -- where he would scan the yellow *Maclean's* magazines for hours. He recalled an advertisement for Morton's salt: a little girl with a bumbershoot, splashing through a puddle. The caption: "When it rains, it pours." "*Mais qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, Maman?*" She explained that salt used

to go lumpy during damp weather, but, because she understood little English, she never explained the slogan's pun. It took him years to figure that one out.

When it rains, it pours.

They passed through the gates of Mount Royal Cemetery. At the end of the narrow gravel roadway, the car ground to a halt. The older cop opened Andrew's door, grasped his wrists firmly and snapped on a pair of handcuffs. While the younger one stayed inside the vehicle, his superior walked Andrew past a waiting car and made him stop for a moment directly in front of the driver's window, which was half-rolled down. Andrew heard a click and was momentarily blinded by a flash. The young cop escorted him up a slippery path like a dog leading a blind cripple. In the distance about a dozen people clustered together beneath a jagged roof of black umbrellas. They shivered around the rim of a freshly-dug hole, staring at Andrew's captor in stony silence, as if to shame him into unlocking Andrew for the duration of the service. A few feet from the group, the policeman, using one hand, flicked a wide black umbrella over himself and Andrew. He jutted his jaw defiantly at the onlookers, as if to say: *You're lucky to see even this much of him. Now get on with it.* He held the umbrella a few imperceptible centimetres closer to his side, causing a steady run-off of icy water to dribble down Andrew's neck.

The minister – a short, earnest-looking man engulfed in a full-length raincoat – was barely discernible beneath his hood. He stood in front of the oak casket and read with steamy spectacles from a plastic-covered page, copied from the Book of Job:

All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my

teeth. Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?...And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though mine reins be consumed within me. But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? Be ye afraid of the sword, that ye may know there is judgment.

As the coffin eased into the rocky soil, Andrew suddenly felt dizzy. He was almost relieved to be attached to this big lug; otherwise, he might have keeled over. Andrew's friends closed in, enveloping him but leaving the embarrassed lieutenant linked to, but not part of, the cozy circle. For a few minutes the only sounds Andrew could hear were the rustling of rain ponchos and the continual droning downpour. In front of his friends, he remained calm. But after the policemen deposited him back in his car-cage, he was finally alone with his grief. The cops smoked and chattered beneath their umbrellas while Andrew wailed; then they made their way back along the muddy track.

En route to the prison, as if to torture him, they veered through Andrew's adopted neighborhood. The police car glided down St. Urbain's slope at a giddy pace, past the rows of multicoloured triplexes, Greek pastry shops, fish markets, abandoned public schools and ruined churches. Andrew had first explored this neighbourhood, on the northeastern slope of Mount Royal, eight years earlier -- and was immediately overwhelmed by the smokey smells of poppy-seed bagels and sizzling souvlakis. For a twenty-year-old country boy, the Russian Orthodox church, with its green minarets sprouting over the tranquil tree-lined streets, had been as exotic as the Taj Mahal. His

first glimpse of each synagogue, each kosher butcher shop, seemed as foreign as an Arab bazaar.

They passed the Santropol Café, the Hotel-Dieu Hospital and the Florateria, where he had often bought flowers for Naomi's brunches. The police car bounced along the buckled, rippling strip of asphalt -- which resembled the main street of a mining town in the permafrost belt more than a main avenue feeding into the city centre. When the older cop got out at a corner store to buy cigarettes, Andrew begged him for a newspaper. The policeman tossed a paper into the back seat and Andrew saw himself mirrored in a front-page photo below the screaming headline:

HOSPITAL MURDERS: LACASSE LINKED TO AIDS HIT SQUAD

Andrew Lacasse, arrested last week in connection with the murder of twelve AIDS patients, may have been the ringleader of a euthanasia "hit squad," police sources said yesterday.

Lacasse, an orderly at Montreal General Hospital, faces fifteen counts of first-degree murder, second-degree murder, manslaughter, attempted murder and being an accessory to a murder.

An autopsy released yesterday by Royal Victoria Hospital officials confirmed the presence of foreign chemicals in the bloodstream of Bruce Barnes, an AIDS patient who was found dead in his bed. Lacasse was arrested at the same hospital around Barnes' estimated time of death.

The mysterious deaths of at least twelve Montreal AIDS patients in the past year has fuelled speculation of a series of murders similar in scope to the baby murders at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children four years ago.

Police sources say Lacasse has been linked to a shadowy group of radical homosexuals whose members allegedly infiltrated hospitals and tampered with life-support systems in order to allow AIDS patients to die painless deaths.

Euthanasia, the act of "mercy-killing" patients who are terminally ill or suffering extreme pain -- even if they no longer wish to live -- is illegal in Canada.

There is no known cure for AIDS. As of last week, two hundred AIDS cases had been recorded in Quebec. Ninety-two per cent of the cases involve gay or bisexual men.

Lacasse, a flamboyant member of Montreal's gay community, first rose to

international prominence in 1982 as the outspoken prostitute in the National Film Board documentary, "The Hustler with the Heart of Gold," directed by the late Mr. Barnes.

Sources inside the gay community say that Lacasse and Barnes had been lovers for over four years. One friend said the couple's relationship "went down the tubes" a year-and-a-half ago when Lacasse first learned of Barnes' AIDS diagnosis. Police confirmed that they had been called in "on more than one occasion" to settle violent domestic disputes between 1982 and 1985. The couple lived in a loft apartment on lower St. Lawrence in a seedy red-light district where artists in chic condominiums rub elbows with derelicts and drug addicts.

Jean-Louis Tremblay, a counsellor for AIDS victims at the Plateau Mont-Royal Health Clinic, says that many of his clients have "suicidal tendencies" after being diagnosed as having AIDS. He refused to comment on the incidence of euthanasia among AIDS victims.

"Euthanasia is more common than you'd think," said Dr. Pierre Bellerose, a professor of legal ethics.

Dr. Bellerose explained that many mercy killings occur with the full knowledge of family doctors, who often turn a blind eye to the situation.

"If anyone offers money for euthanasia to be performed," he explained, "the person paying for the service is equally guilty under the Criminal Code, and can also be charged with murder."

Lacasse will appear in municipal court this morning, where it is expected he will be ordered to undergo a complete psychiatric examination.

Lacasse was granted special permission to attend Mr. Barnes' funeral this afternoon under heavy police security.

A city in ruins. As they hastened through the downtown core, he stared out at the checkerboard of empty lots and rotting warehouses as they hastened through the downtown core. Almost without warning, a downward-leading ramp engulfed them and they were suddenly speeding beneath the earth's surface along the Ville-Marie Expressway; Andrew now understood why planners called such routes "arteries." As the long fluorescent tube-lights whizzed by, Andrew could almost feel the skyscrapers shooting out of the ground above him. This particular artery pumped them straight through the heart of the city, connecting the centre to points unknown, far off the island. *Montreal is sick.* This police car was like a bubble in the bloodstream. He remembered Raquel Welch's tight rubber suit in *Fantastic Voyage*, and the little spaceship that was

shrunk a thousand times and injected into the sick man's bloodstream. The crew saved the man, and the man ended up saving the crew just as the shrinking effect of the spaceship was starting to wear off. They escaped through the sick man's eye in a gush of tears.

In spite of the modern expressways and mirrored towers that continued to rise at the southern foot of Mount Royal, a death-smell rose out of the rubble of this once-great metropolis. A doomed city. A city of death. Perhaps he would escape the death-stench of this city. *In a gush of tears.*

He snapped out of his reverie as the car merged into the smoggy daylight. They veered onto the exit ramp of a twisting cloverleaf but the car barely slowed down, screeching around the narrow concrete curve.

"If we're lucky," Andrew said mock-cheerfully through the screen to his escorts, "we'll all be killed before I even get there!"

"Shut up, you fuckin' faggot," Sgt. Pierrefonds snarled, taking his eyes off the road almost long enough to send them catapulting down fifty metres to a ragged assortment of railroad tracks. A few minutes later, a large rectangular sign, planted in the vast brown lawn that formed a muddy moat around the massive Gothic-looking building, announced:

INSTITUT CORRECTIONNEL PSYCHIATRIQUE DU LAKESHORE

LAKESHORE PSYCHIATRIC CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE

Aside from the lawns – which, although it was hard to tell in November, must have looked inviting in the summer months – the "institute" had every appearance of a prison. The only prisons Andrew had ever seen were the ones near Kingston. You got off the 401 in search of a truck stop and presto! Suddenly you were face to face with a cold limestone castle surrounded by ranks of barbed wire and searchlights and sentries and turrets. They passed the checkpoint without stopping. The old gray walls filled up the entire windshield now, as their car slid into a kind of inner courtyard filled with ambulances, vans and other official vehicles. The policemen opened the door and let him out of the car with a grunt.

No handcuffs needed in this medieval fortress. The lobby was in chaos. Doctors, nurses, orderlies, some gowned, others masked, all wrapped in white, jostled for space up and down the fluorescent green corridors. *Now it feels like a hospital.* The difference, of course, was the presence of guards everywhere at the same time, trailing behind patients who were connected to hoses and bottles of plasma suspended above wheelchairs and rolling beds. His two police escorts entrusted him to two waiting guards. Andrew was dazed by the appearance of his two new companions, swathed in white gowns from head to heel, gloved, masked, and extremely untalkative. At first he thought they were mad doctors, ready to haul him off to a shock-therapy chamber.

In this terrifying atmosphere, Andrew received his first wordless tour of the facility. Every hundred yards, a new set of swinging aluminum doors flipped open with a thud and a creak, revealing another stream of wheeled and wobbling patients. To think that complexes as vast as this one existed in cities all over the world made Andrew dizzy and disoriented; the guards jostled him on. The lingering odour of disinfectant greeted

Andrew before he reached his cell. The ceiling was abnormally high; just below, cut into the exterior wall, was an inaccessible window with black metal crosses. A plain white toilet squatted in one corner. The floor was polished linoleum, swirled with colours. Andrew flopped his travel bag on the lone wooden chair and stripped, throwing his clothes, piece by piece, onto the hard mattress. One guard examined his bag while the other probed his body. They took his bag, along with every stitch of his clothes, and left him sitting naked on the bed. Every few minutes a guard leered at him through a window in the door, then disappeared. Presently they brought him a blue cotton uniform, stamped with a faint numbered code, then disappeared again.

His meals were pushed through a slot in the heavy metal door. For the first few days, the janitor was the only person to enter the room; the man looked downright ridiculous, entubed in a safety suit that seemed secure enough to shield him from deadly gamma rays. He negotiated the alien landscape of Andrew's cell like a cosmonaut. Andrew would sit on the bed while the man worked, wheezing feverishly through his face mask. Even more bizarre was the man's attempt to chat him up as though they were in the neighbourhood barbershop. "Nice day today," he would enunciate, clasping the mop with thick rubber gloves and slopping it around the toilet.

Andrew never missed the opportunity to reply facetiously: "I wouldn't know, the windows are too high," or "Really? In November?" If the janitor commented on the inclement weather, Andrew would reply: "I'm so glad to be inside on a day like today."

In spite of the alienating treatment, Andrew was relieved to be far from the glare of flashbulbs. He slept deeply for four days, curled tightly into a ball, rising only to eat and go to the toilet. Then a guard summoned him to the visitors' room -- the kind you

see in the movies, split down the middle with a long sheet of plexiglass that rises to the ceiling – and directed him to his booth, with phones connecting either side. He was relieved to see his first familiar face. Marvin Schwartz grinned impishly at Andrew through the glass, stained with greasy fingerprints. Marvin was short and wiry, with a long bony face and a receding, thinning mass of mousy-brown hair. His soft eyelashes, which fluttered incessantly over his pink-veined eyelids, lent the lawyer a misleadingly soft impression. His gravelly voice conveyed the exact opposite.

"You all right?" he growled into Andrew's receiver.

"I'm okay," Andrew replied. "But I want some books. How long am I going to be in this nut-house?"

"As long as we can possibly keep you here," he said, rolling up his eyes and frowning slightly. "Just sit tight, okay? You might as well get comfortable -- it could be months."

"Months?" Andrew exploded. "If I wasn't crazy before I came in here, I sure as hell will be by the end of the winter!"

"I'm sorry, but it's the best we can do--"

"And who's we, I'd like to know?" Andrew interrupted.

"Andrew, just don't start, okay? I didn't come here to get a lecture from you. Now, when I say 'it's the best we can do,' it's because it's *all* we can do for the moment. There's a lot worse places you could be right now, like—" He paused and let his clear blue gaze finish the rest of the sentence.

"They all think I'm going to give them AIDS in here," Andrew whispered into the phone. "The guy who cleans my room wears this isolation suit. This is against the human rights code, you know. This is un--"

"Will you knock it off?" said Marvin gruffly. "Now if you're gonna pull this screaming-queen number on me, I'll just leave right now!"

He was half-standing, the receiver hooked between his head and his shoulder. His hands gripped the counter-ledge, nostrils flaring.

"All right! I promise! Calm down!" Andrew said.

"Look, I know it's been hard for you," Marvin said, almost sweetly. "You think I don't know what it's like to lose a loved one? Just --" He chose his words carefully. "Just lay low, okay? We'll get you out. Just try not to be--" He paused again.

"You mean, 'a flamboyant member of Montreal's gay community?'" he volunteered mockingly.

"Well, you said it, not me," Marvin chuckled.

Marvin snapped his briefcase closed, rapped the pane with his umbrella and juttied out his lip as if to say, "*Bon courage.*"

"Could you get me a pen and some paper at least? Or something to read?" Andrew begged before Marvin hung up the receiver for the last time.

"I'll try," Marvin mumbled, then was gone.

Within two days, the janitor was dressing almost normally -- except for the thick rubber gloves. One day, Andrew discovered a dog-eared copy of *Le Journal de Montréal* on his supper tray. He chewed and savoured every piece of news, which was about as stale as the bread he dipped into his consommé every day at lunch. Still, he could barely

suppress a smile each time he noticed that an article or editorial had been "edited" from his copy. *They're still talking about me.* He spent each afternoon literally filling in the blanks. After dinner, he combed the whole text again, looking for clues about the fate of his comrades. The bare light bulb would click off without warning.

About two weeks after his arrival, he was summoned to an office which he was surprised to discover was just around the corner from his cell. *Am I being observed?* The plush surroundings were a welcome respite from his own Spartan set-up. Signs of life included one puffy-haired woman, around fifty, flipping methodically through a box of cue cards; two mauve peonies in a vase on her desk, browning slightly around the edges; a spiny cactus shooting out of a clay pot on the window sill like a gnarled, Martian finger; and an instrumental version of "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on my Head" emanating from the secretary's brown, fake-wood clock radio. She handed him an official form with his name typed on it, and nodded towards the adjoining room, also done in the fake-wood motif. It was like a 60's rec room complete with fat, lolling beanbag chairs and foam footrests.

His guard, smoking a cigarette, watched impassively as Andrew plugged in the kettle and greedily scooped out some instant coffee granules. A Colombian peasant, wrapped in a brightly-coloured blanket, smiled at Andrew from the label. Andrew smiled back and thought of Mark. He submerged a spoonful of Coffee-Mate into the hot brown liquid; the lump slid off his spoon and disappeared in a swirl of chemicals.

He sank into the low-slung chair and took in everything around him, while focussing on nothing in particular. By and by he realized he was staring at a poster on the opposite wall that featured a sandy-striped cat, suspended from a chin-up bar,

hanging from his front paws for dear life. **HANG IN THERE, BABY!** the poster said. But where had he seen it before? A lightbulb – the kind that flashes above people’s heads in the Archie comics – went off in Andrew’s brain. How long ago? Ten years ago, at least. He remembered the newsphoto taken in the Prime Minister’s Office on Parliament Hill; a smug Trudeau was shown displaying that same hip poster to reporters. Andrew massaged the small of his back by rolling around in the beanbag chair, absorbing the warm streaks of afternoon sunlight that filtered through the dusty window. Between sips of coffee, his mind wandered back to the days of Trudeaumania, and the ideological victory of reason over passion. His view of the poster was abruptly blocked by the stocky shape of his guard, who said, "Let’s go." So they went. The door was marked in tall green letters:

DR. GUILLAUME OUELLETTE

CHEF DE PSYCHIATRIE

BUREAU DU REPRÉSENTANT DE LA COURONNE

A graying, affable-looking man in his fifties was wading through a pile of documents that rose nearly as high as the old-fashioned goose-neck lamp that sat in the middle of the whole mess. He motioned for the guard to leave and to close the door behind him.

"Sit down, please," said the doctor neutrally. "I’m Dr. Ouellette." He filled out half a dozen forms that covered everything from Andrew’s school history to his maternal

grandmother's cause of death. Then, for the first time, he looked straight into Andrew's face.

"You know why you've been brought here," he said in a low voice, which came out more like a statement than a question.

"Yes," Andrew replied.

"And why is that?"

"To see if I'm crazy," Andrew said, looking directly back at his inquisitor.

The doctor winced slightly, bridged his hands and focussed on a fixed point somewhere on the wall behind Andrew.

"I think we had better be sure we're using the same terms here," the doctor sniffed, half-rising from his chair. He pored over a row of reference books, jammed between two book-ends carved from chunks of dazzling Brazilian quartz. "Let's see how *Petit-Robert* describes 'fou.' It says, '*atteint de désordre, de troubles mentaux; qui est hor de soi.*'

Andrew answered in a riddle:

*"Un fou qui est fou,
et sait qu'il est fou,
est moins fou qu'un fou
qui ne sait pas qu'il est fou."*

"Now the Oxford Dictionary," continued the doctor, ignoring Andrew's smile, "defines 'crazy,' as you put it, as follows: 'Rickety, falling to pieces, full of cracks or weak joints; made of irregular pieces fitted together; insane; outrageously foolish; etc.' Would you say that's you?"

"Well, I am falling to pieces," Andrew said, suppressing a smile.

"That may very well be true," said the doctor, peering over his half-moon reading glasses. "But what I need to know is whether you're insane."

"How does the Oxford describe 'insane'?" Andrew asked.

The doctor flipped to the new definition.

"It says 'mad or senseless,'" the doctor replied.

"That makes sense to me," said Andrew, smiling stupidly at the doctor.

"Mad," the doctor said almost triumphantly, flipping to a new definition. "Of disordered mind, insane, rabid; wildly foolish; reckless; ecstatic; in ecstasy."

The strange definitions echoed and swirled around Andrew, sucking him gently into a dark maelstrom. Through the window, the St. Lawrence glistened. Tiny houses, like rows of Kleenex boxes, lined the distant southern shore. The river's ripples throbbed and zig-zagged ceaselessly, reflecting his own mind's crazy patterns. Patiently he waited for the dike to break.

"I was thinking of a poem I wrote once," Andrew said, struggling to dislodge it from a distant cranny of his skull.

"So you're a writer, eh?"

"No...well, I've taken a few courses and I, uh..." Andrew began to blush.

"So what about the poem?"

"It's funny. Two things happened at the same time. I had never been to the sea in my life and I'd never written a poem in my life. Bruce and I sort of had a honeymoon in Provincetown and one morning I got up and watched the sunrise and wrote my first poem."

He stopped talking, a bit surprised at how quickly the therapy was taking effect.

"Do you remember the poem?" asked the doctor.

"How did it go?" Andrew muttered. "Oh yeah, it was, uh,

*Waves at high tide
Rush to shore
Only to be pushed back
By their own momentum."*

"Pushed back to where?" asked the doctor.

"What?"

"You said the waves come to shore, then they're pushed back...back to where?"

"Back to where I've been all these years."

"And where is that?"

"It's called Hell."

"And what is Hell for you?"

Andrew slumped in his chair, legs splayed, as though an unseen hand was pressing his torso against the leather backing. He stopped resisting and slid back into the whirlpool. His lower lip trembled, and beads of sweat appeared along his brow. His eyes darted around the room, shifting in and out of focus.

"L'enfer, c'est les autres," Andrew said, his eyes stinging.

The doctor nodded knowingly.

Andrew sat on the steps of the Sun Life Building facing the sun, now setting over the rest of Canada. On one side of the building a maintenance man had just spent the last two hours erasing three black letters spray-painted on one pillar: OUI. By the fall of 1979, the battle lines had been drawn. From the blue-haired French-speaking matrons -- who had gradually taken control of the sales counters at the Eatons and Simpsons stores downtown -- to the recent wave of francophone Vietnamese boat people, across the province citizens were being asked to support or reject a watered-down concept of separatism called sovereignty-association.

Andrew sat out of harm's way, gazing at the greenery of Dominion Square, also known as Carré Dominion. He crossed Mansfield Street and strolled into the park. The policemen gossiped in a cluster on the west side, pretending not to notice him.

"Andy," said a voice coming up behind him.

"Eh, Michel, what's up?"

"Just got some grass."

"We've got visitors."

"Meet you in the 'can."

Within minutes they were smoking a joint in the washroom of the Peel Pub, kitty-corner to the park.

"Gonna be busy tonight, man," said Michel, sucking greedily on the tail-end of a joint. "Hand me your roach-clip."

It was actually a stereo clip from Radio Shack, fastened to a long piece of leather cord with some colourful feathers and beads hanging off it. Michel liked to fondle Andrew's souvenir of the Indian reserve. Michel, in his late twenties, was gruff and stocky and had worked the streets of Montreal for the past ten years. Andrew had never seen him wearing anything else but the mandatory tight jeans and cowboy boots.

"There's some big religious convention in town this weekend," said Michel. "Mormons or Muslims or something. You watch, they put the wife to bed around eleven o'clock, then they'll be crawlin' out of the Sheraton like cockroaches!" He released a belly-laugh. "Keep one, man," he said, passing Andrew a joint.

"Buy you a beer?" said Andrew.

"Can't, man," said Michel, straightening his hair in the mirror on his way out. "I'm late for a date."

He waited for Michel to leave, then slipped the joint and roach clip into his back pocket. Andrew carried around other talismans he had gathered during his time spent with the Indians, including a beaded necklace and a suede bracelet, embedded with a tiny marble. As he pushed open the scuffed bathroom door, he pressed the bracelet to his face and sniffed its smokey moosehide. On the inside of the door, someone had

scrawled NO. He ordered a jug of draft and downed it steadily, staring absently at the television screen.

Yes. No. So what? What did he care about the state of the world?

There would always be people like Andrew, a bit on the lean side, never quite making it.

* * *

The year before, arriving in Montreal alone and penniless, he had swiftly learned the hustler's three rules of survival. His teacher: Jean Mathieu, alias "La Grande Jeannette," drag performer, drug dealer and part-time transvestite prostitute in the red-light district. Their fortuitous encounter took place at a tavern across from Dominion Square on his first day in town.

"Don't worry, honey!" Jean said, coaxing Andrew back to his rooming-house on Tupper Street. "I'm not gonna jump you!"

They stayed up and talked all night. Jean spoke nostalgically about his own adventures after arriving from Chibougamau as a teenager.

"This town can be dangerous if you're not careful," said Jean.

Andrew, in a moment of drunken weakness, mentioned the rape he had suffered the year before. Jean butted out his cigarette and stroked Andrew's head lovingly.

"Honey," he rasped philosophically. "I always say, if you're gonna get raped, you might as well be getting paid for it."

Rule number one: *take what you can get*. Get something out of it-- a joint, a thrill, money, revenge -- anything! Jean quickly taught him the streets to cruise and the parks to avoid. On his first night in Dominion Square, he looked longingly across at the other boys who banded around, sharing joints and jokes and cigarettes in the cool darkness. (*Rule number two: don't speak till you get the sign.*) Finally, the oldest guy came over and said:

"*Eh, travailles-tu?*"

Andrew squinted at him sideways through a stream of cigarette smoke.

"I don't speak French," Andrew said, lying.

"Where you from, man?"

"Toronto," he said, lying again.

"You working?"

Andrew paused and stared at him.

"Well, I sure ain't here for the scenery," Andrew said brusquely.

"You know the going rates?" the stranger replied, lowering his voice and coming a bit closer.

Andrew said nothing.

"Blow job is thirty *minimum*, okay? If they want to pay you any less you tell them to go fuck themselves. Got a cigarette?"

Andrew offered him one reluctantly. The stranger bit his nicotine-yellowed fingernails between puffs.

"I'm just warning you because some kids come around here, they charge twenty, sometimes *ten* dollars," he said indignantly. He gestured to his gang of friends. "If they catch you, they'll beat the shit out of you."

Andrew flicked his cigarette and began to walk away.

"But you look like a good guy," said the stranger, who followed him and offered his hand. "My name's Michel."

Andrew stood frozen and stared at him strangely.

"How do I know you're not a cop?"

Michel burst out laughing.

"You know something? My mom always wanted me to be a cop!"

"My mom did too. I'm Andrew."

"Okay, Andy," he said, beckoning him to the waiting group. "Come meet the boys..."

* * *

Putting these thoughts aside, Andrew finished his pitcher of draft and jumped up, ready for some action. As a rule, he tried not to cover up his body with unnecessary clothing; after all, that was what his customers were shopping for. His street uniform consisted of jeans, a faded cotton tank-top and a jean jacket, which he carried around to ward off the evening chill, but put on only when he absolutely had to. He preferred shirts with V-necks that permitted an inviting view of his sturdy chest and the fuzzy reddish hair that covered his pectorals.

He crossed into the park. The cops were gone. A thirtyish heavy-set man with short-cropped blondish hair and glasses stood awkwardly on the other side of the main statue, staring at him. The man would pace half-way around the statue, stop, retrace his steps, hesitate, turn back around and stop again, his hands plunged inside his windbreaker pockets. First he would seek eye contact with Andrew, then look away in a guilty fashion. Andrew cleared his throat and moved in for the kill. The direct approach was the best; after all, you couldn't spend the whole evening exchanging coy side-glances with everyone in the park. That didn't pay the rent. He rounded the statue and stopped squarely in front of the man.

"*Ça va bien?*" Andrew said.

"Uh, *oui*," the man said nervously.

"Oh, you speak English," said Andrew helpfully.

"Yeah," the man said, a bit relieved.

"Bit chilly for this time of the year, don't you think?" Andrew said, quickly retrieving his cigarette pack from the upper pocket of his jean jacket.

"I wouldn't know," the man said, staring at the statue.

"Oh, you're not from Montreal?" said Andrew, pretending to be surprised.

"No," said the man, obviously pleased to have something to talk about. "I'm from New York."

Andrew raised one boot artfully on the bench, causing his genitals to press against the inside of his skin-tight jeans. The man's eyes nearly popped out of his head. Andrew lit a cigarette and gazed in a blasé fashion towards Windsor station.

"New York. Hmmm. I'd like to go there sometime."

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the man was still staring at his crotch. Now that he was sold, Andrew didn't want to spend an awful lot of time chatting about the sunset. If you didn't get down to brass tacks, they'd small-talk you all evening. *Time is money.*

"So what are you up to this evening?" Andrew said bluntly.

"Not much," the man said evasively. "Just looking around."

"And do you like what you see?"

"Uh, sure," the man said, blushing. Andrew noticed his fingertips were shaking a little bit. "I – I'll come back later, okay?" And then he sauntered off.

Andrew swore under his breath and shook his head. Michel smiled at him supportively from fifteen metres away, where he was about to score with another customer. Michel's smile seemed to say, "He'll come back. They always do." The presence of Michel, his best friend, was comforting, even though they spoke little on busy evenings like this one. They were always aware of each other's movements within the park, keeping an eye out for cops or bad tricks. Because of Michel's seniority, they weren't quite equals, but they were friends.

Michel chain-smoked Export A's and had darkish rings around his eyes. He was six feet tall and solid muscle, thanks to various growth formulas, diets and steroids he got from his weight-lifting coach at the gym where he worked out more or less regularly. At first Michel had taken on the role of Andrew's den-mother, letting him sleep on the floor of the room he rented by the week at a *pension* on Clark Street – a Grand Central for transients, drag queens, fugitives, ex-cons, pimps, hustlers and hash dealers. Michel always had a surplus of good tricks, and before long Andrew was getting the overflow;

soon Michel began asking Andrew to accompany him on dates that required a third or even a fourth party. Within a couple of weeks, Andrew had saved up enough to rent his own room. Andrew had successfully created a new identity for himself: homeless Toronto boy, trying to get back home. He achieved this by speaking only a few standard French phrases and above all, by pretending not to understand it. In his case, it worked to his benefit. For one thing, the other boys deferred to him because of his exotic outsider status. Best of all, he usually knew who was on his side. (His feigned ignorance of French had even saved his life on a few occasions. Once at a client's house he had overheard the man bragging to someone on the phone about how he was planning to tie Andrew up and torture him. Andrew was gone before the man got off the phone.)

Although ninety-five per cent of the hustlers on the Square were French-Canadian, they made every effort to learn "the international business language of love," as Michel cynically referred to English. These were small businessmen, not linguistic quibblers -- unlike the separatist intellectuals who hung out at Café Campus, a student pub at the Université de Montréal, and snubbed anglophones. *Oui. Non.* After years of cultural and linguistic confusion, Andrew was sick of the whole language question. He had been born and raised in Quebec, but during his first protracted residence outside *la belle province*, he'd realized how little the rest of the country understood Quebec. He was also shocked by how little sympathy French-Canadians outside Quebec afforded the cause of the Québécois: On the Indian reserve -- where he had lived for almost a year -- and in the neighbouring Franco-Ontarian town, he had had ample opportunity to talk to red-neck miners, truck drivers, businessmen and school teachers; all assured him they would

be tickled to see Quebec secede from the rest of Canada. ("If they want to go, let 'em!") In Ontario, Andrew met French-Canadians who saw Quebec as the enemy. And English-Canadians who couldn't wait for Quebec to leave. It was one thing to threaten to leave. It was quite another thing to be handed your hat at the door!

Oui. Non. Oui. Non. Andrew leaned back into a park bench and weighed Quebec's options. He wondered how many of the other boys even knew that a referendum was about to take place.

* * *

Andrew was an outsider in his own province – half-French, half-English, and totally confused. He had been born in the Châteauguay Valley, a rural English-speaking enclave about a hundred kilometres south of the city. His family defied cultural and linguistic labels, veering in and out of the assimilation process over the centuries. His mother, Madeleine McIntyre, whose English-speaking parents had died when she was four, had been raised by two aunts, Ruby and Pearl. Ruby married a French-Canadian farmer and brought Madeleine to live with them. Madeleine was raised in a house full of French-speaking children; by the time she was twelve she had completely lost her English. After she, in turn, married a French-Canadian farmer named Lacasse, the assimilation process was complete.

Aunt Pearl, meanwhile, stayed in the town of Huntington and remained steadfastly English-speaking all her spinster life. She took her role as Andrew's godmother quite seriously; once a year, she would arrive at the farm with bags of clothes and crayons and

books like *The Life and Times of Lord Baden-Powell* and *The Royal Family: At Home and Abroad*. Although Aunt Pearl insisted Andrew's elementary education be in English, his parents became more and more fearful of the mounting tensions between the English and the French in the late sixties. At recess, even the children seemed to be aware of Quebec's rapidly-deteriorating political situation:

"You guys be the FLQ and we'll be the Mounties."

"No way! You guys were the Mounties last time...!"

* * *

Andrew walked past a pick-up truck on Peel Street. The driver, who was dressed like a lumberjack, leaned over to the passenger side and rolled the window down. After a few words of discussion, Andrew climbed in and within five minutes they were undressing in a cheap hotel room on Stanley Street. Fifteen minutes later, he was walking back to the Square along Dorchester with two twenty-dollar bills in his pocket.

* * *

The first time he had seen Dorchester Boulevard was on television. He was in Grade Six, his last year of English school before his parents transferred him to a French high school. One October day in 1970, the principal's voice came on the P.A. system, instructing the entire student body to report to the gym, where they sat on the floor

around television monitors, perched on tall portable stands. The children assumed they were being permitted to watch another historic moon landing, and clapped and squealed with delight -- until they saw tanks rolling down Dorchester, with troops stationed on every street corner. His principal, "Old Bag" Bartleman, explained in a trembling voice that the War Measures Act had been declared; they were to go directly home and stay inside. The only word Andrew understood was "war." Fortunately his Grade Six class survived; at their graduation party, they all danced in a circle and sang rebelliously:

*War!
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing...*

* * *

They always come back. Andrew stood beside the statue, self-satisfied, as the nervous New Yorker shyly made his way toward him.

"So you want to do something?" Andrew said.

"Yeah, sure," the man said, turning away. "I—I live on St. Marc Street. We could go back there."

"It'll cost you thirty dollars minimum," Andrew said.

"Fine."

"I thought you said you lived in New York," Andrew said as they walked west.

"I'm *from* New York. I just moved here a month ago."

"Who'd leave New York to come here?"

"I did. I'm studying at McGill."

"Oh yeah. Nice campus."

The brown-brick apartment building, a three-story walk-up at the top of the street, had a gassy smell in the corridors and a few tenants who looked like they'd been there for a couple of hundred years.

"My name's John," he said to Andrew, closing the apartment door behind them and leading him down a damp dark hallway to the living room.

"And I'm Andy," he said, checking out the dim, cramped kitchen. "Aren't you a bit old to be in university?"

"Well, thanks a lot!" said John, a bit disarmed. "I took some time off to work and now I'm back doing my Master's."

"What are you studying?"

"Social work," said John, yanking open the ancient refrigerator to retrieve two beers. Andrew rolled up his eyes slightly and followed him back to the living room. They sat, staring at each other, on opposite ends of the sofa. John gulped his beer noisily and looked at the ceiling.

"I —"

John paused, unable to continue speaking.

"Yeah, yeah," Andrew said. "You've never done this before."

"Well, what are your rates?" John finally managed to stammer out.

"It depends on what you want to do," Andrew said in a business-like tone. "If you want to just do me here, I'll only charge you \$20. I'm supposed to charge you \$30, but

you're a student, and anyway, if it doesn't take too long then I can go back out and make some more money. If you want to party for a few hours, then it's sixty. Overnight is a hundred, but I'd have to meet you later." He paused to catch his breath and light another cigarette. "So what'll it be?"

John studied him for a moment.

"I just want to talk to you."

"Talk?" Andrew said, somewhat puzzled. "Well, that's cute. So I came here to talk. Great." Now he was annoyed.

"I told you I'd pay you."

"I don't understand," said Andrew. "If you're paying me and you want to talk, I might as well be fucking you at the same time."

"No, no, *you're* going to talk to *me*. That's what I'm paying you for."

"Wait a minute," Andrew said, sitting upright. "What are you? A cop? A journalist?"

"Okay, okay, I'll tell you the truth."

"You're not really a student?"

"Yes I am, but I'm doing my Master's thesis on male prostitution and I want to interview you. I figured if I told you that in the park you'd probably tell me to get lost."

"That's right. That's just what I'm going to tell you now."

"But if I knew a little more about you, I could probably help you," John said seriously. "I'm trying to organize a group of hustlers here. In New York I used to work in this place where guys would drop in for information."

"Information about what?" said Andrew angrily. "What the *fuck* are you talking about?"

A drop-in centre for hustlers. He laughed at the absurd vision of him and Michel sitting around a fancy café, swapping magazine articles on the latest blow-job techniques.

"Just forget it," Andrew said bitterly. "It'll never work. Find someone else to study."

John reddened and cringed, and his eyes lowered.

"You know, I wish you guys would go bother somebody else," Andrew said disgustedly. "We've got *everybody* on our case. We've got undercover cops who get dressed up in leather and come after us. Then there's the weirdos who want to tie us up and cut us up into little pieces. Then there's the born-again Christians. They start reading the Bible to us in the middle of the street like we're the devil's disciples or something. And now you want us to tell you all our problems so you can get your fucking Master's degree? Are you out of your mind?"

"I'm not just doing this for my degree," John protested. "I think a lot of hustlers are badly treated and the government doesn't give a shit about them."

"Yeah, well, what do *you* know?" Andrew spat, standing up. "Even if you paid me a hundred bucks I wouldn't talk to you!"

"Well, here's twenty dollars," John said sadly, handing him a bill.

"You sure you don't want something else?" Andrew said, raising an eyebrow.

"It's tempting, but not today," John said, forcing the twenty into his palm. "But come back any time if you feel like talking. Remember, it's apartment 23," he said, pointing to the raised wooden numbers on the outside of the door.

Andrew walked down Ste. Catherine Street, fuming. He made his way into a fast-food café on Bishop Street and ordered a foamy capuccino served in a styrofoam cup. It was a student hangout, and now he found himself between two tables, caught in the middle of a debate about something called "liberation theology." He looked on with a mixture of envy and disdain: pink, shaved suburban faces in pink fuzzy sweaters and leather football jackets with crests that said "lineback." *And what would my crest say? Cocksucker?* Twenty-one years old, no university and the farthest away he'd ever been in his fucking life was Wawa, for God's sake. What would happen to him? Would he end up like Michel, with hardened muscles, hardened smile, hardened heart? *Rule Number Three: Stay hard. Avoid ejaculation at all costs, so you'll have enough energy to move on to the next trick.)*

* * *

From the age of ten he would wake up at 5:30 a.m. to do the milking, take a 45-minute bus ride to school, study, do sports, take the bus back, do more chores, homework and then finally go to bed. He would lie awake for hours with one ear glued to his transistor radio listening to an amazing range of far-flung American stations. It thrilled him to think that teenagers in New York and Fort Wayne, Indiana were lying in bed at the same moment listening to the Jackson Five and Crosby, Stills and Nash on WOWO and WABC.

After high school, his family pressured him to take something "practical," like poultry management or soil technology, so that he could take over the farm and be

"responsible" and "serious" about his life. But Andrew's main goal was to get the hell out. He ended up in an English junior college near the smallish city of Sherbrooke.

The appearance of his new roommate, Mark, unsettled his parents and three sisters, who had gotten dressed in their Sunday best late one summer morning to drive him to his new home. In perfect (but foreign-sounding) French, Mark greeted them in a battered pair of hiking boots and an embroidered cotton shirt that drooped out of his baggy jeans. He had fuzzy hair and a suspicious-looking red bandana twisted around his neck in knots.

Within weeks he had become Andrew's role model, mentor and lover. They were exact opposites, and hopelessly attracted to one another. Mark was Jewish, boisterous, dark-haired and shamelessly gay; he smoked cigarettes and grass and came from a fractured family. Mark and Andrew shared a room (and a bed) for a year and a half. Mark not only widened Andrew's sexual horizons, but exposed him to drugs, rock and roll and Jewishness. They sometimes stayed in their room for days at a time, listening to Lenny Bruce records and reading Jacques Prévert.

Mark was a product of the Cold War. His father, a Middle Eastern Studies professor at Yale, had been blacklisted during the McCarthy era and ended up at McGill. He had met Mark's mother at a Jewish Communist League discussion group. Naomi, who had grown up in the St. Urbain Street ghetto, was working as a cashier at the Loews when they were married in 1956. On their honeymoon, the couple had fought bitterly over Khrushchev's "secret" speech that denounced Stalin as a murderous anti-Semite. Mark, who claimed to be "the dialectical result" of this disagreement, had never known his father, who disappeared mysteriously on a trip to Baghdad when Mark was two...

* * *

Andrew looked down at his tray and noticed he had shredded his styrofoam cup into a mound of chips. That conversation with the social worker depressed him. He went to the bathroom and smoked the other joint, then crossed back into the Square. A dull-red Renault circled past him. He sat with his legs spread open on a bench that faced the adjoining parking lot and hugged his chest to keep off the encroaching dampness. He knew the Renault would be back; within fifteen minutes it had reappeared. The driver rolled his window down and poked his head out, not unlike a rancher inspecting a steer from a distance. Instead of flicking his headlights right off, the driver let his parking lights linger for a few seconds. Andrew got the hint.

"How's it going?" he said, walking up to the open window. The man was younger than Andrew had expected, with reddish cheeks and bright nervous eyes. He must have been in his mid-twenties with clean-shaven Anglo-Saxon features and three shiny rings on his slender fingers. He looked away from Andrew as he talked.

"Wanna come over and party?"

"Party where?"

"We live on St. Lawrence."

"Who's we?"

"My lover and I are looking for someone else to party with." Almost as an afterthought, he added: "You don't *mind* a threesome, do you? I mean, double your pleasure, double your fun, right?"

"Yeah, and double the price, too," Andrew said, smirking.

"Okay, okay, get in," the stranger said, indicating the passenger door. He introduced himself as Donald.

They crawled through Ste. Catherine Street's bumper-to-bumper traffic with the windows down, creeping past the dazzling signs for girlie shows and all-right delis, eyeing the next car's inhabitants. As they got closer to the corner of Ste. Catherine and St. Lawrence, the people jammed on the sidewalks began to overflow onto the street. Narrow alleys and darkened side-streets led to hidden doors beneath neons signs for CHAMBRES, always with a letter or two missing. The buildings were grey, three-storey, crumbling structures whose top windows were boarded up. In front of the seedy beer parlours, one-legged sailors negotiated with drunken whores smeared in glossy paint who swung their purses and barked at passersby, looking for a better offer. Boys from Laval and Ville St.-Laurent hurled insults from cars. One motorcyclist pulled his chopper onto the sidewalk and lifted the visor of his helmet just long enough to ascertain the price of a voluptuous black woman in a leather mini-skirt. She jumped on the back and they roared through the slots in the choked traffic. The air hung thick over that corner, redolent with cheap perfume, french fries, shoe polish, after-shave and sweat.

Midnight on the Main. The car finally managed to negotiate the frantic intersection and parked in a back alley where a transvestite was crouched over a man's heaving groin. Andrew realized they must have arrived; why else would they have parked here, of all places? Although Andrew lived in this area, it never occurred to him that paying customers might live here too. They picked their way past the broken glass and mounted a rotting wooden staircase. The stairs disappeared into a shed that sheltered a solid iron door with three locks. The inside set of stairs was solid and well-lit.

Andrew gasped when they passed through another set of locked doors at the top and entered a huge space. He had been expecting a cold dingy warehouse. Instead, a life-sized cut-out of Marilyn Monroe greeted him upon entry. The immense loft apartment occupied the whole top floor of a textile warehouse on St. Lawrence Street. The ceilings were very high and choked with an endless array of ventilator ducts and industrial-looking pipes of varying widths. It had no rooms, although various sectors of living space were discernible. In front of the window that looked over the street, for example, an old-style sofa and a thick armchair nestled in front of a fifties-style television. A little further down was a "kitchen." The only counter space was a low-lying butcher's block with a cleaver planted squarely in the middle. Above it hung an apparatus that allowed pots, pans and lids to be suspended from hooks at various strange angles that almost made these familiar objects appear to defy gravity. In the middle of the entire space was a "bathroom" consisting of a bathtub — that seemed to have grown out of the floor — and an ancient enamel crapper, complete with a chain connected to pipes that disappeared into a chaotic overhanging metallic maze. The bed in the "bedroom" was barely visible behind a battered old Japanese-style screen that offered a limited measure of privacy.

There was some kind of workshop on the far wall that included gadgets attached to little screens that looped film through spools. The rest of the "living-room" was a nightmare of clutter. There was a rolled carpet sandwiched between a mattress and a dusty bed frame; a hairdresser's chair with the attached hair dryer; a deflated plastic King Kong; dismembered male and female department-store mannequins, arranged in a series of kinky positions; a toilet bowl; a rusting bicycle; dusty rubber boots; and not

least of all a "ski-boose," one of those attachments you put behind a ski-doo to haul extra passengers. Old army uniforms and outrageous-looking costumes were suspended from various pipes throughout the apartment.

"Where's your friend?" Andrew asked, feeling comfortable enough to take off his boots and jean jacket and throw them wherever he pleased.

"He must have gone out to get some pot," Donald replied, cracking open a couple of beers. They walked into the living area.

"Do you like the Sex Pistols?" Donald asked, pulling an album out of its jacket.

"Never heard of them."

"It's punk rock."

"Oh, yeah."

Without further ado, Donald motioned him towards the bedroom.

"Can't wait for him all night," Donald said.

They shed their clothes and tumbled into bed. During foreplay they smoked a joint and sipped on their beers. While Sid Vicious exhorted God to the save the Queen and her fascist regime, Andrew was exhorting a bored-looking Donald to lie on his back and spread his legs wide. He put a glob of KY on his fingertips and smeared it expertly over Donald's ass. He hoisted Donald's feet and set them on his own shoulders, then leaned into him. Once inside, he paused, took a puff from the smoldering joint and got to work. He was in for a long ride. This guy was talkative, so it would involve double the work.

"What's your name again?" asked Donald.

"Andrew."

"Andrew, it feels great. Not so fast. Slow down. Right. Would you be a darling and pass me my beer and cigarette pack, please?"

Without withdrawing, Andrew tilted Donald's torso sideways and skillfully slid him across the mattress a few inches – just far enough to pick up Donald's ashtray, lighter, cigarette pack and beer. He set them on the mattress beside his client. Still joined, Andrew leaned slightly towards him. They clinked the beer bottles.

"Cheers," Donald said. "Do you realize that we're in the minority right now?"

"No, I didn't," said Andrew politely.

"I was just reading a survey in *Mandate*. Contrary to popular belief, only forty per cent of all gay men engage in anal intercourse."

"And what do the rest do?" said Andrew, keeping up his end of the conversation.

"I'm fucked if I know!" Donald said, howling at his own joke. He wrapped his feet around Andrew's neck and held on for dear life. "I'm glad we're part of the top forty," he purred.

"And what do you do, Donald?" said Andrew.

"I just graduated in costume design at Concordia. I'm working freelance at the moment."

"I guess this is a busy time for you," said Andrew, stopping for a moment to catch his breath and finish his beer.

"How do you mean?"

"Next week's Hallowe'en," said Andrew.

"Oh, yes, yes. We're having a big Halloween party here," Donald said excitedly. "I've already started to make the costumes."

"And you're going as a fairy, right?" Andrew said, making a mental note to crash the party.

"Very funny!" Donald said. "Mind you, I *will* have wings. I'm going as a --"

"Donald, I'm home!" A voice bellowed from the bottom of the stairs.

"Oh, he's here," Donald said. "I didn't tell you, but this is a game. The fantasy is, he comes home and catches me in bed with another man. He gets upset and punishes me, and then we both have sex with you."

"What?"

"Just keep going," Donald said urgently. "Pretend we didn't hear anything." Then he began to yell out in an absurdly loud voice. "Oh baby, give it to me! Oh yeah, fuck my ass hard! Oh yeah, don't stop!" Bewildered, Andrew did what he was told. Behind the screen he heard a metallic snapping and the rustling of chains. "It's just a game," Donald whispered. "Keep going. OH! OH!"

"Donald?" the voice said. "Are you in there with somebody?"

"Oh no! My hubby's here!" Donald screamed.

A dark figure emerged from behind the screen in a harness of black leather that stretched across his hairy chest. He was wearing black boots and a studded leather jock strap. His face was covered in a demonic-looking black leather hood that zipped up the back of his head.

"I told you Daddy doesn't like his little boy to play around!" the man yelled fiercely through his mask, pushing Andrew gently to one side. "You s!ut! How many times have I told you not to fuck the boys downstairs? Now I'm going to have to punish you!"

He rolled Donald over on his stomach, pulled off his belt, and began slapping red welts across his bare buttocks.

"You bitch! You slut! You'd fuck the dog if I didn't keep him tied up, wouldn't you?" the voice boomed.

"No, please don't hurt me!" Donald mock-pleaded. "I'll be a good boy, I promise."

"It's always somebody else every time my back is turned!" The man looked quite drunk, but he seemed to know what he was doing. He slipped off a pair of handcuffs, dangling from his side, and locked Donald's wrists to the bedpost.

"Ahh, fuck it," he said, unzipping his mask from the back and peeling it off like a condom. He and Andrew stared at each other for a long moment.

"Andrew," he gasped, suddenly quite sober.

"Bruce?"

Andrew's eyes and mouth widened. "Well, I see *Andrew* gets around," said Donald icily.

Andrew sorted frantically through the pile of clothes for his jeans, and slid his underwear on quickly.

"Andrew, where have you been?" said Bruce, dumbfounded.

Donald lay there fuming, meanwhile, handcuffed to the bed.

* * *

Andrew had met Bruce three years before while attending college in Sherbrooke. He and Mark spent all their free time at his mother Naomi's cottage on Lake

Memphramagog – a favorite summertime destination for Montreal's struggling artists and intellectuals. Andrew was intrigued by this bare-chested, handsome man named Bruce who played footsie with him under the picnic table, his chestnut hair shining in the sun. In a broad, exotic-sounding New England accent, Bruce spoke passionately about Fassbinder and post-modernism.

Later, Andrew found out that Bruce was from Lowell, Massachusetts; like Jack Kerouac, Bruce -- whose family name had been anglicized to "Barnes" from "LaGrange" -- was descended from French-Canadians who had moved there earlier in the century. After having been expelled for anti-war activities at Boston University in the late sixties, Bruce had fled to Canada; he was "discovered" by Naomi, who encouraged him to finish his degree in film studies at Concordia.

On that first day at the cottage, Bruce moved in for the kill shortly after Mark and François, Bruce's lover, had gone for a canoe ride. Andrew went into one of the bedrooms to change; Bruce followed him on the pretext of searching for a frisbee. Before Andrew knew what was happening, he felt a hand slide up his leg; within seconds, Bruce had insinuated himself from behind and was grinding his clammy bathing suit into Andrew's thin, shivering buttocks.

"But you have a lover!" Andrew gasped.

"And so do you, my dear," Bruce said wickedly. In one *demi-tour*, he twisted Andrew around to face him. "François lets me fool around," he breathed, kneading Andrew's thighs with his broad, bony hands. "Surely Mark would allow a slight dalliance?"

Andrew wasn't quite sure what a dalliance was, but he didn't like the sound of it. Although Andrew was well-built, he was no match for Bruce, who was a head taller and had a thick layer of well-defined muscles on his arms, legs and chest. The more Andrew pleaded to be released, the harder Bruce squeezed. He kissed Andrew until they were both out of breath.

"I'll scream," Andrew said finally.

"You wouldn't dare," Bruce said, kissing him farther and farther down his body.

"Sound carries very far over the water."

"You wouldn't dare."

"You're right, I wouldn't."

"You'd better do something about *that*," Bruce said, giggling boyishly and pointing to Andrew's crotch, "before your boyfriend gets back."

Bruce collapsed into spasms of laughter on the sofa. As tears streamed down his cheeks, Andrew bolted out the front door. Fortunately, the canoeists were still too far away to notice the curve in his bathing suit when he hit the lake.

"Is Bruce a nice guy?" Andrew asked Mark that night in bed, after Bruce and François had left for Montreal.

"Nice?" Mark echoed quizzically. "I never really considered Bruce 'nice' before. He *is*, but it's just that, I mean, he's like part of the family. I grew up with him. He used to babysit me. Why? Do you find him 'nice?'"

"Yes," Andrew said. "I wish *I'd* had somebody like that to hang around with when I was a kid."

"You mean like an older brother?"

"Uh-huh."

"I never really thought of him that way," Mark said. "But I guess that's what he is..."

* * *

Bruce fumbled for the key to Donald's handcuffs.

"Aw, Andrew, it was only a game," he said, his voice suddenly very soft. Stay and have a beer with us."

"No, for *you* it's a game," Andrew said, shaking his head. "For me, it's -- oh, never mind!"

"At least tell me what you've been doing for the last two years."

"See for yourself!" Andrew cried. He pointed to himself. "As you can see, *I'm* the real slut around here."

"Andrew, don't go yet. Please."

But Andrew, his shirt half-buttoned, grabbed his jean jacket and was already half-way down the stairs. He slammed the door and disappeared down the dark alley.

He felt relieved to blend into the cacophony of Ste. Catherine Street. An invisible string seemed to pull him a few blocks eastward to the battered metal door of the Bellevue Tavern. There were about fifty small round tables in the tavern, with four or five men jammed around each table. Andrew squeezed into a seat near the stage, a narrow raised platform pressed against the outer wall. Jimmy the waiter, weighed down with a wide tray filled with glasses of draft, stopped in front of Andrew long enough to take a drag from his cigarette.

"Jimmy!" Andrew said. "Your tits are draggin'."

"Hi doll!" Jimmy said. "You drinking alone tonight?"

"Till I get any better offers," Andrew replied glumly.

"There's a guy in the corner--"

"I'm not talking trade, Jimmy," Andrew said abruptly. "I'm talkin' about the real thing."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm talkin' about love, Jimmy. Ever heard of it?"

"What do *you* know about love?" Jimmy said, shrieking with laughter. "Just bring me a jug."

"One jug coming up, *mademoiselle*," Jimmy tittered. "What's wrong with you, girl? You on the rag this week?"

He scampered off. At the table to Andrew's left a group of businessmen were chatting up a rough-looking pool player, who produced a couple of silver-foil packages from the pocket of his jeans. To Andrew's right, a lanky red-faced man in a bright red-checked shirt and hunter's vest stared drunkenly into his glass.

The evening was ruined; he might as well sit back and enjoy the show. A narrow light beamed in on a small back door covered with a curtain, where a sultry Gloria Gaynor look-alike stepped out. (By comparison, the lighting in Andrew's old high school auditorium had been high-tech.) The drag queen was tall and slender with long, black kinky hair that looked almost real. The cream-coloured gown, bordered with fake fluffy fur, had a deep plunging neckline. It hugged her hips then split wide open just before the crotch, revealing a set of smooth, stockinged legs. The only true indication of the

entertainer's real sex were the broad shoulders, covered in a mink stole. She wore sparkles in her hair and lipstick that was so glossy-red it actually reflected the flashing disco lights. She lip-synched badly to the scratchy song, but jerked a thumb defiantly towards her heart in a convincing manner. She wagged her finger threateningly to all the bad boys in the audience, who cheered her on wildly as she sang:

*Oh no, not I,
I will survive
Oh, as long as I know how to love
I know I'll be alive
'Cause I've got all my love to give
And I've got all my love to give
And I'll survive, I will survive,
I will survive!*

The one-woman show followed. Although she was visiting from somewhere south of the border, "Gloria" spoke the universal language of homosexuality -- gay dialect. Andrew couldn't (or chose not to) speak it, but could at least follow it. As he listened to Gloria's monologue, he unconsciously and simultaneously interpreted the feminine nouns and pronouns into "straight talk":

"Girls! It's so great to be back in Montreal. The first time I came was for the Olympics in '76 and darlings, I've been comin' ever since! This bitch has been around, you know what I mean. I was trickin' five, six times a night. I mean, my pussy hurt! I made a special visit to the dormitory of the Romanian wrestling team and I said, 'Girls, I'll pay you! Just don't stop!' And they didn't! This one wrestler named Boris -- well, she was about as butch as my baby finger, if you know what I mean. At the *same* time, I was having an affair with a pole-vaulter. She was head-over-heels in love with me until that cunt (woman) stole him back. Listen up, girls. Take my advice: never get

involved with a straight man (a bisexual man). They'll set you up in an apartment, they'll shower you with furs and jewels, but they'll never say, 'I love you!'"

After the next song, Jimmy plugged the jukebox back into the wall and everyone continued chatting, as though this was the most normal way imaginable to spend an evening. And for the majority of men inside that bar, it was.

* * *

Andrew's first time in a gay bar had been unforgettable. When Mark took him to "Camouflage" in Sherbrooke, they almost didn't let Andrew in because he didn't look gay enough – something he later learned to take as a compliment. Inside Camouflage: smoke-stained ceilings, a hexagonal Molson clock, a slippery dance floor and pool tables surrounded by short, stocky men with dark moustaches, dressed in down-filled hunting vests and workboots.

Because Andrew's only background on gay culture had come from Dr. Reuben's *Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex*, his first reaction to the gay scene was surprise; he had steeled himself to encounter dominant body-builders ravishing passive, thin-waisted transvestites. Most guys, he discovered, fell somewhere between the two extremes: on the one hand, sequinned, silicone-injected transsexuals who shrieked and swore; on the other, bulky bearded men with beer-bellies who swigged quart bottles of Laurentide and dangled Export A cigarettes from their lower lips, grinding their tight crotches into the edge of the pool table in a gruff-but- friendly male-bonding fashion....

* * *

Tonight at the Bellevue there was no magic. He poured out the last drop of draft and stumbled back onto Ste. Catherine Street. He made his way through the east end up to Parc Lafontaine, the other hustling ground, where the clientele was a bit more downscale but a lot more interesting. Parc Lafontaine was a real park, the size of several city blocks, with bicycle paths and tennis courts and artificial lakes you could paddle across in the summer. In the middle of one of those lakes was a powerful fountain. On warm evenings, Andrew would take a break from his work to sit on the ridge overlooking the pond and watch the fountain work its magic. Coloured lights were embedded deep in the centre of the apparatus, which would switch on and off automatically all through the night. Jets of mauve and pink and blue shot out of the pond, dancing gracefully at every angle, a sort of aquatic version of the northern lights.

By this time of the year, however, the pond was drained of life, the fountain dismantled. Brown sludge from decomposed leaves lined the bottom. The bare trees shivered mournfully overhead, ready for the next five months of winter.

In the next few hours Andrew made two hundred dollars getting in and out of various parked cars. The worst part of his work day was going to bed at six in the morning after his fifth customer of the evening had just ejaculated on top of him (or his shoes) and gone.

He went home and sat alone in his grey room as the sun crept in; the toilet flushed as the first roomers of the day plodded off to work. The various drugs he had taken over the past eighteen hours had run their course. In spite of a whole day and night of

sexual activity, he still needed to come before he could get to sleep. He sat up on the rumpled bed and leaned back against the sperm-stained wall. He stroked himself slowly, reliving the sensations of that hot summer day at the cottage – the wet bathing suit; the deep, comforting voice; the wide arms that offered protection, instruction, reassurance. Then he curled up under the covers and dropped off to sleep, dreaming of the day he would wake up and feel a strong, warm body beside him.

Andrew heard a bang on his door and awoke with a start. He lapsed back into his dreams, but before long he heard a boy's voice on the other side of his thin door:

"Andrew! Hurry up! It's starting!"

Andrew threw on his housecoat, lit a cigarette and shuffled out to the kitchen to fix a cup of coffee. While waiting for the water to boil, he scanned the *Journal de Montréal*, reading about an underworld assassination and Ginette Reno's latest Vegas show. Every afternoon at two, the boys from the Square would drop by Michel's room for *The Young and the Restless*. During the show, the boys would ogle their favorite hunky actors; over the commercials, the boys would pass around coffee and joints while exchanging vital work-related information. For most of them, it was also a kind of informal English lesson.

"'Fooling around,' *c'est quoi?*" said Gérard, who was taking notes.

"When you fuck somebody you're not married to," explained Andrew, the group's *de facto* English teacher.

Today, a new boy had been invited to join their inner circle. Réjean, a seventeen-year-old new arrival from Lac St.-Jean, was sleeping on a mattress in Gérard's room until he got himself established. He was a slim black-haired boy with darting eyes who

looked on at this motley crowd with some trepidation. He smoked the joint compliantly when it was passed to him and watched TV in a dazed fashion. Michel sat back regally in an easy-chair and scoffed at the other boys, who "coo'd" and "ah'd" their favorite doctors and lawyers and architects.

"You'll never find a prince like him," Michel said bitterly, pointing to one of the show's heroes. "I gave up looking a long time ago."

Andrew guessed that Michel's heart must have split in two somewhere along the line, which no doubt explained why he was so successful at his job. After all, it was Michel who had taught Andrew Rule Number Three – *stay hard*. Andrew was beginning to realize that *hard* was more than just a physiological state; it was a state of mind. He took it for granted that he would be single as long as he continued to hustle.

After the soap opera, Michel chased everyone out of the room except Andrew. He heated a spoon over a candle and drew the clear fluid into the syringe. Michel had already taught Andrew how to wrap the rubber cord around the bottom of his bicep and pull it up tight with his own teeth, keeping the vein visible. After they shot up, they went to play pool in a tumbledown tavern on Ontario Street, across from the tattoo parlour. Without warning, Michel decided, or rather insisted, that he was going to pay for Andrew's first tattoo. Andrew allowed himself to be led into the shop where, for forty dollars, your mother could be affixed to your arm permanently. He settled for a green serpent wrapped around a sword pointing downward, and chose the outside of his left arm, along the bicep.

"Symbol of health," the tattooist said, sticking a mass of pins into his arm.

"I don't feel too healthy now," Andrew said faintly.

A day later, the whole affected area had scabbed over. In three days, his entire upper arm was a crusted welt. Michel warned him not to get it wet and, above all, not to scratch. Andrew did everything – dancing, drinking, walking – to keep his mind off the itch. Like a sculptor whose chips, once fallen away, reveal a graceful statue, Andrew saw a brilliantly-coloured design slowly come into view as the scab fell away, chunk by chunk.

Andrew had three regulars a week. The first, a priest from a downtown parish, came by every Tuesday afternoon. They spoke very little but the sessions, which lasted a little over an hour, were full of passion on the priest's part and gymnastics on Andrew's. This customer paid Andrew enough to cover his weekly rent. At lunch on Thursdays, a civil servant from Quebec City, who came to Montreal once a week on business, would appear at Andrew's door with his tie already loosened. He was always in a desperate hurry to get off, and would tip Andrew if he could make him come faster. This client paid enough per week to keep Andrew in groceries. On Saturday nights, Andrew would visit a high-rise overlooking Parc Lafontaine. The man, whose wife worked as a nurse on the midnight shift, had two children asleep in the next room. The man would toss the dolls and toy trucks off the sofa and they would fuck right then and there with the curtains flying open: the bright moon, the city lights, the illuminated cross on top of Mount Royal flooded into the living room. This client's weekly payment provided enough for beer, a few meals in restaurants and the odd film.

About five hours a week. Not such a bad life. In theory, he could work the Square on the busy evenings and put money in the bank; because of his steady diet of beer and drugs, however, the more he earned, the more he spent. After the first couple of months

of excitement, it became like any other service industry – boring and repetitive, with limited vertical mobility. Hustlers were basically free agents, without pimps and madams, who provided a service. Just because it was the world's oldest profession didn't necessarily make it interesting.

After the rape, something had died in him. When he had suddenly found himself on the streets of Montreal, demoralized and disowned, he had truly felt there was nothing else he *could* do. The other boys bragged about saving up their money to get into legitimate business, but what other profession could have supported his lifestyle on five hours' of work per week? Running into Bruce, however, had jolted his complacency. What if he and Mark had stayed together? What if he'd gone on to university? What if his parents hadn't disowned him when they found out he was gay?

Now he was ashamed of the scene he had made at Bruce's. After all, Bruce wasn't the type of guy to hold something like his profession against him. The more he thought about it, the more curious he was to find out what had happened to Naomi and Mark and Gina. They would probably all be at that Hallowe'en party that Donald had mentioned. On the afternoon before the party he went down to the Salvation Army store on St. Antoine. The place looked like it had been ransacked. For Andrew, a costume's originality was less crucial than its ability to disguise properly. He groped blindly through rows of cheap dresses, feather boas, rubber pumps and army boots. He was about to give up when he found a black balaclava in the winter wear section.

He arrived at Bruce's loft around midnight dressed in black from head to toe with rough twine wrapped around the balaclava's neck to prevent anyone from yanking it off. In one hand he swung a thick rope tied into a noose. Bruce and Donald were dressed

as bizarre winged insects. The loft was filling up fast with men and women in some of the most outlandish costumes Andrew had ever seen. He stayed on the sidelines, peering into the crowd. Whenever anyone approached him, he replied brusquely (in a thick French accent) that he didn't speak English. Gina, dressed like a medieval princess, was holding court in one corner, surrounded by a gaggle of gay men who giggled hysterically at her lewd comments. Naomi was dressed as a Parisian painter, with a pencilled-in moustache and a navy-blue beret. She weaved through the crowds on the arm of an aristocratic-looking gentleman who Andrew recognized from the cottage.

"C'est la vie, c'est la vie!" she cried drunkenly.

She had a children's water colour paint set tucked under one arm, and waved a baguette with her free hand. Her French had never been very good; now she insisted on speaking only French. When she brushed past Andrew, she turned to her friend and said:

"C'est la mort, c'est la mort!"

Then she stopped and stared at Andrew.

"Je pense que je vous connais déjà," she said.

"Peut-être dans une autre vie," Andrew replied.

"Hey Paul," she said, turning to her escort. "He said he knew me in another lifetime!"

"You must have been very bad, then," Paul laughed, "to have made this chap's acquaintance."

"Paul, you know me. I feel like I've been to hell already. *L'enfer! L'enfer!*" she yelled dramatically.

"I say, didn't Sartre say something about hell once?" Paul asked.

They both turned towards Andrew, peering intently into the slits of his mask.

"*L'enfer, c'est les autres*," Andrew replied.

"This hangman speaks the truth," Naomi said in a sober tone. "Who are you?"

Andrew shook his head.

"I know you, don't I?" Naomi said.

Andrew shook his head again and began to back away.

"Mr. Hangman, if you won't reveal yourself, then please come to brunch tomorrow at noon. 4123 L'Esplanade. Promise?"

Andrew nodded graciously then stole away, swinging his rope.

The next morning when Andrew woke up he decided to go. Her documentary films were not exactly blockbusters, but if there was one thing Naomi *was* famous for, it was the Sunday brunches she threw at her apartment --the third floor of a Boston brownstone on a tree-lined silent stretch of the street overlooking Jeanne-Mance Park in front of the mountain. When Mark and Andrew had lived together in Sherbrooke, they'd stayed at Naomi's once. Their first full weekend in Montreal had been a romantic one; the young couple had spent the whole time eating smoked meat sandwiches, examining statues, sneaking into bars and window-shopping.

Clutching a cheap bouquet of flowers, Andrew mounted the stairs. He wasn't quite sure why he was doing this; Naomi gasped when she opened the door.

"Not...Andrew?" she said incredulously.

"The hangman," said Andrew, smiling.

"Andrew!" she screamed and threw her arms around him, almost knocking him off-balance. "Why didn't you say something last night! For God's sake, get in here and explain where the hell you've been for the last two years!"

The apartment was more spacious than it first appeared. The kitchen, with its high ceilings and old-style gas stove, radiated warmth and intimacy. The living room had a balcony in front overlooking the park, while the kitchen balcony looked over the alley to the back of the buildings on St. Urbain Street. The guests still hadn't arrived, and Naomi was up to her elbows in food preparation. She was tall and refined, with thick hair that was black except for a single grey stripe that gave her unadorned oval face the look of a light-hearted Indira Gandhi. Or a serious Bea Arthur. She put Andrew to work grinding coffee, then grabbed a handful of chick peas from a Mason jar and stepped onto her back balcony. She kept tossing peas at the window of the apartment across the way until Gina poked her sleepy head out, complaining of a hangover.

"Andrew's here!" Naomi yelled. "He's here right now! Come over quick!"

Ten minutes later, Gina was in Naomi's kitchen, smothering Andrew with kisses. Gina was the type of girl who got leered at by construction crews, but she subverted her prettiness with baggy pants, a slightly over-sized windbreaker and dirty blond hair that peeled off in loose strands from the bun pinned up on top of her head. Her blue irises were alive, flecked with gold and brown. She and Andrew had met in that same kitchen three years before. At the time, Gina had just moved to Montreal to attend McGill; once she and Naomi struck up their first conversation on their adjacent balconies, Gina had become a kind of surrogate WASP daughter to the older woman.

While Andrew fumbled to explain his two-year disappearance, Naomi was already on the phone.

"Bruce! Hello, dear. Yes, guess who? Sorry to wake you. I know it's only one o'clock. Wonderful party last night! You'll never *guess* who just showed up for brunch...well, you'll just have to get over here, won't you?"

Naomi pointed to a large bowl and a pile of unpeeled fruit; Gina and Andrew rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Andrew tried to ward off unwelcome questions about himself by repeatedly firing questions at Gina about the past two years of her life.

* * *

Gina's parents were intellectuals -- "unfortunately" as she often put it. Like many intellectual couples of the fifties, her parents had met at grad school. Gina's mother, Jill, a native of North London, had been a literature undergraduate at Cambridge when she met Ted, her Milton tutor. Ted was from Toronto, studying on a Commonwealth scholarship. Jill got pregnant soon afterwards, causing a minor scandal on campus; her family disowned them immediately. They got married and after graduation moved with little Gina to Toronto, where they lived in Ted's parents' basement apartment. Ted and Jill were pioneers of sorts. By 1964, the family had moved to Yorkville, close to the coffee-houses where Joni Mitchell and Neil Young would soon be kicking off their careers. Like Mark, Gina was sent to an alternative school; when she was nine, her parents got her high for the first time.

"It was too weird," she told Andrew once. "All these long-haired people kept coming in and out of our apartment, sleeping on the floor, walking around naked." She spent a lot of time with the hippy children at Rochdale College. Her parents were older and more established than the hippies; they provided the space to organize anti-war meetings or to come down after a heavy acid trip. With the seventies came the flowering of the women's movement.

"My mother used to give me shit if I played with make-up or if I wore dresses," Gina complained once. "She would accuse me of looking like a 'sex object.' Imagine saying that to a twelve-year-old kid!"

Eventually they began to act more like a "normal" family. Ted got tenure at York University, and Jill became a professional feminist at Queen's Park. They bought a house in Rosedale and tried to salvage whatever family life they could – but by then the damage had been done. When Gina was fourteen she O.D.'d at an Edward Bear concert at the Ex and woke up at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. The psychiatrists would come in and say, "Why do you hate your parents?" and she would scream, "Because they're fuckin' weird!" Her parents solved the discipline problem by sending her to a private girls' school -- quite a shock after years of finger-painting and educational television. As long as she got good marks and stayed on the Pill, her parents gave her complete freedom to do what she wanted. She didn't even have to sleep at home.

During her five years of high school, she rarely saw her parents. They were into a "spiritual trip": theosophy, Eckankar, Edgar Cayce, mind-expansion, est training. It was hard to keep up; every weekend she would come home to find people speaking in

tongues, going into trances, om-ing and meditating. (By comparison, waking up to naked hippies was a piece of cake.) In her last year of high school she moved in with a rock singer/drug dealer who committed suicide. The police cleared her of any wrongdoing and she vanished. After a year of wandering in Europe, she sent her parents the first honest letter of her life. She said she had no money but she'd rather sleep on the streets of Paris than live in a nut-house with a family that never paid any attention to her. Ted sent a telegram saying Jill had been hospitalized for a nervous breakdown and begged Gina to come back "for the sake of the family." She went back to Toronto fully intending to return to Paris, but kept getting delayed. She ended up in journalism school at Carleton, but Ottawa was much too tame for her. She transferred to McGill and made Montreal her permanent home...

* * *

"Where are you living?" Gina asked suspiciously.

"It's a long story," Andrew said. "We'll go out for a coffee after this and catch up, okay?"

He had almost forgotten what it was like to stand around a well-lit kitchen, eating good food and talking about ideas and feelings. About twenty guests arrived at the top of the stairs with bags of food and bottles of wine, kissing Naomi on both cheeks as they entered. There were men and women of all ages: professors, dancers, students, even an opera singer who read tea leaves beside a giant potted fern in the living room. Andrew

was introduced as an old friend of Mark's from Sherbrooke and was then left to fend for himself.

He hid behind a rubber plant, sipping his wine contentedly. He eavesdropped on a conversation between two CBC producers who lamented the lack of good researchers; then, at the other end of the room, he saw Bruce arrive by himself. The handsome filmmaker eased through the crowd, pretending not to see Andrew; instead he stopped and chatted up old acquaintances. Wet patches began to expand beneath Andrew's cotton dress-shirt.

"What a pleasant surprise," said Bruce, deliberately bumping into him. "How long has it been?"

Andrew blushed.

"Cigarette?" said Bruce, refusing to relinquish his stare.

"Sure."

"We lost track of you for a while," said Bruce, a touch condescendingly. "I was worried about a sweet young thing like you getting into trouble in the big city."

"And look what happened."

"I know."

"I can take care of myself."

"I bet you can." Bruce stepped back, slightly taken aback by Andrew's self-assured tone. "Do you remember what I told you the first time I met you at Naomi's cottage? I said you can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy."

"THANK GOD I'M A COUNTRY BOY," Andrew said, mimicking John Denver.

"Bruce, darling!" Gina cried foppishly, interrupting their little tête-à-tête. "The mystery man is back! Isn't that wonderful? Now if we could just get him to fill in the details."

"Oh, I think I've got a good idea what he's been up to."

"The fruit salad was simply fabulous!" she said, turning to Andrew. "If you want some more you'd better grab it quick."

"This is great!" Andrew said, running into Naomi in the kitchen. "I even know a few people from the brunch I went to a couple of years ago."

"You know, when Bruce first came to Montreal he was just like you," she said, pulling a couple of sizzling quiches out of the oven.

"You must be proud of him," Andrew said.

"Oh, I'm proud of him all right," she said, peeling off her oven mitt and wiping her brow. "He's a great artist. I just wish he'd settle down a bit."

"But I thought he had a lover?"

"*Donald*," she groaned. "He always goes for the cute dumb ones, God knows why. He's got 'em eating out of his hand – you know: film director, television interviews, trips to Spain, all that jazz. But it never lasts. He calls me at least once a week to say he's in love, always someone new." She flapped her hand in front of her face, partially to fan herself and partially to indicate her inability to fathom the sex lives of gay men – and Bruce's, in particular.

She rolled a joint on the kitchen table and updated Andrew on her son's whereabouts – a constant struggle, since Mark was always moving from one continent

to another. At the moment he was organizing a North-South youth conference in Singapore, but he was planning to work his way across the South Pacific on a boat.

"One month it's grad school, the next month I get a letter from Sri Lanka saying he wants to become a Buddhist monk!"

* * *

Mark could easily be that naked flower-child you sometimes see in documentaries about the sixties. Unfortunately, by the time the seventies came around and Mark hit puberty, he was a "problem child," skipping school, getting drunk and getting expelled for glue-sniffing in the high school washroom with Barney Marsh, the doctor's son. At fifteen, when Barney's family was vacationing in Florida, Mark was arrested for breaking into their house to steal tranquilizers from the doctor's private stash. Every letter from the principal, every phone call from the police station, was another cruel twist into his mother's heart. Then Mark started hanging out in adult bookstores on a bad stretch of Ste. Catherine Street, where old men with foul garlic breath lurked in corners and waylaid young men with promises of dirty magazines and whisky. One evening he came home with a pierced ear and proudly announced at the supper table:

"Guess what, Ma! I'm a faggot, and it's all your fault."

He was confused at her reaction: she actually *congratulated* him on his orientation and thanked him for giving her credit. It was a shocking thing, not being able to rebel against your own parent, but he wasn't giving up that easily. After he was arrested for selling drugs, Naomi issued an ultimatum: he could keep studying somewhere outside

the big city or she was going to throw him out. By the time Andrew met up with him at Champlain College, he was already in line for a scholarship at neighbouring Bishop's University...

* * *

At brunches like this Andrew clammed up. He envied people like Gina and Mark, who had grown up in this sort of environment. What interesting things could he ever recount about his own life? *If only these people knew what I did for a living.*

At four o'clock, Andrew and Gina slipped out for a capuccino around the corner at the Santropol Café, an old house constantly in the process of renovation. It smelled of cut flowers, Windex and freshly-ground coffee. The background music was soft but sassy; the service slow but relaxing. They sat at a low wooden table overlooking Duluth Street. All around them shoppers and students and artists laughed and argued in small groups. A waiter passed by with an enormous triple decker sandwich that consisted of thick slabs of black Russian bread interlaced with green-and-white gobs of cream cheese and nuts. Chunks of bright carved tropical fruits adorned the serving plates in exotic patterns.

"Did you finally graduate from McGill?" Andrew asked.

"I've still got two courses left. I transferred into Women's Studies. Political science was such a disappointment."

"Why?"

"The problem wasn't the professors," she said grimly. "They're cool, they're all a bunch of old radical burn-outs from the sixties. The problem was the students. I thought they'd be more politicized, but all they care about is getting into law school."

One course she had taken was called "Revolution in the Third World." Before handing out his course outline during the first class, the professor had announced that one of his colleagues had just smuggled a film out of Cambodia in the midst of the Pol Pot genocide. The lights were drawn and the horrified first-year students were shown footage of people being flayed, burnt and buried alive. One student vomited on the floor; several more fled. The next time the class met, the room was only half-full. "That's more like it," the teacher had said. "If you guys can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!"

"Andrew, 'fess up," Gina said finally. "What the hell happened to you? Mark and I were worried about you, and then we just sort of gave up."

Andrew just stared at her, not really knowing where to begin.

"Andrew! You used to be my friend!" she protested.

"I still am," Andrew said. "But a lot has happened."

"Naomi and I had this theory that you flipped out after you and Mark split up."

"I didn't flip out," said Andrew, irritated. "And we didn't just 'split up.' We were perfectly happy and then all of a sudden he just casually mentioned he was going to Mali for a year – without me! How would *you* feel?"

"But weren't you going to meet him somewhere?"

"He wrote me a letter from his training camp in Manitoba. He said I should come out to this commune they were living on for a few months before they went off to Africa. I missed him so much I decided to go out west, even if I had to hitch-hike, which I did."

"You hitch-hiked out west to see Mark?" Gina asked, surprised. "But he never--"

"I never made it," Andrew said.

"What happened?"

"I almost died."

"What?"

Andrew looked away, but Gina kept staring at him. She clenched her fists and pressed them to her chin. After a few minutes, when he turned to look at her again, his face had gone white and his hands shook.

"Okay, I guess I have to tell somebody."

He ordered another cappuccino and began.

"I never hitch-hiked in my life, so I had to learn stuff like what clothing to wear and where to stand on the shoulder so you're close enough for the driver to see your face, but far enough away that you can make the ditch in case they swerve at you. I made a sign from a cardboard box that said GO WEST, YOUNG MAN! but before I could go west I had to go north. My luck was spotty. Like, one day a hippy couple picked me up in this rusty van carrying old washing machines and they took me four hundred miles. And then the next day I walked more than I rode.

"People would get comfortable with me after a while and then they'd lay on the coffee and cigarettes and start talking about their lives. I was like a priest on wheels, listening to everybody's confessions. People didn't care to know who I was or what I

was doing or why I existed. They were mostly middle-aged men with sons like me who had fought against them and then all of a sudden they were gone for good. It was exciting to be on the road, but then I would have to listen to these travelling salesmen talk for hours about their kids' hockey tournaments or their daughters' beauty contests - - God, that was almost as bad as being stranded in Wawa!

"After three days of sleeping in a ditch, I was so desperate to get the hell out of Wawa I gave up on the Trans-Canada and decided to try going up this logging road that went through the bush a couple of hundred of miles and then came out up at the northern highway. Big mistake. But at that point, I figured anything was worth a try. This wildlife officer from the Ministry of Natural Resources took me fifteen miles up the road and then just dropped me off and disappeared down a dirt track into the bush. He warned me, he said there was nothing past that point and I'd be better off walking back into Wawa. But I didn't give a shit; there was no way I was going back there.

"So here I am, a beautiful sunny August day in northern Ontario, enjoying the scenery, at peace with nature. Just before dark, this big sixteen-wheel logging truck pulls over. I didn't even know how to get in, the cab was so high off the ground. I grab the handle and yank myself up like I'm scaling the side of a mountain! The driver gives me a big smile and rams the truck into gear before I even have a chance to close the door. All of a sudden I feel so high up, almost as tall as the trees. So we're jerking and bumping along this beautiful route and he pulls a beer out of a cooler in the back and says, 'Fuck, man, I was hoping I'd pick up a broad hitch-hiking.'

"Frank's his name. He seems to be in a partying mood, and we wash down some bennies with more beer. He's bragging about all the accessories in his truck, like an 8-

track stereo, and he's even got a bed in the back behind the seats. I tell him I'm going to Winnipeg and he immediately asks if I have a 'chick' there. So I say no, then he gets quiet, then I get quiet and all of a sudden it's pretty dark. He keeps offering me those strong Export A's, and I'm getting high just smoking them, not to mention the beer and pills. I get the feeling he's turning to look at me, because every once in a while I feel this hot sting of smoke hitting my left cheek. And then, out of the corner of my eye I notice he's only got one hand on the steering wheel, and the other one's sort of laying on his crotch. At first I thought he was scratching, but before long I could tell what he was looking for. He would stop rubbing for a while, then he'd stare at me with this guilty look on his face, and then he'd look straight ahead again. And so..."

Andrew stopped talking. Gina looked at him, wide-eyed.

"So what happened?"

"What do you think happened? We pulled over and got into the back, and then he beat the shit out of me and then he raped me and then he left me to bleed to death on the side of the road."

He lit another cigarette, averting his eyes while Gina got over the shock. Now she was afraid to ask any more questions. She waited for him to finish the story, but he just sat there, staring dumbly through the window.

"Thank God you survived," Gina whispered.

"Yeah, but for what?" he said bitterly.

Gina winced and looked away.

"I realized one thing up there," Andrew said bitterly. "I knew nobody gave a shit about me. So after I got back here to Montreal I just sort of figured if I'm gonna get raped, I might as well be getting paid for it."

He let the words sink in.

"You're a hustler?" Gina said, incredulous.

Andrew blushed, but remained silent.

"I suppose you're going to tell Naomi now?" he said finally.

"Andrew! You make it sound as if everyone's against you."

"Yeah, well..." His voice stopped, and he looked away. Gina leaned over and squeezed his wrist.

"Let's get out of here," she said.

* * *

One night, just as winter was creeping in, Bruce appeared on the Square and invited Andrew for a beer at the leather bar a few blocks away. It was 10 p.m. and the crowd of people along Ste. Catherine Street had swollen considerably. The cars hedged along in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Packs of clean-shaven high school kids filled the sidewalks, shouting obscenities in English. The pinball arcades flashed strobe lights and blared rock music onto the street. As usual, the restaurants and cafés were jammed. They turned down Stanley Street and stopped in front of a bar half-way down the block. A tall, crudely-painted sign showed a nearly-naked man lying on his back in a leather jockstrap.

The stairwell's hushed silence gave way to a steady wall of sound as they penetrated the bar, which was no wider than the average bachelor apartment. Bruce ordered their beers from a burly, steel-faced bartender, then they pressed their way into the back. At least three hundred men were there, milling around, staring, standing alone or chatting in groups. The men, who ranged from twenty to fifty years of age, looked tough, desperate or simply bored. They leaned against railings constructed from skinned logs, wagon wheels and other western paraphernalia.

The men came in various shapes, heights and costumes. Some were dressed as construction workers or cowboys or policemen. Many wore black leather jackets or chaps, those leggings that made the men's ass-cheeks protrude from their jeans. Bruce pulled a piece of foil out of his wallet and unwrapped a large chunk of black hashish, which he proceeded to crumble into a rolling paper. He sprinkled in some tobacco and rolled up a spliff. For a moment Bruce's face disappeared in a cloud of smoke, then magically reappeared with a greyish blue halo around him.

They spoke little. Andrew generally avoided bars unless a customer insisted; why spend time in a place where people wanted to have sex with you for free? *You might as well be getting paid for it.* The gravest danger of the bar scene, of course, was the possibility that Andrew might actually meet someone he liked and get too attached -- and then he would be out of a job. Still, Bruce's presence was comforting.

"Did you tell Naomi?" Andrew said.

"Tell her what?" said Bruce, caught a little off-guard.

"You know."

"No...oh, you mean, what you do for a living?"

"Yeah."

"No – well, why should she know? She'd just worry anyway."

They were silent for a while.

"Do you want another beer?" Bruce asked.

"No thanks. I've gotta get going."

"Oh, yeah," Bruce said, fumbling for words. "Sorry, I didn't mean to take you away from your work. But I was going to ask you a favour."

"What?"

"I just applied to the National Film Board to do a documentary on male prostitution, and I'd like you to help me."

"Me?" Andrew said, shocked out of his drug-induced reverie. "What do you want from me?"

"Whoa, slow down. All I said is I wanted some information."

"So that's why you tracked me down, eh?" Andrew said, extremely hurt, but trying his best to come off angry. "You think I'd make a nice subject to study, eh? You're just like that fucking social worker."

"Who, John?"

"I saw that fat old queen at your Hallowe'en party. You know what his great idea was? A drop-in centre for hustlers! Can you believe it?" He backed away, glaring.

"Look, I think a film like this would be very good for exposing, you know—"

"Very good for exposing the career of Bruce Barnes!" Andrew yelled over the rumbling rock music. "You're all the same, you all want to exploit us for your own fucking careers. I've had it with you guys. Leave me alone."

He pushed through the crowds and disappeared down an alley before Bruce could follow him. As he breathed in the cool air, he thought of Ted Ketchum, his best friend in grade school.

"Hey Andy," Ted had said one day. "You and I would make a great team, you know."

"Why?" Andrew had asked innocently.

"Because I'd suck them in and you'd suck them off."

He must have known. There was always somebody trying to put the screws to him. What a mistake to get in touch with old friends. Now he just wanted to be alone.

* * *

In an effort to avoid well-meaning social workers and would-be filmmakers, Andrew shifted his base of operations to Parc Lafontaine. He kept his regulars, but his routine was now quite different. He spent most of his waking hours in the east end; except for Christmas dinner with Michel and a couple of others, he fell out of touch with the boys on the Square. Besides Michel, the only other hustler he kept in contact with was Réjean, the boy from Lac St.-Jean, who by this point had settled into city life and had his own room at Andrew and Michael's rooming house.

One Monday morning in the middle of winter Andrew went downstairs to pay his weekly rent only to hear the landlord complain about that "maudit Réjean," who had missed two weeks' rent in a row. It occurred to him that Réjean had failed to drop over to Andrew's room for their weekly coffee- and-gossip session. When Andrew asked

around, he discovered that nobody had seen him at the *pension* for five or six days. He and the landlord entered Réjean's room, but found no clue to his whereabouts. Two pairs of jeans hung on a single wire hanger in the makeshift closet. On the table beside the unmade bed there was a statue of the Virgin Mary and a set of turquoise rosary beads clustered beside a picture of his mother. A few magazines, a bottle of cologne and some toiletries seemed to be his only possessions.

"If I don't get paid soon, I'm going to have to rent this room out," said the landlord with a trace of regret.

Andrew went over to the Square to find out about Réjean. Jean-Pierre, whom Andrew knew only superficially, finally admitted he had seen Réjean get into a truck with a "bad date."

"How did you *know* he was a bad date?" Andrew asked, suddenly afraid.

"Cause I've been with that guy before," said Jean-Pierre reluctantly. "He's pretty rough."

"What do you mean, rough?" Andrew said, grabbing his collar.

"I told you, he was rough with me," he mumbled, a bit embarrassed. "I—I couldn't sit down for a week."

"So why the fuck did you let little Réjean into the truck with him?" Andrew screamed, shaking him. Five other boys looked on grimly.

"Hey man," Jean-Pierre said, pushing Andrew back. "I didn't see nobody taking care of me when I was bleeding out my ass for a week. Why the fuck should I care?"

Andrew let him go. He didn't want to create a scene in the Square in case the cops were out. On his way down Ste. Catherine Street it occurred to him that Jean-Pierre might have a point: why *should* he care? Why should *anyone* care?

"I'd like to report a missing person," said Andrew into the phone.

"The name of the missing person?" said the policewoman, rustling a sheet of paper.

"Réjean Bergeron."

"Date last seen?"

"November 10."

"Place?"

"Dominion Square."

"Occupation?"

"Prostitute."

"Your name please."

"Andrew Lacasse."

"Address."

"1218 Clark Street. No phone."

"Relationship to missing person?"

"Friend."

"Your occupation?"

"Unemployed."

"One moment please."

The policewoman informed him that somebody would be over right away. He hung up, and walked around the corner to his house. Fifteen minutes later two policemen

were inside his room. He took them next door to Réjean's abandoned room and smoked nervously, leaning against the wall. He recounted his conversation with Jean-Pierre.

"What makes you think something happened to your little friend?" one of them said.

"I told you what Jean-Pierre said," explained Andrew politely. "The guy who picked him up sounds violent."

The two cops exchanged whispers and wry looks.

"I think it would be a bit excessive to put a province-wide bulletin out on a kid just because he went off without paying the rent," one of the cops said.

"But his stuff is all here!" Andrew protested. "He may have been kidnapped or something!"

"I think you watch too many television shows," the other cop said, glancing at the Playgirl pin-up on Andrew's wall. He smirked and scratched his chest absently. "We don't have enough to begin an investigation," he said. "You think we've got time to check on every hustler who gets into a car with somebody?" He winked at Andrew. "Who knows? He's probably having a good time right now!" He motioned his partner towards the door. "Let us know if you get any more information."

"I thought that was *your* job," Andrew said disgustedly, but the policemen walked straight out the door, pretending not to hear.

Andrew packed Réjean's things in boxes and carried them down to the basement. The next day, a *chambre à louer* sign went up in the front window. With Réjean's photo in hand, Andrew paced through every bar and park in the city. For two weeks he asked everyone -- male, female, gay, straight -- who worked the streets. Contacting the press

was out of the question; they'd send a team of reporters down to the Square so fast that the boys would be either thrown out of work or busted.

* * *

"You wanna see it?"

"Why not?"

With one hand still on the wheel, he loosened his belt and revealed a tall rod. He stroked it proudly and then waited for me to do the same. I was getting nervous because he was looking at me more than he was looking at the road. He stopped stroking, then reached over and guided my hand into his lap.

"Not too hard," he said. "Nice and slow."

Then he wanted me to do a mobile strip show. So I threw off my shirt and shoes and then my underwear. He pulled the truck onto the shoulder, kicked off his construction boots and we both dove onto the foam mattress in the back. It smelled raunchy, like sweaty worksocks and a down-filled sleeping bag that's gotten damp and hasn't dried properly. But now he looked really mean.

"Get on your stomach," he said, in a deep voice.

* * *

One day he ran into John, the social work student, on Ste. Catherine Street. This time Andrew was ready to talk. John took him to a greasy spoon and kept his coffee cup refilled. Andrew blurted out what had happened to Réjean.

"You see what I mean?" John said triumphantly. "Nobody gives a shit about people on the street!"

"It's true," Andrew said. "Even the guys I know won't do anything because they're scared."

"Scared of what?"

"Scared of exposing themselves," Andrew said.

"And what about you?" John said. "What are *you* afraid of?"

"Nothing!"

"Then I think it's time to organize something," John said.

"You mean like that union you told me about in New York?" Andrew asked, getting interested.

"Well, it's like an association," John said. "They've got a hot-line to phone for emergencies, a V.D. clinic, a drop-in centre, a newsletter...well, not really a *newsletter*. It's a bad-trick sheet."

"A what?"

"If any of the guys have problems with a trick, they go to the centre and somebody writes down the person's description, what kind of tattoos or scars he has, the kind of car he drives, his address, then they pass it around. I've got some brochures and stuff at home. Do you want to come take a look at them?" he asked.

"I can't," Andrew said. "I haven't worked for about a week and I'm running low on cash. But how about next week? It's number 23, right?"

* * *

The following Monday he dropped over to John's apartment for coffee a couple of times between dates, listening to John explain things his group in New York had fought against: police abuse, unjust sentencing, dangerous work conditions, economic exploitation. The more John talked about it, the more sense it made to Andrew. But how to sell the idea to the other boys? He hadn't dared tell Michel about it, even though they all knew Andrew was up to something. They'd just laugh at him, tell him to mind his own business. Or would they? Andrew reasoned that if something horrible had happened to Réjean, it could just as easily happen to any of the others. They started working on a brochure.

"You know what would be even better than a brochure?" John said one day, putting down his pen.

"What?"

"A movie."

"You've been talking to Bruce, I see," said Andrew suspiciously.

"I talk to him all the time. He's a good friend of mine. Andrew, I told him about Réjean and he wants to do a movie about him, but he can't do it without your help."

"A movie about *Réjean*?"

"Why not?"

"But what good will a movie do if Réjean is...is, you know, already dead?"

John looked at him.

"So there won't be any more Réjeans."

Hidden inside a plain-looking brown envelope were all his memories: reviews, interviews, invitations. Photographs: Bruce and Andrew at the Berlin Wall; Andrew leaning against the Eiffel Tower; Bruce lifting a barbell at Venice Beach; Bruce and Andrew dining at Fisherman's Wharf. There was the cover photo of Andrew in the *New York Native*

He had arrived for the photo session wearing neatly pressed blue corduroys and a soft pink cotton shirt – apparently not the image most people conjured when they thought of a hustler from "Montreal's meanest streets." With a pair of Levi's and a leather jacket, the make-over was miraculous. He ended up looking like yet another angry young man illuminated by 42nd Street's neon, collar upturned à la James Dean.

Cover story: *New York Native*, June 12, 1982

MONTREAL HUSTLER DENIES FILM SENSATIONAL

In a city that's accustomed to being shocked, there seems to be no end to the controversy surrounding *The Hustler with the Heart of Gold*, an eye-widening documentary by Bruce Barnes on the life of a hustler in Montreal. *The New York Times* attacked the film, headlining this year's International Festival of Gay and Lesbian Film, as "ludicrous, revolting and condescending. A gratuitously violent look at male prostitution." Other critics have suggested that some parts may have been staged. On his first trip to New York, Andrew Lacasse, the film's gritty subject, responded to the allegations:

NATIVE: Your film has shaken up a lot of people.

LACASSE: I don't understand why this film is so shocking. Can you explain why this is the "talk of New York" at the moment? I thought New York had a lot more male prostitution.

NATIVE: Of course, because there are more people. There have been other documentaries on male prostitution but nothing like this before. How did the other hustlers react when you got them involved in the film?

LACASSE: At first they didn't want to, but then Réjean disappeared, eh, so they were all pretty scared. I convinced them that if they helped out with this film, they might be helping Réjean.

NATIVE: There's a scene at your parents' house in the country. They seemed to have no idea why you were doing this film.

LACASSE: What they don't know won't hurt them.

NATIVE: But they're in the movie. People are going to be watching them at film festivals all over the world!

LACASSE: They live a pretty simple life in the country. They don't understand what the fuss is about. They have their friends, they never go into the city. They don't even know what "gay" means.

NATIVE: But don't you feel you've been taken advantage of?

LACASSE: A journalist from London phoned to ask me if I thought Bruce had exploited me by making a film about me. I think it's funny when journalists use that word, *exploit*. You don't *know* what it's like to be exploited. I mean, if this is what it's like to be exploited, I guess I'm not doing too bad!

The Village Voice, June 12, 1982

DOCUMENTARY DISPELS MYTHS OF MALE PROSTITUTION

There's a wonderful agency in Canada called the National Film Board. In essence the Canadian government gives filmmakers funding to explore relevant social and cultural issues. Thanks to the NFB, a searing new documentary on male prostitution is headlining this year's International Festival of Gay and Lesbian Cinema.

"The Hustler with the Heart of Gold" is directed by Montreal filmmaker Bruce Barnes, a conscientious objector who moved to Canada from Boston in 1968. The seventy-minute documentary, an unsettling and controversial exercise in hyper-realism, is now playing to packed houses at film festivals on both sides of the Atlantic. The film's success lies in Barnes' ability to allow the subject -- a plucky 23-year-old prostitute named Andrew Lacasse -- to explain in his own words what he and his co-workers are experiencing.

"He must be acting," we're tempted to say. It's a filmmaker's dream to find someone as unjaded as Lacasse; he not only engages us with his calm analysis of his own scuffle for survival, but takes us on a frightening "on-the-job" tour of Montreal's meanest streets.

Barnes explained that the two met briefly in the late seventies and fell out of contact. Two years later Barnes learned that Lacasse was hustling in Dominion Square, the traditional shopping ground for boys in Montreal's bustling downtown gay district. Through Barnes' lens, the city literally sparkles by night. With a series of hidden cameras, we are able to observe a transaction from wink to climax; we watch Andrew pick up a businessman on the Square -- even the corny conversation was recorded -- and follow them into the stairwell of an underground parking lot, where sex and money are exchanged in rapid succession.

The scene shifts to the seedy rooming-house in the east end, where Andrew and many other boys rent rooms by the week. Andrew fears the worst when his young friend Réjean, a seventeen-year-old hustler from northern Quebec, drops out of sight for a month. All attempts to motivate the police to instigate a search are rebuffed.

Andrew's friends gather informally in his room to watch afternoon soap operas and discuss Réjean's situation. One boy describes the "bad trick" who was last seen with Réjean, which precipitates a frank discussion on sex practices in an informal, non-clinical tone. Interspersed between this main drama, we witness Andrew's myriad daily activities as he slogs through snowdrifts, wanders through the red-light district, eats greasy French fries and hot dogs, and chats with Jimmy, the waiter in his neighbourhood gay bar.

After Andrew describes his rustic upbringing, the scene shifts to a typically rural French-Canadian setting, a farm about seventy miles south of Montreal. In a vernacular as thick as pea soup, Andrew's parents are reluctantly interviewed on how much Andrew has changed since he left the farm at age seventeen. When asked if she knows what kind of work her son does in Montreal, the well-meaning Mme Lacasse responds: "I don't know, but I'm sure he uses his head."

Cruel moments like these can momentarily catch the viewer off-guard. More often than not, however, action is well-paced and editorializing is kept to a minimum. The

"plot" comes to an unexpected climax at the morgue, where Andrew identifies his young friend, whose body has been found repeatedly slashed and impaled.

In the final frame, the viewer is forced to watch the spectacle of a young man weeping and praying not to have to return to the street. Our romantic myth of the carefree prostitute is thoroughly dispelled. Through some dark magical transformation, we see the hustler with the heart of gold change from a sexy, light-hearted boy to a paranoid man.

NEW YORK DIARY

Sunday, June 8

We parked the car somewhere in New Jersey and took a bus in. I was really excited when I saw the city in front of me like I'd always seen it in the movies. From the big bus terminal we took a yellow taxi to the Lower East Side, which looked pretty run down. We stayed with an old college friend of Bruce's, Hersh Levine, an alternative film maker from Boston who lives with his lover Tony, a black man from New York who works in a bank. It's very casual here. We sleep on a fold-out couch and they walk around nude. I've never stayed in an apartment that's so run down. The bathroom wall is caving in and they pay \$600 (American!) for a two-bedroom apartment. For that price you could rent a whole house in Westmount.

June 9

Last night Tony came out of their room naked with a hard-on and asked us to join them for a *ménage-à-quatre*. I wasn't really interested but Bruce insisted (since we have an open relationship) but I think it was just an excuse for Tony and Bruce to have sex

because Bruce practically jumped on Tony and didn't get off him for an hour (so much for the group sex part).

This morning we all went out to a Polish restaurant for breakfast, which is apparently a bohemian thing to do. (Maybe it's the only thing bohemians can afford to do, since everything else in this city is so expensive!) Hersh and Bruce went to some film centre, Tony went to work and I wandered around St. Mark's Place. I bought a falafel and the guy asked me where I was from. He said, "Canada! That's somewhere north of Maine, isn't it?" I got a kick out of reading the personal ads in the *Native*. We went to a really nice Indian restaurant with candles and incense and good music, different from the one in Montreal that Bruce always takes me to. Here everybody talks, talks, talks, even the waiters, the bag ladies on the street, everyone talks. I sometimes feel like telling people to shut up, but since it isn't my country, I keep my mouth shut. We went to Café Orlin for amaretto coffee.

June 10

I think half the people in this city must be gay! We went to a Greek restaurant for lunch near the World Trade Center with a couple of NYU students and the waiter kept giving me the eye. I couldn't keep my eyes off his ass, which made Bruce jealous. (I only did it because I'm starting to get jealous about all the attention Bruce is giving to Tony.) Then Bruce embarrassed the hell out of me by telling these two guys at lunch (almost total strangers) about the different sex positions I like, etc. I got mad and told Bruce to shut up and when he didn't, I got up and went over to the waiter and asked

him for his phone number! (I can't believe I did that!) When we left the restaurant, Bruce and I got into a yelling match on the sidewalk and then we realized I was late for my interview at *The Native*. I wasn't going to go but Bruce begged me to go and then apologized.

Then there was a press conference and I was so shocked because everybody kept asking me whether the film had been staged and if I was an actor. I kept saying, "Why would anyone make this up?" (I don't think they understood.) And then the journalists wanted me to tell them dirty stories. They all think it's glamorous, they think I'm like, a non-stop porn star or something, it makes me sick.

The screening was exciting and there was a party afterwards. All these actors and writers asked me INTELLIGENT questions, and Bruce was jealous again of course, especially when some famous old man (I think he's a writer or something) wanted to have a picture taken with me. So we left and went to the baths but I fell asleep in there. I went home but the others went to the Mineshaft and Bruce came home smelling like piss.

June 11

Bruce was upset when the *New York Times* review came out and he started phoning different people and screaming. Tony works in Chinatown, so I met him for lunch and we bitched about married life. My fortune cookie said: "The restless see today; the

patient see eternity." We had a good laugh. I wanted to go to Central Park but I didn't realize how far it was, and I got lost on the subway. It took me all afternoon to find the place where John Lennon was shot and then I had to meet Bruce for a demonstration on "U.S. out of Central America."

There were about 75 cops and they wouldn't let you stop and look, you had to either keep moving or else go under the wooden sawhorses and join in the demo. So we marched with all these punk anarchists with gel in the hair who were yelling, "Money for Jobs! Not for War! U.S. out of El Salvador!" As a Canadian it seemed strange to be chanting that. The demonstrators had a megaphone they were passing around, and you could yell whatever you wanted. This man kept screaming about Reagan (he's running for the Republicans). He kept saying, "Reagan is mentally ill! It will be disaster if he leads the country!" The guy with the megaphone asked me where I was from, and when I told him, he yelled into the megaphone, "Hey, this guy came all the way from Montreal for this demonstration! Let's hear it for the Québécois!"

We went over to John Matthesson's house for dinner. He's a writer and his roommate Paul is a political activist. (We met them at the reception after the screening.) John writes for some "bourgeois" magazines that pay enough money so he can work half-time and write his novel. The food we ate was pretty awful (macrobiotic). John complained he had mold growing in his intestine, which made me even less hungry. Then we got into a fascinating conversation with Paul about "tea rooms," which means the public washrooms where men have sex. Paul said he drops into the toilet in the subway on his way home from work for a quickie. Apparently some man who got arrested for public indecency is fighting it in the Supreme Court, claiming his right to

personal expression of sexuality is being denied. Paul says the Supreme Court decision will have a great effect on sex in the gay community. I find it hard to get worked up over this, but he's excited and claims that gay men are at the "vanguard" (is that like avant-garde?) of the sexual revolution.

We also went to an off-off Broadway play on 2nd Ave. and 10th St. Very experimental. I didn't understand it, but the best part was when this gorgeous actor takes all his clothes off. There were only four of us in the audience, so it was very easy to meet the playwright. John went up and told him the script sounded like it was written by T.S. Eliot. You should have seen the guy! I thought he was going to cry. He said something I didn't understand about if Gertrude Stein and T.S. Eliot could have a baby, then he would be it ??????????

June 12

I think Hersh is glad we're leaving...he and Tony are supposed to be in an "open relationship" too, but I guess there are limits. We had to get up early this morning. I woke up and smelled something horrible. I was going to make coffee and discovered the kitchen sink had backed up overnight and the sink was full of several days of dirty dishes, and there was water all over the floor coming out the sink from other people's apartments. It smelled like vomit that had gone bad. We escaped for another great breakfast at the Polish restaurant. More talk, talk, talk. Hersh was discussing a going-away party he gave for a friend of his who was moving to Israel. Somebody baked him a cake in the shape of the map of Israel before the 1967 war -- I don't understand. Their

apartment is being flooded and they're drinking coffee down the street arguing Middle Eastern politics!

Then we went to the disarmament demonstration, with a million people! We marched in the gay section down Fifth Avenue to Central Park. The gay contingent was quite fascinating. Lesbians on motorcycles ("Dykes on Bikes"); gay atheists; gay Seventh-Day Adventists; the Uncut Club (a lobby group that promotes an end to forced circumcision of males) with a banner that said "STOP THE SLAUGHTER!"; the gay S & M group, dressed in leather (some were wearing "tit clamps" on their nipples, and a lot had tattoos); Black and White Men Together; Gay Trotskyists; some people with AIDS (a new disease that a lot of gay men are getting); and the NAMBLA, the North American Man-Boy Love Association, "a pedophile support group". One man brought this eleven-year-old boy along, and told everyone it was his lover! We missed the fist-fight, but apparently someone from the lesbian mothers' association beat the guy up.

When we got to Central Park, we were too far away to see the big rock concert but we heard the speeches. I felt like I was part of an historical event. For me the climax was when they brought this old Japanese woman out on stage who survived an atomic bomb. She only spoke two words of English. She said, "No more Hiroshima! No more Nagasaki!" Everyone held hands and touched and hugged. It felt great to hold Bruce close right out in public, in this city in front of millions of people. I told Bruce, "When we go home, everything is going to seem so boring."

* * *

Bruce must have left the loft about forty-five minutes before, Andrew calculated. He touched the coffee pot with the inside of his wrist the way a mother tests the warmth of her bottled milk. He put the glass pot back on the stove and flared the gas jet into a tiny glow. The kitchen really looked like a kitchen now, with shiny aluminum pots hanging off a rack and earthy-looking plates and bowls that filled a whole cupboard, giving the room definition. The bedroom was separated from the rest of the space by huge bamboo blinds that were suspended on three sides, giving it the shape of an actual bedroom. When Andrew moved into Bruce's loft, he had been adamant: *it's the junk, or me*. Bruce had eventually given Andrew permission to get rid of the stuff that had been picked up in back alleys over the years, full of cockroach eggs and mouse turds. Andrew learned over the years that the reason Bruce was incapable of reducing the clutter was not for sentimental reasons; he was just afraid of open spaces.

He drooped his bathrobe over the toilet cover and stepped into the shower stall. The bathroom was more or less a normal room now, although the old-style bathtub still stuck out like an altar, uncovered, rising from the middle of the floor. The bathroom had been the last region to be renovated; if they were going to have an open relationship, Bruce insisted, they shouldn't be afraid of "sharing the experience of each other's body functions." After a year Andrew pointed out that the reason nobody came to visit them was because others were reluctant to share in the experience. They had compromised on this half-structure with its walls that went three-quarters of the way to the ceiling.

He padded back to the kitchen in his slippers, poured himself a coffee and reached for *The Gazette*, piled in already-leafed-through clumps on the kitchen table. It was enjoyable to sip coffee and read underneath them now, but at the time the installation

had been hell. The skylights had been the worst. Bruce, of course, had to do it all the hard way. He insisted on doing everything "himself," even though he didn't have a clue. And because he couldn't (or wouldn't) hire anybody, Andrew ended up doing most of the work.

Andrew sat there contentedly, reading about the Princess of Monaco's latest visit to a local discotheque. April sunlight poured through the skylight. He sipped warm coffee, nibbled a croissant and decided it had all been worth it; even if he didn't own the furniture, even if he wasn't on the lease, he belonged here. Maybe it wasn't much, but it was more of a home than he'd had for a long time. He forced himself to get up and examine the clock beside the bed. The princess would just have to wait. Stubbing out his DuMaurier, he put on his tightest (and most faded) jeans and set out. A pool of bills and other letters lay inside the door directly below the mail slot. He fished out a letter addressed to him with a broad yellow stamp. Some tropical insect was pictured above the name COLOMBIA. He had given up trying to keep track of Mark's migratory patterns. After years of awkward silence, Andrew had finally decided to clear the air. He had written Mark a long letter (to Nairobi? Karachi?) and had gotten a favorable response. On his way to a conference in Chicago, Mark had called him from the airport. Naomi "would kill" him if she knew he was on the continent and hadn't called, but Andrew met him at the Queen Elizabeth for a long lunch. After a few hours of getting to know each other again, they agreed they were still friends. Mark caught the airport bus and vanished. They saw each other seldom, but Andrew felt nonetheless privileged to be on Mark's mailing list.

* * *

It was during the late seventies – the golden Trudeau era of government giveaways -- that Mark got involved with a national campus organization called Contact Canada, which offered free trips to students after their first year of university. The program's vague goal was to educate students about international affairs in a non-conventional way. It was a distant cousin of the Company of Young Canadians (a.k.a. the Company of Young Communists), the sixties movement in which bands of idealistic youths and their intellectual mentors terrorized the countryside with their dogmatic vision of how to make Canada a better place to live in. According to the brochure, Contact Canada's goal was defined as "community development," which, when you thought about it, could mean just about anything. Sociologists in Ottawa used demographics to randomly choose a cross-section of twenty-year-olds, based on sex, ethnicity, population density and family income. The bureaucrats tried very hard to throw diametrically opposed subgroups together as brutally as possible: Inuit students were sent to paint Easter eggs in Alberta's Ukrainian communities; miners' children from Cape Breton were sent to work in the slums of Montreal; middle-class urban guys like Mark were sent on seal-hunting expeditions in the Arctic.

All expenses were paid by a "non-governmental organization" whose budget was provided completely by the federal government. In addition to their various daily activities, the whole process involved weeks and weeks of pre-orientations, pre-interviews, interviews, training camps, orientation seminars, briefing and debriefing sessions, medical examinations, questionnaires, mid-evaluations, self-evaluations, post-

evaluations and reports. The volunteers were in a perpetual state of being interviewed about the experience they were undergoing; like lab animals, they were constantly poked, prodded, filmed, and occasionally deprived of food and water. As if being stranded on an island above the treeline with only a diet of raw caribou kidney were not enough, Phase Two of the program was designed for the survivors of the first four months of alternating cultural stimulation/ deprivation: a four-month trip to a Third World country to complete the culture shock process.

This was cultural revolution, Canadian style: Mark was sent to a fig commune in Mali, financed by the Canadian government, where he and his comrades were expected to bridge the gap between mental and physical labour on the bucket brigade. Timbuktu actually existed, Mark discovered. He and his partner from Moose Jaw went on a "study tour" there and somehow got separated in the bazaar. No doubt his partner's blonde hair made her stand out. She wandered into a den of thieves and before she knew what was happening, had been drugged and sold into white slavery...

* * *

Spring was agonizingly slow in coming that year; Andrew could see occasional patches of green spreading through the empty lots just behind Ste. Catherine Street's storefronts. En route to the welfare office, he passed two male strip bars. The first one was a seedy dive for gay men, where waiters doubled as strippers on the tiny stage, outnumbering customers three to one. The second strip bar, a couple of blocks down, was a seedy dive for straight women. Twelve hours earlier, secretaries and

businesswomen alike had shivered, lining up around the block. Beside the door, the large sign was inescapable:

AUCUN HOMME ADMIS SANS ACCOMPAGNEMENT D'UNE FEMME

Through his firsthand knowledge of Montreal's sex industry, Andrew had learned that a rigid sexual apartheid was in place. Everyone knew the strippers at the gay strip bar were straight (and there were apparently soiled Playboy pictures in the backstage area to prove it) while the strippers at the straight strip bar were gay. So why keep single men out of the strip bars for women? Andrew assumed the owners were afraid that gays would "take over," which seemed ridiculous since they had their own strip bars.

What a strange world. A mind-echo bounced back at him in the form of a graffiti spray-painted on a wall in front of him:

FIGHTING FOR PEACE IS LIKE FUCKING FOR VIRGINITY

* * *

He grabbed me by the shoulder and flipped me over like a pancake.

"Hey!"

"Shut your mouth, faggot," he snapped, and gave the back of my neck a sharp karate chop.

I lay on my stomach shivering with fear, while he poured out a string of obscenities. Down below I could hear the engine idling and the whole bed was shaking. My guts were vibrating and I realized that I was lying naked on my stomach in the middle of fucking nowhere with a madman! His hand probed me roughly and when he found the opening he shoved a dry finger up my ass.

"Don't!"

"Huh? You like that, eh?"

"Please!"

"Oh, 'please?' I guess you really want it, hmmm?" he said. He stroked his rough hand along my cheek.

* * *

"You can't just keep doing interviews. You've got to start *doing* something," Bruce had said.

Yes, but what? At first there had been a lot of offers to do talk shows and attend festivals and conferences from Brisbane to Brindisi, fun places to hang out and be politically and culturally hip. Even if they *did* pay your way over, there were still credit card bills and rent to be paid back home. Financially, Andrew had absolutely nothing to show for his four years as a "celebrity." For one thing, they don't pay actors in low-budget NFB documentaries (especially when you're not acting -- you're just *being*). Instead they give \$100 honorariums and tell you it was "an experience," and "something to put on your c.v." *Yeah, right below the three years of cocksucking.* He was too short to

be a model. He even auditioned as a stripper, but the manager informed him flatly that his penis had to be at least six inches long (flaccid) before he could be considered.

"But it doubles in size when I'm erect," Andrew insisted.

When the manager, very blasé, demanded that he prove it, Andrew lost his nerve.

"Next," said the manager, turning away.

Going back to the world's oldest profession was out of the question, although he would have made a lot of money. It never ceased to amaze him how *few* people actually got the message of the film; ironically a documentary on the evils of prostitution had actually boosted his list of potential customers. Countless professionals made appointments with Andrew to discuss the prostitution "problem" and ended up trying to get him into bed -- like the Deputy Minister of Communication who Andrew had met at the Montreal premiere. He was a famous closet case, but an important ally for gay artists applying for federal grants. As a follow-up to the International Year of the Youth, he had asked Andrew if he would like to organize a booth about street kids for Expo '86. Each luncheon meeting to discuss the proposal, unfortunately, was cut short with an invitation to come back for a cocktail at his downtown apartment (which he rented to get away from his wife in Ottawa on weekends.)

For most people Andrew was still dirty. Clearing the air and exposing the seamier side of things, he thought, would shore up his new career. But new career as what...?

* * *

At age 24, he felt farther away from a vocation than when he had been in Cegep. The doors of opportunity, it seemed, had all slammed in his face. And now he was surrounded by would-be welfare recipients in a dreadful waiting-room with scuffed walls and the faint smell of wine-breath and leaky Pampers. Being forced to wait nearly an hour was insult added to misery. The fact that you would even *consider* going on welfare meant, of course, that you probably weren't intelligent enough to keep an appointment. Instead, they made you come in, take a number and wait around the understaffed office, sometimes for hours. It was one of those places where, even if you didn't smoke, you wanted to -- just to fit in a little better with the surroundings. Instinctively, Andrew pulled out his orange package of DuMauriers. Someone sat down beside him. Andrew kept his eyes fixed to the nutrition poster opposite.

"Have you got an extra cigarette?" he heard the voice say.

"Sure," Andrew said, opening his pack and handing over his lighter to a melancholy-looking man about his age with red hands and a slightly runny nose.

"Andrew," the man said. "Do you recognize me?"

"No," Andrew said.

Inwardly he groaned. *This happens all the time...*

"I used to work the park," Andrew heard him say. "I'm from Shawinigan. Remember, you gave me one of those leaflets and I went to one of your meetings?"

Andrew gawked at him blankly. How many? How many brochures had he handed out?

"...saw your film," Andrew heard him say.

They always say "my movie" as if I'd made it. If I had, do you really think I'd be sitting here right now?

"...changed my life...unclean habits...married with children now...accepted Jesus Christ as my personal saviour..."

The man groped through his inner pocket and handed Andrew a religious comic book. Andrew flipped through it after the annoying man's number was called. The story-line begins with our homo-hero wandering drunkenly into a single men's hostel. He has a vision one night and gives himself up to the religious authorities, who put him back on track. Something about being sodomized by the horned devil while still in his crib...

After the guy was called inside the office, Andrew tore the comic book into tiny pieces and waited. Finally he was ushered into the inner sanctum.

"So *you're* the famous Andrew Lacasse," said the social worker, scrutinizing his application in his office. "How's the film business these days?"

He was about forty, with a puffy throat and a gentle bearing. He smiled sourly and leered at Andrew through his glasses, as thick as the bottoms of Coke bottles.

"I admired your film very much," he continued. "In fact, we use your film to train junior social workers on life in the streets of Montreal." He paused and smirked. "You're even more attractive in person than on screen."

Andrew stared at the cold icy fish-lips that pursed and parted ever-so-slightly. *Should I undress now, so we can get it over with...?* Since he needed a welfare cheque immediately, he held back his invective, ignored the compliment, and went for the tried-and-true sob story: the film industry in Quebec was very bad at the moment.

"I'm out of work, I'm broke, and I need some help for a couple of months till I get on my feet."

But the man wasn't listening.

"I'm taking an evening course in urban sociology," the man said. "Could I interview you for a paper I'm writing?"

"Of course," Andrew said, slipping back into his familiar role as lab animal. "Give me your card and I'll call you next week. My lover gets very jealous when other men call me."

Andrew fled north up St. Denis Street as far as Carré St.-Louis, with its ponds and garden-lined walks. He felt like an old man as he sat on a bench and stared blankly at the public works employees in front of him who were reconnecting the fountain. He smoked a joint, steadied himself, then pressed on to Prince Arthur Street. On his first visit to Montreal in 1977, Prince Arthur had been one of the many forgettable side streets in the Portuguese ghetto. Now the streets were cobbled with flaky bricks that buckled and broke during the harsh winters. The greasy spoons had been converted into *brochetteries* and *ristorantes*; customers were unable to see in or out of the windows because of the green jungle-like growth of hanging plants. The waiters looked starched, with stiff smiles and glazed moustaches. Even Mazurka, the Polish restaurant that had for years been famous for its \$3.25 dinner menu -- including soup, bread, butter, perogies, sour cream and coffee -- had been forced to acquire a tonier clientele. Still, this kind of urban planning seemed much more humane than what was happening in Ottawa and Toronto, where entire neighbourhoods were being gutted and renovated. True, nobody really wanted gentrification (except the developers), but Prince Arthur Street

represented a compromise to accommodate the tourists and "the boat people" – the suburbanites who came downtown once a week, sculling the expressway in their miniature battleships – by localizing the unpleasantness to certain pockets.

Now he worked his way up St. Lawrence, slowly savouring the familiar territory. This part of the pavement belonged to him. In fact, it belonged to everybody. What he loved most about the Main was that nobody owned it or claimed it. Statistically, Toronto was more cosmopolitan than Montreal, but it was far less integrated. In Toronto, each ethnic group was stashed away in its own corner of the city like a dirty family secret. Ethnicity was a confrontational thing in Montreal, something you wore on your shoulder like a badge. Naomi loved to tell the story of a friend of hers who had grown up in a Jewish suburb of Toronto. She had never seen a Hassidic Jew until one day, while sitting on Naomi's balcony on a visit to Montreal, she saw a father and son on their way to *shule*.

"Did you see the fur hat?" she had shouted excitedly to Naomi. "It's like something out of 'Fiddler on the Roof!'"

The strip Andrew was walking up was a no-man's-land, separating the warring factions of east and west from Old Montreal to the top of the island. Walking along the Main was a relief from the daily language battle. Geographically, it was half-way between the "traditional" (anglo) downtown with its hordes of bargain-crazed American tourists who hung out amongst the tacky, chrome decor of Crescent Street – and the "French" downtown of St. Denis Street, with its cloying Québécois crowd, its grubby hash vendors, its retro music and fashion. He tried to visualize the Main in the near future, when a high corridor of concrete and barbed wire separated east and west as he had seen

in Berlin, the way he imagined Beirut to be. Tanks and army trucks with machine guns patrolling the narrow half-street, divided down the middle. *Walled off for your own protection*, they would say. West Berlin. West Beirut. West Montreal. Could it, should it ever come to that?

Andrew continued up the hectic corridor past a Portuguese furniture store, a Hungarian bookstore, a Vietnamese grocer, an Indian spice shop, a gay bookstore. The stairwell leading up to the gay bookstore was lined with multi-coloured blurbs announcing women's self-defense classes; gay A.A.; gay men's volleyball; gay Christians; and a gay *cabane à sucre* in the Eastern Townships. At this stage of his life, Andrew could not have imagined a less appealing activity.

* * *

"The community" was, in fact, four separate communities: anglophone gay men, anglophone gay women, francophone gay men and francophone gay women. It was a schizoid minority with very little awareness or communication with its various severed selves. Quebec women were still going through their *we-must-separate-ourselves-from-men-at-all-costs* stage and who could blame them? Andrew's grandmother wasn't allowed to vote in provincial elections until the Forties; until the early Sixties, a lot of women had been busy having fifteen children.

Montreal was one of the only cities on the continent where men were banned from women's bars and women were banned from men's bars. Even if a woman somehow gained entrance to a gay men's tavern, she would be either refused service or escorted

out immediately. Sexual apartheid in Quebec was a taboo subject, however, and not open to debate in the gay community. The other taboo aspect of this apartheid system was the tale of two cities. Andrew's generation, the children of the Trudeau era, had been so engrained with the idea of bilingualism and biculturalism that you weren't allowed to stop and examine the reasons why it had failed.

Over the years Andrew began to notice that anglophone intellectuals, who had spent years learning French (in order to be accepted by francophones), were still socializing with other anglophones. There were very few truly bicultural friendships and almost no bicultural relationships. This was another taboo subject, because part of the game of living in Montreal was pretending that everyone got along just fine. Speaking both languages equally well, with no particular allegiance to either side, Andrew was nonetheless shocked at the ridiculously vast amounts of wasted energy spent in Montreal by people hating each other, or at best refusing to communicate with each other.

All services in the city were doubled. There was an English gay phone-line and a French gay phone-line, in separate sections of the city. There were two separate gay volleyball leagues who never played against each other. There were separate gay rights organizations, drop-in centres and health clinics.

The anglophone influence on the Quebec gay scene was omnipresent, but to acknowledge it was again taboo. The game was to pretend it wasn't really there. The city's only gay bookstore, for example, had been founded by English-Canadians and Americans; walking into the store, you wouldn't know it. The anglophone book vendor would look you in the eye, and if he wasn't a hundred per cent positive you were anglophone, he would err on the side of caution, saying, "*Est-ce que je peux vous aider?*"

This approach was not simply politically correct, it was also necessary for survival. If the clerk started out by saying "Can I help you" to a client who was (God forbid) a francophone intellectual, watch out. Even if the client spoke English fluently, *it's the principle!* There was a good chance the client would create a scene in the store, or stomp out and threaten to write an impassioned letter to *Le Devoir* complaining that his fundamental human rights had been trampled on; that he had been denied service in his own language in the city's only gay bookstore, in the second-largest French-speaking city in the world, etc.

Gay francophone men spoke English fluently on shopping-and-sex vacations in New York, Amsterdam and San Francisco. For reasons of national pride, however, these same men would often pretend they spoke no English if an anglophone dared speak English to them on their home turf. In fact, many gay businesses in Montreal were owned by anglophones, often Americans. In order to avoid accusations of appearing to be "too" anglophone, these owners would hire an army of francophones to attract francophone clientele. But when you went into the offices where the money was being counted after a busy night, you inevitably heard that whiney, nasal accent, so common to gay businesses along the Eastern Seaboard...

* * *

Andrew glanced at his watch. Ten minutes late, but that would be fine with Gina. He paused in front of the café, and peered in at her through the window. She was sipping coffee and reading *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a Mexican poncho draped carelessly

over the neighbouring rattan chair. Bangles entwined both wrists and, in true *femme fatale* fashion, she smoked her Gaulloise with a cigarette holder. Today she was wearing a Latin American ensemble, including a braided shoulder bag and an Andean vest made of fuzzy llama wool, no doubt. She had a few different costumes. First there was the guerrilla look: a Ché beret with khaki army pants and one of those Palestinian scarf-things wrapped loosely around her neck. There was the sari-and-sandals outfit; the quilted-silk-jacket-and-Mao-shirt; and her famous gypsy ensemble, complete with turban, peasant blouse and long pleated cape. Andrew loved to be the first to arrive at these weekly encounters so that he could see her come in from the cold, unsnapping her cape in a dramatic fashion, revealing layers and layers of vests, tassles, shawls and brightly-covered scarves. The motif was always the same: vaguely Third World-oppressed-woman. Gina saw her outfits not as costumes but as examples of her vast multicultural exposure.

Gina and Andrew were the victims of a cruel economic recession in the early Eighties that affected almost everyone in Quebec. Because both of them were often unemployed at the same time, they met at cafés in the daytime to help each other get through those long dark days. They also preferred to meet in the daytime because of their domestic obligations in the evenings. Gina's love life was so varied that Andrew needed this weekly *kaffeeklatsch* just to keep track.

* * *

After finally graduating in Women's Studies at McGill, her career had followed a somewhat nomadic course. She began working in a daycare centre, supplementing her meagre income by waitressing at a French restaurant on St. Denis. In addition to her jobs, she was involved with Central America solidarity committees, international human rights committees, as well as seminars and conferences on Women in the Third World, Daycare in the Eighties, Birth Control for Immigrant Women, etc. Her work pattern involved landing short-term contract work for, say, a rape-crisis centre or a refugee resource centre, until she qualified for Unemployment Insurance. When her U.I. ran out, she would go on welfare. On welfare she would then be eligible for another government-sponsored work project. She slept very little.

Another reason for her lack of sleep was the number and intensity of men she had been involved with. There was the Italian truck-driver from St. Leonard who delivered fruits and vegetables to the Four Brothers supermarket by day and played in a rock band at night. There was the Timorese diplomat she met in a Brazilian café on Duluth Street. Later, at the same café, she met and had a brief affair with an Angolan pilot. Her lovers were invariably from political, cultural and economic backgrounds that were unstable or oppressed. She would feverishly support the cause that her lovers espoused until the whole thing came crashing down, usually after a few weeks, in a fireball of cultural misunderstanding.

Once, at a crowded colloquium on U.S. involvement in El Salvador, for example, she stepped up to the microphone during question period and singled out Quebec's representative for the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front, a Salvadorean man who had just dumped her. After denouncing the revolutionary committee's rampant machismo, she

realized she had made a fool of herself -- not because she didn't have a point, but because everyone knew she was a jilted *compañera*. At moments like these, she would feel vindicated - and then slump into depressions that lasted for weeks on end. Eventually she would drag herself, crawling and bawling, onto Naomi's doorstep. Naomi finally convinced her to see a feminist therapist; within months Andrew could see the change, especially in Gina's vocabulary. Words like *bourgeois* and *exploit* and *imperialism* were now being replaced by *analysis* and *alienation* and *energy*. They began to discuss *patterns* and *self-esteem*. (Usually, when one of Gina's new intellectual waves hit Andrew, he would go to Bruce's impressive library to read up on Gina's subject-of-the-month. Psychology books, however, were curiously lacking from Bruce's collection.) Naomi took up the slack; books by Jung and Laing and Fromm worked their way down the pipeline from Naomi to Gina to Andrew...

* * *

Gina rose excitedly from her chair and allowed Andrew to kiss her on both cheeks. She cleared away the paper and bade him sit down.

"Well, aren't *we* in a good mood this afternoon!" Andrew said.

"I was hoping it would show," Gina said, radiant.

"It certainly *does*," said Andrew enviously.

The espresso machine hissed in the background.

"So -- out with it," he said. "It has something to do with Carlos, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Carlos was a grad student from Rio de Janeiro doing his Master's in Communications at Concordia. He also worked part-time as an announcer for an international shortwave radio network.

"He's wonderful, I'm wonderful, the world is wonderful," Gina sighed. "I came home from my class last night and he made me dinner. There were flowers on the table and wine."

"So how was it?"

"You mean the dinner or the sex?"

"Well, both!"

"His cooking isn't very good. We stopped half-way through dinner and I took protein supplements instead."

"Yumm," said Andrew. "Full of Vitamin C, they say!"

"It's the staff of life, darling," she said, laughing wickedly.

They suppressed more of this kind of talk until after the waiter had brought Andrew's coffee, and then they burst out laughing. They traded tips on male masturbation and lamented the effect of alcohol on erections. "Honey, forget the *schlong*," Andrew said, mimicking Naomi's accent. "Is he a *mensch*? Can he take good care of you?"

"Of course not!" Gina replied sarcastically. "You think I'd be interested in him if he could? He's a struggling student."

"Right. Struggling student who went to a Swiss boarding school," Andrew corrected. "Just because he's from a Third World country doesn't mean he's got a bank account to match. You're not feeding him, I hope?"

"No, but he's sort of in between apartments at the moment, so he's been--"

"Uh-oh, Gina, you know what happened when the Italian grocer moved in."

"We had lots of fruits and vegetables," Gina said, smiling.

"You had lots of headaches! After they move in they start getting bored, start playing the field."

"No, it's not going to be that way this time," Gina said determinedly. "Besides, his mother's flying in from Lisbon next week. So he'll have to find a place fast."

"Either that, or Mama can just move right in too."

"Yeah, right."

"Anyway, speaking of South America, I just got a letter from Mark today from Medellín," he said, mispronouncing the name.

"Two ells in Spanish is 'yuh.' So it's 'Medehyeen.'"

"Shall I read it?"

"Oh yes, please."

* * *

Medellín, Colombia
April 5, 1984

Dear Andrew,

Party, party, party! That's all I seem to do here, and work a few hours a week teaching. It's a pretty wild place, it's Third World, but nothing like I've ever experienced before. I've been here for a month and this is the first chance I've had to sit down and write a letter. How's Montreal? Did the bus drivers go on strike again this winter? It's been a few years since I spent a winter in Canada, it's hard to imagine. Have you been working much these days? I hear unemployment is still very bad. Gina seems to be

getting contracts, but it's too bad she has to go on welfare first before she can qualify. Give her my love and thank her for the books she sent.

I actually started using the Spanish textbook before I even left Miami on my way down here. On the flight to Cartagena I told the stewardess where I was going and she said, "You don't have to go to South America to teach English, you know. We could use you in Miami." (That was six months ago when I went through Colombia on my way down to Chile. I met some English teachers in Medellín who told me that anytime I wanted a job, to come back. I had just enough to fly back from Santiago, and started teaching a couple of months ago. If I stay for a year they'll give me a bonus and pay my ticket back.)

This city is completely surrounded by mountains, about half-way between Bogota and the coast. Population-wise, it's the second largest city in Colombia, about the same size as Montreal. Everyone is crammed into this valley, with nowhere to expand. The population has multiplied ten-fold in the last fifteen years, from 250,000 to 2.5 million. Since it's a large textile manufacturing centre in the middle of the mountains, it's become one of the most polluted cities in South America. (Everyone escapes to the mountains on weekends where it's cooler and the air is fresher.)

But the big industry here is drugs! Medellín is the centre for cocaine production in South America, bringing the price of a pure gram of coke down to about \$20. Everybody acts as if nothing is going on, but the "Mafia" (as they call it here) seems to run the whole show. It's very exciting, with shoot-outs downtown, daring bank robberies, hit men, death squads, etc. It's like Chicago in the thirties. Everybody has bodyguards and bullet-proof vests, and if they don't, they just lock themselves inside their homes after dark. (It gets dark every day, like clockwork, just around six.) I'm working at a private language institute that hires a lot of Americans. The teaching method is very simple: you just repeat the same phrases and the same tests out of the textbooks over and over again. It's mainly businessmen and housewives studying here. The gay scene isn't big, but it's very lively. There's one disco and a neighbourhood bar. Because the number of openly-gay men is so small, you tend to meet people very quickly. So far I've made some good friends. People are very friendly and unreserved, unlike Canadians.

I hang out quite a bit with Alvaro, who studies languages at one of the state universities here. Yesterday we were coming back from his family's *finca* (country house), and arrived in the city on the freeway. I said, "Alvaro, there's one thing I've been wondering ever since I got here. Why is it that nobody wears motorcycle helmets in this city?" He looked at me and said: "Because it's against the law to wear motorcycle helmets in Medellín." I looked at him as if he was crazy. He said, "We have a problem with the Mafia death squads in Medellín. The hit-men have submachine guns, then they wait for a certain person to walk out of his office downtown, then, 'bang!'"

Apparently they spray the guy with bullets, and then escape through the traffic (which is bumper-to-bumper downtown) by driving their motorcycles *over* the sidewalks. The motorcycle assassins have masks tucked inside their helmets. Just before they make their hit, they slip the masks down over their faces and shoot. They escape up to the slums on the side of the mountains and disappear before the police can even arrive at the scene of the crime. The only way the city officials can control the problem of motorcycle death squads is to ban *all* headwear on all people riding motorcycles

anywhere in the city. If the police see motorcyclists with anything on their heads, they're immediately detained for questioning.

I thought that was a good example of the violence here. There are lots more incidents, but so far I've been lucky. I get paranoid, but the people are actually very friendly here. I'd still rather be here than in Montreal at the moment. If I could just find a boyfriend it would be perfect! I hope you and Bruce are still happy together. Write if you get a chance.

Love,
Mark

P.S. Don't let Naomi read this letter.

* * *

"Carlos says it's the most dangerous city in South America," said Gina, butting out her cigarette. "He says even people from other South American countries are afraid to go there. God, if Naomi only knew where he was! She'd flip out right now, wouldn't she?"

Andrew nodded grimly.

"Brazil's supposed to be very different," Gina mused, twisting another cigarette into her holder. "Carlos wants me to go down with him next Christmas, but I don't know..."

"What do you mean, you don't know?" said Andrew, disgusted. "You have a gorgeous, aristocratic boyfriend who wants to introduce you to a whole new part of the world. Adventure, romance, travel...what more could you want?"

"A lot."

She started to sing:

"You-can't-always-get-what-you-want!"

Andrew joined in:

"But-if-you-try-sometimes-you-just-might-find-you-get-what-you-need!"

"No, really, Andrew, my therapist seems to think that--"

"Oh, what does your therapist know?"

"Andrew! That woman has helped me a lot!"

"Yes, I know. I'm sorry, I didn't --"

"Just because *you're* afraid to go to a therapist doesn't mean--"

"Wait a minute!" Who says I'm afraid to go to a therapist?"

"I did!"

"But who says I have to go see one?"

"My therapist."

"How does *she* know about me?" Andrew asked.

"*Andrew*, you're my best friend!"

"So?"

"So I'm worried about your relationship with Bruce."

"Uh-oh. I thought we were talking about *your* problems."

"Well, I think we have the same problem," she said.

Andrew was silent.

"Marlene says we both suffer from chronic male dependency. She says it's like a drug or something. In order to feel validated, we need a man in our lives."

Andrew listened, frowning.

"Because our paternal role model was weak," she continued, "we spend a lot of time searching for a man who's going to pay attention to us and give us the support we never had as a child."

"No," Andrew said, getting hot. "You're the one who's searching for a man. I've already got a man."

"No, but it's more complex than that. It's not just *searching* for the perfect man, it's also putting up with the one you have. And you don't have to be so defensive."

"I'm not being defensive!" he exclaimed. He looked down and noticed his clenched fists, knuckles white. "We have our problems. Doesn't everybody?"

"Yeah, but most people would end a relationship if they had to put up with what you do."

"Why? What do I go through that's so difficult?"

"Never mind," Gina said, pushing away her coffee cup. "You know something, Andrew, you'd make a good writer. You're a great listener. You're *really* good at listening to other people's problems and making comments about them, but like, what do I have to do to get you to talk?"

Andrew recalled an interview he'd read with the survivor of a Japanese concentration camp who had been forced to talk by having reeds shoved underneath his fingernails. He suddenly felt faint. He wanted the conversation to end. *Enough of Gina's prying for the day.* She was sitting there, staring at her shoes, waiting patiently for a response.

"Gina, I've got no job. I have no career. I just went on welfare. What would I do without Bruce? Where would I live?"

A large diesel truck thundered past the café, shaking the window panes and rattling their coffee cups. They finished their coffees in silence, then proceeded to throw on their various layers of clothing. On the sidewalk, they kissed and parted.

* * *

He pulled out the finger, then repositioned himself between my legs. He pinned me down by pushing one hand between my shoulder blades – so hard that he flattened me onto the mattress. I couldn't breathe. I heard him spit on his hand a couple of times and then he forced my legs open even wider. I was saying:

"Don't do this, please."

He said:

"Come on, baby, open up!"

And then he leaned over me.

"Ever since you got into the truck, you wanted this," he said, breathing hard. "And now you're gonna get it!"

* * *

Because of the construction on Pine Avenue, traffic on St. Lawrence was at a standstill. Andrew zigzagged through the gridlock street and bounced into his favourite grocery store, the Four Brothers. He suddenly felt revitalized. CHOM blasted on the overhead speakers, and the afternoon staff was just arriving. The fat wives, who worked

as cashiers during the day, were going home to cook dinner, and their children had just arrived from school to relieve them.

The Four Brothers had the freshest fruits and vegetables in town; it was clean, but not sterile like the large supermarket chains. The shocking thing was the employees seemed to like what they did. They knew each other, yelled at each other, looked the customers straight in the eye. Everyone knew Andrew and smiled at him. He seemed to get over his shyness and act naturally when he was there. He had learned not to be afraid to ask someone to go into the back to find a fresher bunch of radishes. Joe, the Italian produce manager (or was he Portuguese?) would pull Andrew aside and say, "You check out these red peppers we got in from California today. Fresh, my God, just smell 'em." They all spoke several languages, including French, but always responded better to English. The immigrants' children spoke a tough inner-city dialect of English that he had only heard on television shows like *Welcome Back, Kotter*. He had never realized there were people in Canada who talked like John Travolta.

When the boys talked to each other, for example, they talked louder than boys whose families had been in Canada for several generations, even though their vocal chords were presumably the same size. Their voices came from somewhere deep inside them. A sentence like, "Hey Tony, open that crate," became a macho statement of rebellion or command: "AY, TO-ny, open that crate, wouldya?" A vague expression of contempt and defiance of authority seemed to accompany such a statement. The girls talked tough too, but Andrew had a hard time putting his finger on how their diction set them apart from "Canadian" girls. A simple statement between cashiers, like "Judy's coming over to study with me tonight," became sexy, bitchy, threatening. The fresh

smells, the tropical colours, the rock music, the raucous youthful atmosphere, those hot Italian (or Portuguese?) studs with the dark stubble and the jeans that disappeared up their cracks when they leaned over the dairy case, those deep, horny accents, all these things made him linger.

On his way home, he cut through an adjoining alley and passed his favourite graffito, spray-painted on the side of the grocery store:

IF VOTING COULD CHANGE THE SYSTEM IT WOULD BE ILLEGAL

* * *

By the time Andrew lugged the two huge bags of groceries up the stairs, it was almost five. The dinner party was set for seven; the guests, John and Hunter, probably wouldn't arrive until eight; they wouldn't eat until around nine. Bruce had said he'd come home "about five" which meant he would drop into the Mystique for a cocktail and wouldn't actually be home until six-thirty. If the food wasn't at least half-prepared by the time Bruce got home, there would be hell to pay. To avoid a potentially ugly drunken disagreement, Andrew smoked a joint and set to work immediately, snipping, grating, chopping, slicing and peeling. At 6:20, Andrew heard the bottom door slam and the hollow footsteps work their way up to the top floor.

"It smells like pot in here," Bruce announced in a drunken accent, throwing down his briefcase. "As usual."

"Well, I'm fine, thank you, and how are you?" Andrew said sarcastically, standing in the kitchen in his apron. Bruce went straight to the bedroom to change into his jeans and a T-shirt. Once a year Andrew would drag him downtown to buy a new set of clothes. Well into his thirties, he cut a dashing figure: his thick brown hair, brushed to one side; the firm jutting jaw; the broad forehead, a little higher and balder – but basically a man just as handsome as the day Andrew had met him six years before.

"You went out to the 'Mistake'?" Andrew said.

"Uh–hmmm. Ran into one of my students when I was in the bathroom. Always knew he was gay."

After fifteen years in Canada, he still never said "washroom." Andrew had had to learn new exotic words like *pocketbook* and *booger*. Cock and ass became *dick* and *butt*. And when something was terrific, it was "*fuckin' A, man*".

"Nice buns," Bruce commented, patting Andrew on the butt on his way to the fridge to get a beer.

"Thanks, I got them at St. Lawrence bakery," Andrew said, nodding toward the cinammon rolls on top of the fridge.

"Mmm. Nice *tight* buns," Bruce said, breathing down his neck while Andrew tried in vain to peel potatoes over the sink.

In a few seconds both had their pants around their knees. Andrew unbuttoned Bruce's shirt and steadied himself by grasping the hot and cold water taps. He could feel Bruce's chest, wooly and sweaty, banging against his back. Bruce came quickly inside him and just stood there, very still, leaning over him. They stood there in the falling darkness, absorbing a wordless language through each other's pores. Andrew lived for

these moments: a miraculous combination of passion and passivity, sex and security. The physical and spiritual bond Andrew felt with this man behind him, inside him, sometimes frightened him more than he would care to admit. He realized this was about as close as someone could ever get to him.

"You'd better take a shower," Bruce said, withdrawing slowly.

Andrew lathered himself, savouring the memory of their first dinner party four years before. Bruce had left work early to prepare for it. Now these parties had become biweekly necessities for Bruce's career, usually on Friday nights. Since Bruce was making good money and buying the food, why shouldn't Andrew stay home and fix things properly? At the time it made sense to them both.

Bruce and John were best friends now. John had found some way to remain in Canada after finishing his Master's thesis on male prostitution, and was now working for the city's largest social services agency. Tonight he was bringing over a friend who was also American. No doubt they would spend half the evening putting down this country. *Well, if Canada's so awful, go back to the States and let's see how well you make out.* Besides the fact that they were both gay American intellectuals living in Montreal, Andrew couldn't see what Bruce and John had in common. When Andrew saw Bruce having an intellectual orgasm, he withered.

* * *

At first Andrew thought the intellectual imbalance between him and Bruce could be corrected if he went to university; Bruce was quite pessimistic. The B.A., he said, had

gone the way of the dodo bird; it wasn't worth the paper it was printed on. If he could do it over again, he said, he wouldn't have gone to university at all, but rather would have done something "practical."

Undaunted, Andrew enrolled in an evening course in sociology at Concordia -- against Bruce's wishes and without his financial assistance. On the night before the mid-term exam, when he was desperately poring over hundreds of pages of photocopied readings, Bruce barged in with two members of the touring Spanish soccer team he had picked up in a park. Andrew had no choice but to participate in the ensuing orgy, which lasted most of the night. When he failed the exam, he grumbled to Bruce, "I knew I shouldn't have taken the course." Bruce sat him down and, with a condescending Jack Nicholson grin, said: "Look Andrew, I didn't want to say anything at the time, but for you it's just not worth it."

"Yeah, well you did it!" Andrew bawled.

"Yes, but that was the sixties."

(Every argument between them had an undertone of generational warfare. At a certain point Bruce would inevitably pull rank and lament the good old days, the enormous job opportunities, how socially committed people were, how "experimental" couples were -- sexually, spiritually, etc. The concept of the Golden Age was reinforced after Andrew had read Kerouac, Ginsberg, Kesey and Wolfe. He was convinced that he had simply been born in the wrong place at the wrong time, a half-generation too late.)

"I guess some people just aren't cut out for university," Bruce said, mock-sympathetically. "I guess that's what I'm *really* trying to say. You've gotta be pretty sharp to keep up on all those readings. It's all right, you'll find something to do."

"But--I--don't--have--a--job!" Andrew sniffled.

"Now don't you worry," Bruce said, smoothing Andrew's hair condescendingly. "You won't go hungry in this house. I'm gonna take good care of you."

So Andrew cast his academic ambitions aside for the moment and contented himself as a glorified domestic handyman. True, he had few rights and only a little money, but he was guaranteed a warm bed, a fridge full of food, beer, grass, whatever happened to be going down...Why rock the boat? *All you need is love*. Wasn't that the sixties credo? It didn't matter if he was a surgeon or a housewife, the fact that he was in love -- wasn't *that* the most important thing? Also, it wasn't as though he was completely powerless. He had quite an influence on Bruce as well; it was Andrew who had convinced Bruce to let him convert the pigsty into a liveable, modern apartment...

* * *

Still, it was difficult for Andrew to handle these dinner parties and their intense intellectuals. Bruce's long-time friends had learned not to embarrass Andrew any more by asking about his latest achievements.

Tonight, in order to make up for being excluded from a boring conversation, Andrew got very high and had one drink too many. He was pleasantly surprised to discover how likeable John's friend Hunter was. Hunter's younger brother had gone to high school with John in Brooklyn. Hunter had come to Montreal about ten years before to take an advertising seminar and had fallen in love -- not only with the city, but with

a Québécois, with whom he had lived for several years. Suddenly Hunter was single again, and tonight he seemed particularly flirtatious.

"In the early Seventies, it was so easy to get into Canada," Hunter said when the topic of immigration came up. "A Filipino friend of mine told me how he got into the country. I think he was about nineteen at the time. Apparently he met some rich guy from Montreal who invited him to come to Canada to visit him for a month.

"Anyway, his friend drops him off at Dorval Airport ready to fly home, and he goes through immigration to get stamped out of the country. The immigration officer looks at his passport and takes the kid into his office for a chat. 'So how did you like Canada?' he says, and Juan says, 'Oh, I liked it very much.' And the officer says, 'Do you think you'd like to live in Canada?' and Juan says, 'I'd love to.' He asks Juan if he has a place to stay, and he gives the officer his friend's phone number downtown. His friend gets in the door after having driven Juan to the airport and he gets this call from Immigration Canada, asking if Juan can stay with him till he gets his papers. And he's been in Canada ever since."

Hunter Browning was a tall man in his early forties with a full head of wiry hair, graying a bit along the sideburns. He ate his chicken slowly, scraping the fat and skin off with his knife. He chewed methodically with a closed mouth and listened intently. John and Bruce were hot and heavy into their session of mutual intellectual masturbation. As the evening wore on and the wine bottles collected along the kitchen counter, their voices grew shriller and shriller as they neared their climax. During a lull in the conversation, Hunter asked if anyone had read the latest *Newsweek*.

"Oh God, another big thing on AIDS," John groaned.

"The media's really getting on the bandwagon, aren't they?" said Bruce.

"The gay plague," John said dramatically, standing up and spreading his hands out wide in the shape of a long newspaper headline. "WHO WILL BE THE NEXT VICTIMS?"

"They've got half the fags in New York scared out of their wits," said Hunter. "They say they've come up with some kind of link between promiscuity and--"

"Yeah!" Bruce exploded. "I read that article, and it made me sick. They write about the sex lives of gay men like we were circus animals or something."

"I heard the CIA injected some gays with the virus and then it got passed on like wildfire." John said gravely. "They're afraid of how radical we've become. This is one way they can control us."

"One more excuse to lock us away, I say," Bruce added.

Andrew listened to the conversation, mortified. He remembered the demonstration; a small feeble group struggling down Fifth Avenue in wheel chairs.

"A friend of mine from New York called last week to say his best friend just died," said Hunter, snapping his fingers with chilling finality. "One minute he was fine, the next minute, presto, he got pneumonia and lost thirty pounds just like that!"

"Isn't *that* pleasant!" said John, a bit annoyed at how the conversation had gone. "See what kind of friend I have? I invite him for dinner and he talks about all these unpleasant things!"

Hunter blushed slightly and remained silent. The evening was winding down. The last discussion had thrown everyone into a slightly disagreeable mood. Bruce got up for more wine.

"Andrew," he yelled, clearly vexed. "Didn't I remind you to put all the bottles of wine in the fridge?"

Andrew said nothing. Bruce staggered over to the table.

"This guy is hell to live with," he muttered. "He sits around all day collecting welfare, smoking my pot, and then he can't even get a simple instruction straight!"

Andrew rolled his eyes up, crossed his arms and sighed. John smiled wryly, as if to say, "Here he goes again."

"Aw, come on," John said. "Leave the kid alone."

"Kid? Are you joking?" He tweaked Andrew's cheek roughly, like he was squeezing a melon. "I got news for you! This ain't fresh meat anymore. This kid's chicken days are over."

"I don't mind warm wine," Hunter said, a little taken aback by Bruce's invective. The party was now clearly over. The guests beat a hasty retreat. Bruce saw them out, while Andrew picked his way through the dirty dishes. Bruce climbed back to the top of the stairs, surveying the scene. Whenever he was angry with Andrew, he would stand there quietly, watching every move Andrew made. Each routine chore was transformed into a psychodrama, in which Andrew found himself alone on stage. Bruce's pose was one of the director, leaning stiffly against the wall, finger to chin in Thinker-like concentration. Bruce's pattern was always the same: the stupid grin, the shaking of his head -- at first imperceptible, then slowly more and more apparent -- then the oral protestations: at first snorts, and then ironic half-laughs and full-blown sighs.

Andrew felt defeated. It always ended this way. Whenever Bruce felt Andrew was enjoying himself too much, he would cause a scene in order to get back into the centre

of attention. He wiped the table laboriously, listening nervously to the jangling of Bruce's keychain and waiting for the first eruption to occur. Bruce's face was already flushed and grimacing. His facial muscles twitched. He began to hyperventilate. His chest expanded and contracted, expanded and contracted. Finally he walked up to the sink and stood in front of Andrew, arms crossed.

"You're pushin' me, kid."

"I thought I wasn't a kid any more."

"Oh, you're cute, you're really fuckin' cute."

He went to the fridge and took out a beer. He pulled a chair over and straddled it. He settled one elbow on the back of the chair and rested his chin against the upright hand.

"Fuckin' welfare bum," Bruce muttered.

"Look," Andrew said, withdrawing his hands from the dishwasher. "You say I should go out and get a job like everyone else, but there aren't any! All you radicals who came out of university in the sixties and seventies took all the jobs and left us the table scraps! You guys had all the government programs to help you, and now you're all professors and producers and editors making lots of money. Now you're getting you're big fat paycheque, and now *I'm* the one who's irresponsible? What happened to all your ideals, Bruce? *Share the land.* Ha!"

* * *

I was flat on my stomach. He was lying on top of me and had one of his arms hooked around my throat so that his bicep was squeezing against my Adam's apple.

He bent into me. Every time I yelped he shoved it in a bit further, but he was having problems getting through, so he pulled it out and jammed it back in like a battering ram.

The more I screamed, the more excited he got. His arm tightened around my neck like a vice grip and then I saw stars and colours and rings of light. I was running out of air. His hairy beer-belly slapped against my back and sweat from his greasy hair sprayed me. Somewhere in front of me I saw a tunnel and all of a sudden I thought, "I'm dying."

* * *

Bruce's face was now a bleeding pink. His vocal chords protruded from his throat, beside the jugular vein. His eyes were a bit glazed. Andrew shook his head and resumed the dishes.

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" Bruce boomed. "I'm talking to you, you little shit!"

He tossed a beer glass against the wall. The dull crunch of glass momentarily cleared the air.

"Leave me alone," said Andrew.

"Why do I put up with this shit?" Bruce said, swearing under his breath. "I've done so much for you."

"What about everything I've done for you?" Andrew yelled back. "This place was a dump before I moved in."

"I could have hired a carpenter and an interior decorator to do that," Bruce replied coldly.

"So why didn't you?"

"Because I wanted to improve your life."

Andrew pulled his elbows out of the suds and glowered at him. He opened his mouth to speak but held his tongue.

"Let's face it, kid," Bruce said. "You only know how to do one thing. You do it well but don't forget, if it wasn't for me you'd be back on the street in two seconds *flat*."

Bruce's voice mellowed. He was taking great pleasure in this, savouring each word like a rare brandy. Andrew winced involuntarily. *That isn't fair...That's what JFK said once. Life isn't fair.* He wiped bits of parsley off the broad blade of the butcher cleaver, hidden beneath the sudsy surface. He squeezed the handle, pressed his thumb against it.

"How much did that old guy pay you?" said Bruce. "Remember that eighty-year-old man who hired you and that other guy to lick his ass, then he farted--"

"*Stop it!*" Andrew screamed, and yanked the cleaver out of the sink. He held it in front of Bruce menacingly. The suds clinging to the hairs on his arm dissolved into little streams and dribbled off his elbow-tips. He paused, then drove the cleaver into the butcher block *ka-thunk*. Bruce giggled maniacally and rubbed his crotch.

"You're sicker than I thought," Andrew said. "I only did those things to make money! You're getting a hard-on just talking about it."

"Oh yeah, you think I'm sick, huh?" Bruce said, stomping up to him. "You little whore!"

He slipped his legs around Andrew's like he was executing some obscene tango step. One hand held the collar around Andrew's neck in a choke-hold while the other hand buffeted Andrew's face: first the palm, then the knuckles; punch-slap-punch-slap-punch-slap. Andrew's hands flailed wildly with each stinging blow, searching for something to hold onto. The exertion was causing Bruce to drip with sweat. Exhausted, he finally released his choke hold. Andrew crumpled and fell to the floor. He crawled around Bruce's feet and dragged himself away from the kitchen floor, now spattered with blood. Once in the living room, he picked up the phone and dialled 0.

"What are you doing?" asked Bruce.

"Je me fais attaquer!" Andrew yelled into the phone. *"1817 St-Laurent, en arrière puis en haut!"*

He didn't even have a chance to put the phone down before Bruce jumped him. The receiver dropped and dangled half-way to the floor like in a Hitchcock film. All Andrew could see was both of Bruce's hands aiming for his throat. He tucked in his chin instinctively and butted his head against Bruce's chest. They both landed on the floor in a whirling ball of arms and legs, like two kids playing cowboys and Indians. Bruce seemed to be having a great time. He smiled as he pinned Andrew down, kneeling on his shoulders.

"Say, I'm a dirty cocksucker!" said Bruce, his big fist hovered over Andrew's face.

Andrew said nothing.

"Say it!"

Andrew strained his neck upward, opened his mouth and spit a huge gob into Bruce's face. Bruce's knuckles swung down, splitting Andrew's lower lip, before the

doorbell rang. Bruce hopped up, grabbed a dishtowel in the kitchen and threw it to Andrew. He ran his hands under the cold water. The doorbell rang again. Andrew heard the door open below, and Bruce reassured the other voices that everything was fine. Andrew pulled himself off the floor and leaned over the railing, peering down at the three figures below.

"Hey! If everything is fine," Andrew bellowed, "then what do you call this? He just beat the shit out of me."

"Are you the one who called the police?" one of the cops yelled up.

"Yes!"

All three came upstairs and took down everyone's vital information.

"What is your address?"

"I live here," Andrew said.

"This gentleman says that this is his apartment, and that you're an intruder," the same policeman said patiently. "May I see a copy of the lease please?"

Bruce returned with the lease and a satisfied smile.

"This is ridiculous!" Andrew shouted. "I've been living here for three and a half years! You're telling me that just because my name isn't on the lease, he has the right to beat me up?"

"Whoa," one of the cops said. "What you two *men* do in the privacy of your own home is your own business. Now as I understand it, this is the legal residence of--" He referred to his notes. "--Mr. Barnes here. Now he can invite anyone to live and do whatever he wants to do in his own home within reason."

"And beating me up is within reason?" Andrew said, leaking blood from his nose and lower lip.

"Hey," the other cop said, seething. "I'm not a nurse and I'm not a fucking marriage counsellor! We've got a lot more serious business on our hands tonight besides a lovers' quarrel, okay? You can press charges, but it's his word against yours and it sounds like the charges would probably be dropped anyway. Now, I would advise you both to clean up this fucking mess and get a good night's sleep."

* * *

When Andrew woke up the next morning, his whole body ached. His face was criss-crossed in a patch of flesh-coloured Band-aids of various lengths. Bruce had washed and dressed the wounds the night before and now the skin on Andrew's face -- all smooth and shiny with blotches of blue -- had swollen around the bandages. He loosened them one by one to relieve the pressure. He groped his way to the coffee maker, where he found a note scotch-taped to the handle of the coffee pot:

DON'T GO AWAY. BACK IN 15 MINS.

He poured himself a coffee and lowered himself slowly into a chair. *Don't go away.* Where the hell would he go? As much as he dreaded the break-up of his relationship, it was on mornings like these that a more chilling thought engulfed him: where *would* he go? He sipped his coffee and gingerly brushed a finger over one of his bruised

cheeks. The bottom door clunked shut and Bruce thudded deliberately up the stairs. A crinkling noise; the warm, moist smell of croissants leaking out of a paper bag. He kept his back to Bruce as he entered, flopping down a fat *Saturday Gazette*. More rustling, and snip-snip. Andrew knew he was reaching for the smoked-glass vase on the top shelf. *Peace offering.*

It was moments like these when Andrew felt most powerful in the relationship. He savoured them vengefully. By refusing to turn into Bruce's guilty gaze, Andrew could drive Bruce to the brink of insanity. *If only the sex weren't so good. Why do I get so turned on after we've fought?* A single teardrop oozed out of one eye. He felt the salt-pain ease its way down his cheek. Bruce was standing in front of him now, head bowed, frantically cracking the bulbous knuckles of his big hands. *I can't believe this big lout is afraid of me. He can't even look me in the eye.*

Andrew felt fragile, like an invalid, as though someone ought to wrap a blanket around his legs and wheel him into the sunshine. Andrew recalled the scene in "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane" when Joan Crawford is sobbing in her wheelchair.

"You'd treat me a lot nicer if I wasn't in this wheelchair!" she tells her evil sister.

Bette Davis' simple reply:

"But y'are, Blanche. Y'are."

Andrew and Bruce had a certain reconciliation pattern: Bruce would get up early, buy flowers and make breakfast. He would cancel his appointments for the day and devote himself to Andrew. Since they couldn't go anywhere in public (depending on the extent of Andrew's scarring and bruising), Andrew would don sunglasses and they would go for a ride in the country. Within the car's intimate interior, they would use

hackneyed phrases from a universal lovers' lexicon to lament the violence and celebrate their commitment. If no agreement could be reached, they would return to the city, dejected. They would inhabit separate spheres for the next few days. Bruce would take his shaving kit and a few shirts and disappear, while Andrew shut himself inside the apartment and mourned. He would refuse to go out or even pick up the phone until Bruce eventually returned, bearing gifts and professing undying love.

On the other hand, if their drive in the country was particularly fruitful, they might stop somewhere for the night. "A second honeymoon," they would laugh. They would find a roadside diner specializing in *cuisine canadienne* they would buy wine and bed down at a cheap hotel. They would get high and drunk, they would fuck very hard, and then, after Bruce came, he would cry in Andrew's arms until Andrew forgave him. Then, and only then, would Bruce fall into a deep sleep in Andrew's arms.

* * *

This time they went to Vermont for an amorous get-away. When they got back, Andrew stayed inside for several days. He finally ventured out into the spring air with his sunglasses. Spring was not a particularly pleasant or eventful season in Montreal. Tons of dog shit, hidden in the snowdrifts for months, suddenly appeared on the lawns and back alleys of the city, slowly decomposing with the rising mercury. There was nothing subtle about springtime in Montreal; by the end of April, it wasn't uncommon to see the thermometer shoot from -10 C to 30 C and back. The sudden heat surge was such a shock to the system that most bodies – even the hardiest ones – could not cope

with the change. For weeks people suffered from colds, flu and sinuses gone haywire after weeks of being locked inside dry, overheated apartments (if you were better off) or damp, underheated apartments (if you were worse off.)

It was true; April *was* the cruellest month. On a psychological level, the atmosphere in Montreal in May was like being in a penitentiary whose gates had suddenly swung open. The heat drove everyone onto their spacious balconies and into the streets. Andrew slammed the door closed and worked his way up Clark Street to avoid running into anyone on St. Lawrence. He had just turned along Duluth Street and was making for the open field of Jeanne-Mance Park when Naomi spotted him in front of the Santropol Café. She insisted on bringing him in for a capuccino. "Take your sunglasses off," she said gravely, once they had settled into their table.

Andrew pried them off reluctantly. His left eye was still puffy and black.

"Oy," was all she said, shaking her head disgustedly.

"Snips and snails and puppy-dog tails," Andrew said.

"What?"

"That's what little boys are made of."

"Oh yes," said Naomi. "Instead of all those fattening things."

She seemed poised to ask a question, then thought the better of it.

"I was just reading *Newsweek*," she said, changing the subject. "They say some gay men in San Francisco have had sex with 12,000 different people in their lives!"

"Oh, Naomi--"

"I'm telling you," she said, "the fun times are over. You know, a lot of straight people used to envy you guys for being so liberated, getting it on whenever you felt like it. They say monogamy is coming back."

"Yuck."

Naomi glowered at him.

"I can't imagine it, Naomi," said Andrew. "Especially Bruce. He's so macho. He's got to prove his masculinity every chance he gets."

"Oh, that's bullshit!" she spat out. "If he feels so good about himself, why does he have to screw every hole in the fence?"

"You tell him that."

"Me? I wouldn't dare."

"Case closed."

The conversation drifted to Gina's new boyfriend. Andrew approved of Carlos, as long as the sex was good – and it apparently was. Naomi disapproved, saying she didn't like the look of him when Gina had brought him over for dinner.

"She's taking her to Brazil at Christmas," Andrew said.

"Oy," she groaned. "As if one in South America wasn't enough!"

She was referring, of course, to Mark. *We're all her children.* Andrew studied this tall, dignified lady admiringly. Poor Naomi. In contrast to most middle-aged, upper-middle class divorcees, who shielded themselves from Andrew's generation behind a screen of country clubs or bridge clubs or religiosity, Naomi had the audacity to want to know who these kids were, how they dressed, what kind of music they listened to. But she still worried.

"If it's not one thing, it's another," she said bitterly. "I work hard so he can get a good education and what does he do? He goes off and picks coffee beans for the Sandinistas, for God's sake!"

"I thought you were a radical at one time too," Andrew said.

"It's not his politics," she said. "He can be as radical as he wants. But he's all I've got! I never see him. Why can't he be radical here? I just wish he'd settle down. Every time the phone rings in the middle of the night, I think, 'My God, the guerrillas have got him.'"

"You worry too much."

"Andrew, there are two types of people in this world. People who have children and people who don't. You wouldn't understand."

"It's not as if you ignored him," Andrew said. "I wish I'd had a mother like you."

His last remark silenced her.

"When I was in Grade Six," Andrew said, "we read a story in our readers called 'The Torn Invitation,' about this American boy and this Polish boy who grow up next door to each other in New York. The American boy's mother is very cold and formal and he hates her. The Polish boy's mother is all gushy, but her son is ashamed of her because she dresses awfully and doesn't act American. Anyway they have a parents' day at school and the Polish boy tears up the invitation so his mother won't find out about it and go to school and embarrass him. The American mother is too busy with her bridge club or something to go. It's the saddest story, Naomi. The Polish mother finds the torn invitation. The American boy invites her to come with his own invitation and he says, 'I'm a son without a mother.' You know what she says?"

Naomi's lips trembled and her eyes hazed over.

"She says '...and I'm a mother without a son,' doesn't she?"

He nodded. A thick lump appeared in his throat and his eyes burned. He patted her hand reassuringly and put on his coat.

"Don't worry, Naomi, he'll be back."

He put his sunglasses back on and kissed her good-bye.

"And don't forget the brunch on Sunday," she said before leaving him.

* * *

I opened my mouth and sunk my teeth into the forearm in front of me. I could feel a bone pop inside his arm. I was up to my gums in blood. He pulled out and loosened his grip on my throat just long enough for me to roll around on my stomach and kick him in the balls. I flopped myself over the edge, and I landed head-first on the floorboards down on the passenger side. He was groaning and confused, all twisted up in his sleeping bag. I moved my hand along the inside of the passenger door, trying to find the handle. Tom lunged towards me just as I got the door open.

I dove head-first into space and then I was on the ground, ten feet below. I got up and ran. He was screaming through the window of the truck:

"My arm! You broke my arm, you fucking faggot!"

* * *

Bruce and Andrew trekked up to Mile-End, the Greek-Portuguese-Hassidic strip of humanity sandwiched between the two ethnic thoroughfares, Park Avenue and St. Lawrence. They walked slowly up the narrow streets in pursuit of bagels. It was Bruce who had taken Andrew to Park Avenue for his first authentic souvlaki. Mile-End was a neighbourhood where French was rarely heard. In addition to the immigrants, there were lots of counter-cultural anglophones -- many of them Jewish, many of them single women -- ex-hippies who were not yet yuppies.

They walked up Jeanne-Mance Street which, Andrew knew, had been named for some important nurse who had died several hundred years ago. In French, it was pronounced zhan-MONCE, but Andrew would often overhear the old Jews -- who'd lived in the neighborhood all their lives and still didn't speak a word of French -- pronounce it "jeen-MANCE", which rhymed with "teen dance." As far north as the tracks, Jeanne-Mance was a solid row of triplexes, broken only by the occasional side street. Wrought-iron bannisters swirled gracefully from the ground floor to the second, one after another. It was the colours of the houses that had shocked Andrew the most when he had first visited this part of town -- the lime green, the putrid pink, the turquoise that just didn't stop. (These colourful habitations, Bruce explained, belonged to the Portuguese fishermen who had emigrated from the Azores. Over there, the fishermen painted their houses in bright colours so that when they were on their boats, they could find their way home.)

At Villeneuve Street they stopped at a Greek *dépanneur*. *Dépanneur* has no equivalent in English -- more personal than a "convenience store", not quite a deli, with

cold beer and wine, open seven days a week. Greasy olives that stared up at Andrew from the dairy case as he reached for a chunk of feta cheese, stinking in its own juice.

A few blocks up was Fairmount Bagel. The warm, doughy smells drove Andrew into an altered state.

"Gimme six sesame and six poppy," he barked in a deep urban accent, a tone he had worked hard to develop.

After all these years, Andrew never got tired of watching the bagelmaster yank dozens of hot rings of dough out of the wood-fired stove on a long shovel. Sometimes you'd even get a real Jewish person serving you, although usually they were Chinese or Latin American. Whatever the nationality, the vendor would always try to give you the ones that had been sitting around for a while. You had to say:

"Can you make 'em hot?"

They would make it very clear that they were doing you a favour -- *but for you, I'll do it*. They would then sneak six cold ones in the bottom of the bag, and six hot ones on top. The tourists went to the Bagel Factory on St. Viateur, but who wanted to queue up behind fifty people at 3:00 a.m.? Saturday night was quite a sight -- ladies in fur coats, ooh-ing and aah-ing with their escorts while watching the unbaked bagels flipped onto a tray and slid into a firey pit. No, St. Viateur was much too glamorous for veterans like Andrew and Bruce. Fairmount bagels were chewier, cheaper and more authentic. The Fairmount shop had actually gone out of business in the forties. According to legend, in the Seventies, when the new owner pulled the original ovens out of storage and cleaned them out, he discovered a thirty-year-old bagel stuck to the bottom of the oven -
- perfectly preserved!

* * *

Bruce's moods went up and down, as usual. He was spending the summer writing a screenplay for his first feature film. He had been unusually affectionate lately, although these demonstrations were still interlaced with the usual fits of anger and violence. For Andrew's part, he had grown to accept the outbursts as the price he paid for the stability of the relationship. (Gina, on the other hand, protested during one of their coffee sessions: "Andrew, what stability are you referring to? It's based on fear, not love!")

Bruce sensed Gina's and Naomi's growing concern about Andrew's role in their relationship and moved slowly towards cutting them out, citing their "bad influence" and "nosiness." He started phoning from work more frequently -- sometimes three or four times a day -- monitoring Andrew's movements. If Andrew didn't answer the phone, Bruce demanded an immediate explanation as soon as he got home. At first Andrew defied the unofficial ban on seeing the women, but it got to a point where there was no use lying to Bruce; deception sparked new confrontations.

But on a clear summer day like this, they pushed these troubles behind them. They were just one of many happily-married couples walking down L'Esplanade -- not exactly arm-in-arm (which would be out of the question, even in this neighbourhood), but in close proximity. They made their way down the warm asphalt sidewalk in perfect sync, aware of each other's walking rhythms. Bruce stood almost a head higher than Andrew, and walked slightly behind him. As they dawdled along, Andrew would slow down

imperceptibly, letting his shoulder brush lightly against Bruce's chest. The hard nipple under Bruce's shirt, a tough rosebud, responded almost with a mind of its own.

Touching each other in public – and getting away with it – was a secret game that Bruce and Andrew loved to play, allowing their bodies to communicate subversively in this potentially-hostile environment. This was the closest Andrew came to imagining what it must have been like in high school, when girls got to wear their boyfriends' hockey jackets with the names embroidered on the shoulder. Not that Andrew wished to be a girl. He just had that unfulfilled adolescent fantasy of running his fingers through Bruce's hair or, well, *necking* with him on a park bench in broad daylight. Not to shock the world, but to express the emotions Andrew felt. As Doris Day had put it many years before:

*Now I shout it from the highest hill;
I even told the golden daffodil,
Now my heart's an open door,
And my secret love's no secret anymore.*

They lingered past the playing field in Jeanne-Mance Park where the Portuguese boys were involved in an animated game of soccer. The couple stood there, admiring the lean brown thighs under the stretchy shorts, the sweating shirtless chests and the boyish expressions of glee whenever a goal was scored. With each goal, these teenagers would literally jump for joy, hugging (and sometimes even kissing) their fellow players. In straight society, this sort of male bonding was okay (especially in hockey) as long as it was a completely public act, accompanied by some degree of valour and/or suffering (kicked shins, broken arms, dislocated shoulders, etc.)

From a minority viewpoint, however, such displays of physicality were an unfortunate reminder to Bruce and Andrew of their own outsider status in this park. It would be unthinkable for them to touch each other's bodies for more than a few seconds in spite of the fact (or perhaps because) they were well-dressed, masculine-looking white males. Andrew reflected on the constant strain he and Bruce endured in public places, always having to hold back. True, straight society provided shadowy alleys and shaded hillsides for instant sexual gratification. But what did that have to do with showing your affection? It was gay sex -- not gay love -- that had come to be tolerated in the past twenty years. Straight people were magnanimous enough to decriminalize sodomy (in certain places), but they drew the line when it came to kissing in a café or holding hands on the street. The expression of love, Andrew realized, was ultimately a subversive act. Keep the races separate. Emotional apartheid. Ghettoization. AIDS.

* * *

Brunch was in full swing by the time they arrived. It struck Andrew how many people he now knew at these functions. He had gotten to a point in his social life where he was seeing the same old people over and over again.

"Andrew!" Gina shouted across the crowded living room. "Come here!"

While Bruce stopped to talk to an old school friend, Andrew poured himself some wine and joined Gina, who was holding hands with a young man who could have easily blended in with the soccer team in the field across the street. He was stocky and slow in his movement, and glanced in every direction, silently appraising each hair style and

conversation in the room. She introduced Carlos to Andrew, then slipped away to help Naomi. Andrew asked Carlos about Rio de Janeiro.

"You'd like it, I'm sure," the handsome man said, smiling like the Colombian man in the coffee commercials.

"You mean because I'm gay?"

"Not necessarily," he said, a little defensively. "But yes, there's a nice gay...component, shall we say?" he added thoughtfully.

"But what would I do there?" Andrew said.

"There's always something to do in Rio," he smiled, winking at Andrew.

Bruce arrived with two plates of food. He and Andrew made their way out to the front balcony off Naomi's bedroom, looking for a breeze to beat the summer heat. They discovered a short, plump woman in round glasses sitting in the corner. She introduced herself as Marlene.

"Are you the *famous* Marlene?" Andrew said.

"Probably!" she said, laughing.

Andrew explained to Bruce that Marlene was the therapist that both Gina and Naomi saw regularly. Marlene had met Naomi at a battered women's shelter during an interview for a documentary film on family violence. To be polite, Andrew asked her how she had gotten involved in counselling. To their surprise, Marlene shoved a pinkie into the side of her mouth and yanked it open.

"See that?" she said nonchalantly. "That's where my husband knocked out two of my teeth."

She pulled out a hash pipe, lit the bowl with her lighter, then passed it over to the astonished pair.

"Er, *ex*-husband, I presume?" Andrew said.

"Correct."

All three leaned back against the balcony railing, as the intensity of the drug rolled over them like a wave. Bruce slipped his arm around Andrew.

"Hetero relationships can be *so* messy sometimes, can't they?" Bruce said, with a touch of chauvinism in his voice.

Marlene stared at him.

"Well, I've seen a few gay relationships that were pretty fucked-up, too," Marlene said. She seemed unconcerned about stepping on anyone's toes.

"Ye., but surely same-sex relationships provide an arena for the perfect expression of love without those *heterosexist* stereotypes," Bruce said.

Here he goes again. It was the familiar gay-lib sermon on how uptight straight people were. Bruce dragged his dogma around with him like a cross, laying on the guilt at every possible opportunity. His captive audience: liberal heterosexuals who winced as he recounted the excesses of the past, the systematic persecution of gays by the prevailing political and religious authorities. His tirade included horror stories about Socrates, early Christians, Joan of Arc, the Inquisitors and Oscar Wilde.

"For the Nazis, homosexuals represented a threat to their system of social values," he said, talking down to Marlene. "That's why they were tattooed with pink triangles and exterminated."

"Oh *bullshit*," said Marlene angrily. "Homosexuals are no better and no worse than anybody else! There were thousands of homosexuals in the Nazi party *without* pink triangles, who stayed in the closet and probably sent Jews and gypsies to the ovens. In fact," she added, "I bet a lot of those gay men in the closet probably got off on that male power-and-authority trip. When you walk into a gay bar today, it's sickening! Men dressed up in leather Nazi uniforms with their jackboots and swastikas – I mean, really! You complain that straight people don't respect gays –well, how the hell can you expect them to?"

Bruce had stopped eating. He was getting very tense.

"I've never seen a group of people so obsessed with power," Marlene went on, lighting a cigarette. "It's like, if they can't get that power in their daytime jobs, they have to compensate for it by getting into their little costumes at night. And everyone talks about gays as being so sensitive and sympathetic." She exhaled loudly; she seemed to be enjoying this repartee. "They're no different than anybody else!"

"It's people like you," said Bruce, back on his high horse, "who perpetuate stereotypes about gay people in this society."

"What do you mean, 'people like me?'"

"Straight people don't understand the discrimination that gays experience!"

She laughed in his face.

"But I'm a lesbian!" she exclaimed. "I left my husband ten years ago and haven't been with a man since."

"Well if you're gay," Bruce grumbled, "you seem pretty homophobic."

"How can I hate homosexuals?" she asked. "I love myself, I love my lovers, I

even --" She paused to emphasize that she was being facetious. "-- have a few gay male friends."

"And what do you think of *their* relationships?" Andrew asked, letting Bruce cool off a bit.

"My gay friends are generally overgrown adolescents," Marlene said. "They can't stick with one person, they've always got to be screwing around with half a dozen guys at once."

"There are other valid lifestyles besides your heterosexist view of monogamy," said Bruce acidly.

"True," she said. "But if you love somebody, and that person loves you, and if you're physically attracted to each other, then why do you feel like you've got to sleep with someone else?"

"Maybe because we're men?" Andrew volunteered.

"Precisely. And gay men philander even more than straight men because there's more opportunity to do it. Gay-libbers say gay men sleep around because they're more liberated, which is a crock. They do it because they're insecure. They always have to be proving their masculinity or imposing it on someone else. Whether you're gay or straight, the penis, it's...it's like a club. A weapon you use to hit other people with."

Bruce's face was brilliant pink and he was squeezing his fists in and out. He stomped back into the apartment without excusing himself.

"That's the first time I've ever seen anyone shut him up!" Andrew told her.

"It's just a pet peeve of mine, I guess," she said, stoking her pipe again.

"What is?"

"That gay lib stuff. I agree that, as gay people, we're oppressed. But it bothers me when gays think their way is better. I'll give you an example. After I left my husband, I came out and realized what I'd been missing. I met this woman, fell in love, and we lived together for seven years. She was in university. I worked and helped put her through dentistry school. We decided that after she graduated, she'd work and I'd stay home. We decided to have a family, so I got pregnant with artificial insemination. I quit the job I'd been working at for ten years and had a little boy, around the same time that Sandy became a dentist.

"Two months later she left me. I mean, she cleared out. Cashed her savings bonds. Left the country. All of a sudden, I was a single mother on welfare, with nothing! I mean, I didn't even have next month's rent!"

"You must have freaked out," Andrew said.

"I was on the verge of having a nervous breakdown, but I couldn't afford to, because there was this two-month-old kid dependent on me. The first year was rough, but eventually my shrink helped me figure out what I'd done wrong."

Andrew was very high. His allegiance began shifting towards Bruce who, he knew, was fuming and waiting for him in the living room. But Marlene's story was like a bizarre late-night movie; he wanted to see it until the end.

"Basically, I was hooked on relationships," Marlene said.

Andrew nodded uncomfortably. *Male dependency.*

"Ever since high school," Marlene continued, "I always had a boyfriend. As soon as I broke off with one, the next cowboy was there on the horizon. I was terrified to be on my own. When I came out, I thought things would be different. I believed all that crap

about women. You know, we were in touch with our nipples and our orgasms and Mother Earth. And then being a lesbian was, like, practically sacred! But our 'alternative' lifestyle turned out to be anything but."

Andrew shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"You know, I think I'd rather be abused by a man than by a woman," she said.

"What do you mean?" asked Andrew, mortified.

"Look at me -- my husband was very direct -- he punched me out and left. But my girlfriend left me to starve with a two-month-old child. To me, that's unforgiveable. Gay people are cruellest with their own kind."

Andrew said nothing. He was busy trying to mask the waves of emotions washing through him. The floor of the balcony felt like it was sagging under him and that soon they would crash into the street. All he could think of were the Jean's immortal words: *Honey, if you're gonna raped, you might as well be getting paid for it. Get something out of it - anything.*

* * *

I jogged for about ten minutes. The only sound I heard was my own heartbeat. Then in the distance I heard the truck start up and drive away. And then it occurred to me that I was completely nude, running along a dirt road in the middle of fucking nowhere at two in the morning!

I slowed down and stopped looking over my shoulder. All of a sudden, I heard all these noises like creaking crickets and rushing water and the howling of strange animals in the distance. The soles of my feet were bleeding and I felt trickles of thick blood drip down the inside of my legs. I came to a bridge and went down an embankment to the river. I stepped out onto a flat rock.

The water was so cold it felt like dry ice being applied to my wounds. I ached like hell. Then I retraced my steps. By the time I got back to the place where the truck had stopped, I was weaving back and forth like a drunkard. Fortunately Frank had thrown all my stuff out, including the sleeping bag, which was soaked in blood. I wrapped it around my body and passed out.

* * *

Marlene shook his hand and went back to her pipe. Back inside, Bruce practically dragged him out the door, then ranted all the way home.

"That fuckin' fish!" Bruce roared on the way home. "I wish she'd keep her cunt-comments to herself!"

"Bruce!" Andrew said. "Don't say that."

"Oh, fuck off," Bruce spat. "To think that bitch is working at a women's centre! I can't believe the government is paying money for her to brainwash women into thinking that men are evil rapists! Did you see the way she looked at me? Some dyke. She had one eye on my crotch, all right. What she needs is a big dildo. That would take the kinks out of her system."

On a day like this one, Andrew knew there would be trouble if they both went straight home. At the foot of L'Esplanade, they stopped in front of a *dépanneur*.

"I'm going for a walk," Andrew said.

Bruce harrumphed, but said nothing. In such proximity to Mount Royal Park it went without saying that Andrew was heading for the gay cruising grounds on the eastern slope of the mountain, probably for sex. As possessive and violent as he could be at times, Bruce was not a hypocrite when it came to extramarital sex. He was vehemently opposed to monogamy and trumpeted the right of either party in the relationship to have sex with as many people as possible, whenever, wherever.

Andrew picked up a bottle of juice and a *Maclean's* magazine, then cut across the lush lawns of Jeanne-Mance Park. He crossed Park Avenue and skirted the statue of the mounted soldier. According to Indian legend, Mount Royal was sacred; in fact, the whole island of Montreal was. At one of their dinner parties, an anthropologist friend of Bruce's had said that Montreal and San Francisco were the only major *yin* cities in North America. Andrew imagined himself crawling up a broad verdant breast.

The narrow gravel road, closed to all traffic but bicycles, switchbacked up the side of the eastern slope. Andrew preferred to take the shortcut -- a steep, narrow path that penetrated the dense bush, linking the zigs with the zags. These well-worn trails forked and meandered higher and higher until Andrew found himself in the gay area, the size of several city blocks. On a warm day like this one, it was a homosexual garden of earthly delights, complete with silence, babbling brook, nude sunbathers and the leafy-green smell of nature.

In a sense it was the totality of gay experience. Andrew was able to be completely free with himself, with nature and with dozens of other men without being stared at, screamed at, attacked or arrested. *And all within minutes of downtown!* (It sounded like an ad for condominiums.) Critics contended that it was a disgusting den of iniquity where gay men engaged in corrupt practices. But the park was big enough and wooded enough that they didn't have to force their "corrupt" practices on anyone. Besides, there were probably a lot more "corrupt" practices taking place at that very moment in foul-smelling public toilets, apartment stairwells, back seats and the backrooms of bars, not to mention the bathhouses. Out here in nature, Andrew could pick and choose at least. He didn't have to breathe in recycled cigarette smoke or have his eardrums blasted out in a disco.

Best of all, it didn't cost anything. It was convenient for busy office workers walking across the mountain en route to their trendy homes on the Plateau. It wasn't uncommon to see a businessman, in suit and tie, swinging his briefcase and crashing through the bushes in search of a quick blow job before heading back to his wife (or husband) for supper. *Getting your rocks off is good.* He stepped lightly through the woods. *The more often people got their rocks off, the better, the saner this world would be.* As for the level of danger, he had actually heard more stories about homophobic attacks in the gay ghetto on Ste. Catherine Street East than he had about the mountain. The location was a deterrent. You couldn't drive there; you had to park your car and walk for at least fifteen minutes. That seemed to weed out most of the baddies.

The damp brown earth stuck to the gap between the heels and the soles of his sturdy boots. Saucer-shaped fungi stuck their tongues out at him from the base of the

hardwood trees that lined the path. Butterflies flitted and danced in a halo of sunlight in front of him, and as he ascended he began to feel cooler, more refreshed. He grabbed onto a sapling to pull himself up a blunt grey rock face, smoothed by glaciers from eons past. The further he climbed, the more the trees obscured his view of the surrounding cityscape. In this part of the park, there were no scenic look-outs from which to admire the skyscrapers; he was entering an interior world. The gays in this part of the park blended into their environments like camouflaged infantrymen, like fairies flitting from toadstool to toadstool. Andrew trained his eyes for signs of movement. Even on the brightest day the underbrush was gloomy enough to offer a perfect cover for spontaneous sexual encounters.

For a while he wandered aimlessly on the maze of paths that twisted over the gentle escarpments, occasionally dodging swamps, hopping over streams. Eventually he came to a high, sunny rock where water trickled all around him. He peeled off his T-shirt and proceeded to sun himself like a frog on a lily pad. After half an hour of reading, he put down his magazine, got up and stretched. As dusk crept into the little valley, he saw something move in front of him, up the rocky hill.

Cruising on the mountain -- even on this hillside, covered with horny men -- demanded a precise protocol. The important thing was to keep up the pretext that nothing was going on, in case unsuspecting straight people strayed into the area. Sexual activity only took place away from the main paths. The second rule was not to follow a prospective sex partner into the bush unless you knew you were really wanted. In other words, you had to be invited by a demonstration of body language; not unlike the mating rituals of certain African birds Andrew had seen on National Geographic specials.

At the crest of the hill, he peered into the bush and noticed a tall, slim, Scandinavian-looking blond. His pants were down around his knees and although his back was to Andrew, he kept twisting his head towards Andrew, inviting him to join the party. He saw the vague outline of a man squatting in front of the blond-haired man. Andrew watched the muscular buttocks dimple and strain each time his body leaned forward; edging slowly towards the scene, Andrew found himself getting hard watching the "bottom-man's" brown mop of hair flop up and down. The blond man smiled and drew Andrew close to him, kissing and unzipping him simultaneously. He seemed to be getting bored with his current devotee. He pushed the man's head aside roughly and replaced it with Andrew's; the now-shunned man stood back at a respectful distance and masturbated. After five minutes or so, the man grew bored with Andrew and pushed his face away. Andrew stood up shakily, gasping for breath, only to discover two more men standing patiently in a sort of line behind the tree.

It had been fun while it lasted, but alas -- Andrew, too, was replaceable. Wasn't that what Bruce had told him? For several more hours he wandered aimlessly from tree to tree, sampling the city's sexual smorgasbord, then tumbled home, exhausted.

* * *

A stern-looking woman with a square face and red hands was sitting on my bed when I woke up. She was chanting in a foreign-sounding language and holding an enamel-coated metal cup containing some foul-smelling liquid. She propped me up with pillows and told me to drink it. There was green scum floating on the top and it tasted horrible. I closed my eyes and downed it

and nearly burnt my tongue. I broke out into a sweat immediately. She told me to sleep and left me in the dark without telling me her name or where I was.

It took me a few weeks to figure out what had happened to me. A band of Ojibway hunters had found me in my sleeping bag and brought me back to their hunting camp, which was about thirty miles from the nearest road. They put me in the back room of one of their cabins. For the first three days apparently I didn't even move and was very feverish. And then for two weeks the woman said weird prayers over me and fed me different kinds of tea. Finally I was strong enough to get out of bed and walk around the rest of the shack, which was one large room. It was cluttered with mattresses, boxes of food, traps and cases of ammunition.

The woman introduced herself as Thelma Coon. I remember seeing her in the kitchen leaning over a big metal basin, up to her elbows in bear guts. There were big blackened pots and frying pans on the wall beside the old woodstove, which was smoking and made the inside of the cabin pretty hazy. She washed the blood off her hands and made me a cup of tea. She said:

"After you opened your eyes, we knew you left the land of the spirits and came back to us."

* * *

The sticky summer wore on. Bruce's moods shifted as erratically as the weather. Andrew would sigh with relief when the black storm clouds rolled up from the St. Lawrence and drenched the city. Day after day he spent inside the apartment, going through Bruce's library. When he read *Burmese Days* by George Orwell, it poured like an Asian monsoon outside the window. Political action, yes, that's what was needed at the moment...but to what end? He felt like he needed to get angry at something.

Bruce, at home more and more of the time pacing back and forth, was slowly driving Andrew mad. Usually at this time of year they would have both been at the lake partying at Naomi's cottage. Instead, Bruce spent the whole summer worrying about the script he was supposed to write (but never did.) He would get drunk, have sex with Andrew, then blame Andrew for having distracted him. The anger would give him an opportunity to hit Andrew, and then he would get drunk again. Although mentally he was very distant, the two became more and more enmeshed psychologically and, it would seem, chemically. They would sometimes copulate for hours at a time, not speaking, only grunting, each party lost in his own purple haze of drugs, alcohol and deafening rock music. Sexually they melted into each other. Their most intense sexual unions were preceded by a threat or an act of violence. Andrew vainly hoped that the final frenzied orgasms, after hours of excruciating pain and pleasure, would somehow exorcise the demons that consumed them both.

Mercifully, Gina had stopped calling. Like a needle digging out a splinter, she had probed Andrew for details of his "obsessive" relationship, as she called it. Still, Andrew felt he needed to talk to someone and Marlene the lesbian counsellor from Naomi's brunch was the perfect companion. Andrew only got together with her when Bruce was not around, and even then he never mentioned her.

If anyone had told Andrew that he was actually undergoing psychotherapy with Marlene over those tall quart bottles of Laurentide and the endless stream of cigarettes at the California bar, he probably would have stopped seeing her. As it was, Bruce would fly into a rage at any hint of analytical jargon. It baffled Andrew that an intellectual like Bruce could feel threatened by such language. One day Andrew was

telling Bruce about one of his "vulnerable situations." Bruce pounced, saying, "Oh yeah? I'll put you in a vulnerable situation, all right!"

* * *

The trees began to shed their leaves. Because Andrew was on welfare, he qualified for a program to work with Marlene at the Women's Centre. After years of welfare and unemployment, he now had a job. Bruce instantly denounced it as a "make-work program for diesel-dykes."

"Do you really want to work with a bunch of women bitching at you all the time?" Bruce said. "Andrew, are you *that* incapable of finding a job that you have to work *there*?"

Defeated and deflated, Andrew turned down the job. Naomi intervened, forcing Bruce to lay off. Andrew's job was mainly administrative, with lots of free time. He began reading the "classics" over his lunch hour: *The Second Sex*, *The Golden Notebook*, *The Female Eunuch*. He would return home each day to taunts like, "Did they make you fill up the Tampax machine today?" or "What's wrong? Got the rag on?" He also got lectures on how lousy dinner was, how messy the place was, and how ashamed Bruce was to invite his colleagues over for dinner. Andrew would listen, sometimes for hours, as Bruce recited scrupulously-composed lists of Andrew's faults: his inability to live in the real world, to land a real job, to assume responsibility, to "commit" himself to the relationship. The conclusion was always the same: Why not quit while you're ahead? Give up now and stay home. Eventually the nightly lectures became a focal point of

their evening activities, and each fault became the confirmation of Andrew's worst fears, dragged out and dissected in bloody detail. Andrew would beg him to stop, only to be criticized as a whining wimp, which would then set off a fresh volley of abuse.

* * *

After two months of work, Andrew had nothing to show for his job: Bruce demanded every cent he earned (to make up for past debts) and they fought every night. He came home from work one Friday night, paycheque in hand, and found Bruce brooding on the sofa. A half-eaten saucepan of Kraft dinner lay semi-scorched on the stove; a sticky-yellow wooden spoon appeared to be grafted to the kitchen table. Empty beer cans littered the floor. A bag of grass lay half-spilled over the coffee table amidst a scattered pile of rolling papers. Bruce, half-shaved, and naked from the waist up, lay on the sofa.

"You won't find anything to eat in the fridge," Bruce said coarsely, "because you haven't bought any fucking groceries for the last two weeks!"

Andrew withdrew a can of beer from the fridge, snapped it open and took a long swig.

"Look at you," Bruce said. "Dressed up all prissy. You're probably growing a cunt in there, hmmm?" Then he started to speak in baby-talk: "Wanna show Uncle Brucie your pussy?"

"Oh, fuck off."

"Lemme see your juicy pussy," Bruce intoned, pretending not to hear. "C'mere, touch Uncle Brucie's pee-pee."

All that Andrew could feel now when he saw this man approach was revulsion. The container that had kept the fear and turmoil contained inside Andrew cracked without warning.

"Stop it!" he screamed. "That's all we've been doing for the last six months!"

"Doing what?" said Bruce, tripping towards the fridge.

"All we do is argue and fuck. Argue and fuck. Argue and fuck. I can't remember the last time we actually had fun together."

"Yeah, last night when I was fucking you," Bruce belched, grabbing another beer.

"Well, maybe you were having fun," Andrew said.

"Don't give me that shit," Bruce said, smiling menacingly.

"It's true!"

"Well, if it's so true," he said in a expression not unlike Archie Bunker's way of mocking and upbraiding Edith, "Why did you say to me, 'Oh yeah, Bruce, stick it up my ass?'"

It was the words, not the tone, that jolted Andrew, when he realized that he had actually said that eighteen hours before. He felt punch-drunk, desperately trying to regain his balance on a patch of quicksand. Why on earth *had* he said that?

"Look, I'm just as sick of this as you are," said Bruce, his voice sounding like he was about to give in. Suddenly he slammed his beer down on the counter and grabbed Andrew by the collar screaming: "But I'm not backing down an inch, you little prick! When are you going to get it through your fat head that you're no good for anything else

except cocksucking? Andrew," he said, softening his tone and releasing his death-grip, "you don't get it, do ya? You like it. So enjoy it. That's what you're good at. Don't try to be something that you're not. You belong to me, remember?"

Andrew felt a wave of panic shoot through his gut. Bruce's hands slid from Andrew's neck, down his back, and locked around his waist, pulling him urgently against his own groin.

Within a fraction of a second, it was over. Andrew's simple act of opening and closing his mouth at the crucial moment had sent Bruce flying backwards, contorted in pain like a beaten dog. Andrew stared, transfixed, thin rivulets of blood dripping from either corner of his mouth. He touched a hand to his mouth and started to shake. The salt flavour trickled down his throat, making him woozy. Bruce had his mouth under the kitchen tap and was squirting pinkish spit across the cupboards. After he got the bleeding of his lower lip under control, (his tongue was unscathed) he groaned ferociously and glared at Andrew, who backed away slowly.

Bruce stuck a wad of paper towels in his mouth and clamped down on it. With hands outstretched – like a character from a Saturday-morning monster cartoon – Bruce veered towards the door to prevent Andrew's escape. *This is madness.* The roaring bull chased him around the apartment, promising his revenge incoherently and trailing gobs of blood-stained tissue. He yanked Andrew's right foot as Andrew was jumping off the back of the sofa. Andrew landed flat on his face and turned himself over just in time to see Bruce's boot come down on his stomach. As Andrew writhed and curled breathlessly, Bruce's boot came up again, this time within inches of his nose. Andrew screwed his face into a trembling sneer, ready for the next blow. Instead, it came down

slowly onto his jaw; not enough pressure to snap his neck, but enough to prevent him from moving his head. Bruce slipped his own belt out of the loops and fastened Andrew's wrists behind his back. Andrew lay on his side like a side of beef. Bruce dragged him to the bathroom and dropped him into the dry bathtub. With a knee in his crotch to prevent squirming, he untied Andrew's hands and handcuffed one of Andrew's wrists to the hot water pipe that fed into the tap over Andrew's head. Now he was lying full-length on his back, fully clothed, chained inside the tub. He screamed when Bruce came back from the kitchen with a cleaver -- which he swung merrily like a guillotine directly over Andrew's body, twisted in fear.

"You can scream all you want," Bruce chuckled. "It's Friday night on the Main. Nobody's gonna hear you."

He pressed the blade against Andrew's throat, then raised it.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you," he said. "I just want to see more of you."

He squatted over Andrew, his legs straddling the bathtub. He spit on the blade, then ran his finger along the stainless steel edge. Blood oozed out of the ensuing incision, which he drizzled into Andrew's eyes. He raked off Andrew's shirt, sending buttons flying in all directions. Next he pulled at the T-shirt underneath and sliced it off his body with the cleaver like he was skinning a chicken. His trousers -- first one leg, then the other -- were next, and then his underwear. The cleaver left a map of slashes across Andrew's shaking body from his Adam's apple down to his heels. With a satisfied groan, Bruce spat out his wad of bloody tissue onto Andrew's face and disappeared. Andrew smelled a joint burning, and heard lots of crashing in the kitchen. Bruce reappeared in his familiar leather outfit: the black halter that fit snugly around his

pecks, the leather bands that spanned his biceps, the black mask and the jockstrap that girdled his groin and forced his buttocks to protrude.

He was pacing back and forth in front of the tub, thumbing through his dog-eared *Portable Oscar Wilde*. The burning, bleeding sensation from his cuts had made Andrew feel delirious. He heard a buzzing in his ears and then from somewhere far above him, he could make out a choir. He began to feel some kind of holy presence, both inside him and outside his body. As the feeling deepened, the choir's rich tones resonated through him. At last he could make out the words:

*Well, I dreamed I saw the knights in armour come,
Saying something about a queen.*

The shiny silver studs on Bruce's cod-piece dazzled and twinkled through Andrew's thick gauze of tears. *My knight. But Oscar is his queen.*

*I was lying in a burnt-out basement
With the full moon in my eyes
I was hoping for a replacement
When the sun burst through the skies...*

Bruce's voice was coming to him from miles and miles away, as if through layers and layers of cotton batting.

"We're all in the gutter," he quoted. "But some of us are looking at the stars."

He flipped enthusiastically through the pages, highlighted in yellow. The choir abated somewhat in Andrew's head as Bruce began his sermon:

Religion does not help me. The faith that others give to what is unseen, I give to what I can touch, and look at. My gods are temples made with hands; and within the circle of actual experience is my creed made perfect and complete: too complete, it may be, for like many or all of those who have placed their heaven in this earth, I have found in it not merely the beauty of heaven, but the horror of hell also. When I think about religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who *cannot* believe: the Confraternity of the Fatherless one might call it, where on an altar, on which no taper burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblest bread and a chalice empty of wine.

Andrew's pain suddenly abated. He felt a buzzing at the top of his head and then a sense of separation. He was rising and lying on his back at the same time, moving and standing still, like the hummingbird that moves its wings incessantly to stay in the same spot. As he rose from his body he could see himself clearly; this other set of eyes gazed serenely at the horror taking place below. He saw his stained body, pale and lifeless, turned into itself in the crimson bathtub. He was attached to his own lifeless body with a thin luminous elastic band. He rose effortlessly. The band stretched higher, until he was through the roof and into the starry night. Montreal glittered below, and soon it was merely a bright light on an island. He was moving towards a bright glow in the sky. He was being transported into the soul of the music. The choir was all around him, the choir *was* him. The united voice sang in perfect harmony:

*There was a band playing in my head
And I felt like getting high
Thinking about what a friend had said
I was hoping it was a lie.*

Then Andrew fell back rapidly inside himself. By now, Bruce had tossed the book away. He peeled off his stinking leather jockstrap and stood up directly over Andrew with one foot balanced on each side of the tub, casting a dark shadow over Andrew's face.

"On the night he was handed over to suffering and death," Bruce began, then stopped. He snorted deeply, searching for some mucous in a hidden nasal cavity, then bowed his head and spat in Andrew's eye. Then he spat on his penis for lubrication and began to masturbate slowly and evenly.

"On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, he took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take this bread and eat it. This is my body which is given for you.'"

Andrew stared at Bruce's face, contorted in concentration, as his heavy body began to rock the tub. The tell-tale perspiration that always preceded Bruce's orgasms streamed from his chest and armpits, falling on Andrew like a warm tropical rain.

"Do...this...in...remembrance...of...me," Bruce gurgled, his face twisted in ecstasy.

He crashed to the floor, then made his way to the kitchen, rooting through the cupboards and tossing jars and bags of flour across the room until he found what he was looking for. He came back to the tub and reverently pressed the plastic squeeze-bottle of red wine vinegar to his forehead.

"After supper he took the cup of wine," Bruce said, unscrewing the cap of the bottle. "And he said, 'Drink this wine, this is the blood of the new Covenant which is shed for you and for me for the forgiveness of sins.'"

He tilted the bottle upside down so that the first drops spilled out of the narrow dropper onto Andrew's feet.

"Whenever you drink, do this for the remembrance of me," said Bruce and then, tensing his wrist muscles, he squirted the bottle across Andrew's body like he was squeezing a lemon; he started at his toes and sprayed his way up. By the time the vinegar had reached his navel, Andrew felt a pain more acute than any of the original cuts. He howled and writhed, jerking and twisting in his handcuffs like a calf being branded. All he could think of was another story from his Grade Six reader. In "The Monkey's Paw," the man wished someone who was dead to be brought to life. Unfortunately the body in the coffin had already been bled and filled with embalming fluid. The body in the coffin twisted and burned, screaming with life. Andrew's body twisted and burned, and then he felt nothing.

* * *

He woke up in the empty bed, feeling fine until he remembered what had happened. There was a thick bandage where the handcuff had bitten into his wrist. His head felt a bit lumpy, but his body was relatively clean. His skin was striped with orange iodine marks and the deeper cuts had been dressed. He felt as though he had been through a war.

On his way to the toilet, the previous evening's nightmare returned. He flung himself back on the bed. *Have I died and gone to hell?* After having slept for the rest of

the day, he stirred. It was getting dark. He scanned the apartment for signs of life. Everything was the way Bruce had left it.

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He went back to bed. He dreamed he was in his old room on the farm. He ran downstairs to the kitchen, where his mother was making crepes. She told him: "Go out to the barn and help your father with the milking and when you're finished, come back in for breakfast." Then he noticed that instead of her usual housecoat, she was wearing a sexy negligée. He watched her suspiciously while putting on his rubber boots, but his

feet wouldn't go in. Suddenly people were there from miles around -- his aunts and uncles, his first and second cousins, his teachers, his sisters -- and they were laughing hysterically at him. When he finally looked down, he realized his boots were full of cowshit. Humiliated, he tried to take them off, but his feet were cemented inside the boots, overflowing with shit.

"You've really met your Wellington!" his mother howled.

He heard a door slam in his dream and woke up. It was the apartment door, he realized, and footsteps were fading down the stairwell. Some of Bruce's things were gone; he was obviously staying somewhere else. He dreamed fitfully, getting up only to drink water and go to the toilet. The phone remained unplugged.

One day, when Andrew's hand hung over the side of the bed, it brushed against a book. Instinctively, he picked up *de Profundis* and began to read. He read the essay over and over. On every page, at every paragraph, he would pause, drop the book and weep. Indeed, he cried until his eyes were so puffy that he couldn't see much of anything. He would rest, let his eyes clear, and then continue for another page, when the process would start all over again. He would double over in abdominal spasms and sometimes cry until he vomited. He began covering his pillow with towels. He was becoming dehydrated. He brought a pail of water to the bed, and drank directly from it. *Read it and weep.*

Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even, the broken words that come from lips in pain, remorse that makes one walk on thorns, conscience that condemns, self-abasement that punishes, the misery that puts ashes on its head, the anguish that chooses sack-cloth for its raiment and into its own drink puts gall: -- all these

were things of which I was afraid. And as I had determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to taste each of them in turn, to feed on them, to have for a season, indeed, no other food at all.

Sometimes Andrew thought he could hear someone moving up the stairs. He imagined Bruce had stopped on the stairs to listen, then quietly retreated. And then he would feel even more alone. The pain flooded back.

Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetops. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.

* * *

One day he heard a banging on the bottom door. After what seemed to be hours of ceaseless thumping, Andrew lowered himself onto shakey legs and threw on his housecoat. He could barely walk. It seemed to take forever to get down the stairs and open the door, where he discovered two uniformed officers.

"Are you Andrew Lacasse?" one of them asked.

"Yes."

"We have a request from a Mrs. Naomi Meyer to see if you're all right."

But he wasn't all right. He stared at them blankly for what seemed to be several minutes. The policemen grew impatient.

"What day is it?" Andrew asked finally.

The policemen stared at each other.

"November twelfth," one of them said.

The day of their fight, Andrew remembered, had been pay day. He got paid on the first and the fifteenth. Twelve days. He swooned, toppled; fifteen minutes later he was in the emergency ward of Hôpital St.-Luc with a tube shoved up his arm. He was semi-conscious when they wheeled him into his ward. The serum seeped into his body, drippity-droppity-drop. In the evening Naomi appeared with flowers. Andrew thanked her with his eyes.

"I knew something was wrong," Naomi said nervously. "Marlene told me you stopped showing up for work, and I knew that wasn't like you. I called every day, every day, but there was no answer. I tried calling Bruce at the college, but his secretary said Bruce wasn't taking any calls. Today I went down there and waited for him outside his classroom. He said you were in the apartment and he hadn't seen you for nearly two weeks! God, I was worried sick!"

He looked at her with wide, empty eyes and said nothing. She bowed her head.

"Andrew, for God's sake, say something!" she sobbed, sitting down on the bed beside him.

He lifted himself painfully, pulled open his hospital gown to show her the slash marks, some of which had become infected.

"Oh, Andrew," she cried, grabbing his clenched fist and kissing it. "Why?"

* * *

She poured me a cup of tea from the largest metal teapot I had ever seen, and went back to her kitchen chores. A tiny dark-haired boy stared at me from the other side of the screen door. She said something to him in Ojibway and he slipped through the gash in the screen. Mrs. Coon introduced her grandson Billy to me, but he bolted back to the other side of the door.

Mr. Coon came in, swinging three dead rabbits by their ears. He was tall and fat and wore red-chequered shirts. He pointed to a dark organ in a metal basin and said:

"You see this? You know what this is?"

I shook my head.

"It's a gall bladder. You know how much they pay for that in -- Thelma, what's that country over there where they buy those things?"

"Taiwan?"

"Or Thailand?"

"--anyway, it's one of those places. They sell this dried-up bear's gall bladder for \$3,000! You know why?"

"Why?" I asked.

"'Cause it makes you horny!" he said.

We all howled for a long time.

* * *

Two days later he was released from the hospital and moved into Naomi's spare room. Fortunately Naomi had just bought an answering machine; he screened his calls to avoid all possible contact with Bruce. She set about restoring him to health. She prepared soup by the cauldron, and stood over him while he ate. After a week he was getting his strength back, but was still very disoriented. The phone rang and Naomi passed it over.

"It's Marlene. She wants to talk to you."

Andrew began to apologize but Marlene cut him off.

"Forget it, forget it. I'll tell you what: you can make up for it if you come down to my office tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yeah, it's very important. I have to show you something. And it can't wait. Naomi will bring you down at 7:30."

"Is this a trick or something?" Andrew asked as they drove down St. Urbain Street. "You're not trying to set me up with Bruce, are you?"

"God, no, Andrew," Naomi said. "But it's something you have to see. I can't explain it. But trust me."

The Women's Centre was in a large building that housed several different committees and services. They went straight to Marlene's private office.

"Andrew, this is an experiment," said Marlene. "In all my years as a counsellor, I've never done this. If anyone catches me, I could have my license revoked."

She stood up and went over to the colorful surrealist painting hanging on one of the walls. She lifted it off to reveal a window into an adjoining room.

"Tonight is the night the battered women's support group has their meeting," she said. "I'm going to lead the discussion and you and Naomi are going to sit here and watch."

Andrew was scared speechless.

"Do I have to?" he said finally.

The women stared at him gravely and said nothing.

"If there was a group for battered gay men, we would have taken you," Naomi said sadly.

Andrew and Naomi set two chairs in front of the window and sipped coffee. Marlene, meanwhile, left to welcome the women, who were slowly filing into the meeting room. The chairs were spread in a semi-circle. The women faced inwards towards the mirror. The back of Marlene's chair was directly in front of the mirror, almost touching Andrew and Naomi on the other side of the glass. While waiting for the late-comers to enter, a young woman in her early twenties yanked a brush out of her purse and rushed up to the mirror to fix her hair. She seemed to stare right through Andrew as she flipped her bangs up and down over her forehead. She powder-puffed her eyes, which were blackened and spongy-yellow. She also tended a deep gash -- somebody wearing a ring had probably thrown her a punch -- that dug a cleft up one side of her face and disappeared into her hairline. It was covered by a long flesh-coloured bandage that had come loose. When she lifted it off to reapply it, Andrew counted at least fifteen tiny black points of thread surrounded by yellowish bumps. She pressed the bandage back on firmly, smoothed her hair, and sat down.

To her right, an older woman with black hair with gray at the roots sat erect, her legs a mass of varicose veins. A white plaster cast locked her left arm at a right angle. Another woman, dressed like a secretary, sat in her pumps, prim-lipped and polite. Her dressy black velvet beret seemed a bit out of place. Next to her sat a middle-aged woman, possibly Italian, with dark hair and a faint moustache. Her chin and the pouches under her eyes sagged morosely. As a dramatic finale, a tiny woman in a wheelchair rolled in.

Marlene, dressed in jeans and a flowered top, took her place at the open end of the horseshoe. Everyone sipped coffee nervously out of styrofoam cups, and almost everyone smoked. All eyes shifted from Marlene to each woman as she was introduced. Marlene made a few general announcements. Andrew noticed she was playing with some bright circular object, tossing it back and forth.

"Some of you came here tonight because you had nowhere else to go," she began in a serious-but-not-unfriendly tone. "Some of you came out of curiosity. And some of you probably don't even know why the hell you're here! But one thing we all have in common is that we're all women and we're trying to get stronger. If this is your first time tonight, I'll tell you again that whatever is said in this room, stays in this room. It's completely confidential.

"This is my crystal ball," she continued, smiling and putting the women at ease. Some of the women smiled shyly back. "You know, in the old days, women used crystal balls to see the future. But men were afraid of their power, and called them evil witches. They raped them and murdered them and tried to crush that power. But the magic is still alive. We still come together in small groups like this, helping each other get strong.

Now, I'm going to pass this crystal ball to the right, and if you want to say something about yourself, or about your life, then go right ahead. If you don't feel comfortable, just pass it on. So Joanne, why don't you start?"

Joanne gazed at the crystal for a while.

"This is only the second time I've come here," she said slowly. "The first time I came I just sat here and listened to all the other ladies' stories, but I still can't think of anything to say," she said, and passed it on.

"I came here because I'm scared to be alone," said the woman wearing the cast. "My husband does terrible things, then he goes away, then all of a sudden he comes back, and I'm in the same situation again." The brow of her upper lip crinkled contemplatively. "I went to the women's shelter so he wouldn't know where I was, but if he finds out where I am, he—"

She clenched her mouth and shook her head, not daring to continue. She passed the ball on to the secretary, who sat upright and took the crystal, rolling it around in her hand for a while as if she was squeezing out some inspiration.

"When I went for lunch today, he was waiting for me when I got out of the elevator in the lobby," she said. "He looked so beautiful, standing there with a bouquet of flowers. He knows how much I love flowers. He begged me and begged me until I went to lunch with him, but I couldn't eat. I just sat there staring at my plate, trying not to cry. He said he hadn't slept for three days because he can't sleep alone. And now he's going to a psychiatrist because he's sorry that he hurt me." Her thin pretty face contorted. "And I said, 'Why don't you leave me alone?' and he said, 'Because I love you.'" And I said, "If you love me then why do you hurt me?" and he said he was sorry.

He wants me to give him another chance. Then he pulled out a box from his pocket and opened it up and there was this beautiful gold bracelet inside. I said, "I can't accept it," and he said, "You have to. Because you're my wife and if you don't take this, it means you don't love me." And then he said, "I want you to look me in the eye and tell me that you don't love me. And then I'll go away and never speak to you again." And I looked at him right in the face, "but—" She began to weep. "But I couldn't say it! I wanted to, but I couldn't say it! I couldn't say it!"

She bowed her head in pain and her beret fell off, revealing a wide patch of bare scalp, covered with large scabs. She covered her head in shame and continued to cry. She passed the crystal on to the moustache lady, who looked horrified and passed it on quickly to the woman in the wheelchair, who looked at everyone else through a pair of glasses with very thick lenses.

"I used to be like her," she said, nodding her head towards the secretary, who was still sniffling. "My man used to give me a look that would melt a glacier. Hah! And then I'd crawl back. Sometimes, after he'd finished with me," she said, lowering her voice, "that's all I could do. Wass crawl. On my stomach. Like a snake.

"First he broke my shoulder blade. Then it was a ruptured spleen. Then it was this. Then it was that. And then the last time they found me it was too late. *So stop bawling over there, lady!*" she screamed to the shocked secretary. "At least you can still walk! Your pretty hair will grow back. But if *you* go back to him, you've got nobody to blame but yourself."

Behind the mirror, Andrew sat miserably in his chair. He covered his face in grief and shame. His body shook like a house whose foundations were being jack-hammered.

"Okay, Naomi. I've seen enough."

* * *

Rio de Janeiro
November 15, 1984

Dear Andrew,

My dream has come true. This is the world's most romantic city. When Carlos sings me love songs on a starlit night on a windswept beach with the moon glistening on the foamy waves, I *know* romance is alive. It exists! It exists!

Is this too corny? Okay, I'll stop. Although the pace is very relaxed here, I somehow manage to keep very busy. My Portuguese lessons are fun, and it's quite easy since I know Spanish. The Brazilian language is soft and lyrical and when you hear the songs and poems, you just want to melt, even if you don't know what it means. (The accent in Rio is different from the rest of Brazil.) I'm looking for jobs teaching English, and I'm looking into the possibility of writing some freelance articles -- "stringing," they call it.

As you can see from the postcard, the mountains and the sea are breathtaking. I'm renting a room from a family in an apartment in Flamengo Beach. Carlos and I haven't moved in together yet. His mother lives on the other side of the city, but Carlos says she's not "ready" to meet me yet. Anyway, she sounds like a real bitch who doesn't appreciate that her darling boy has taken up with a crazy gringa. I don't care, I'm enjoying myself here. It's great to be away from the slush and snow. Summer has started and the beaches are packed. (Yesterday it was 36 C.)

So how are you? I had a feeling things weren't going well, but I got tired of phoning you to find out. I *am* hurt, because we've been friends for so long. I'm sorry if you thought I was psychoanalyzing you too much, but I've never seen you so down. I'm sure the tropics would perk you right up! Come down anytime. It's cheap (because of the latest major economic crisis) and the boys are beautiful. Mark is supposed to be coming for Christmas from Colombia! Say hi to everyone.

Love,
Gina

* * *

"The Portuguese discovered it in January," the freckled American said, pointing out the window of the air-conditioned taxi towards a murky brown body of water after they passed a tall bridge. "That's why they call it Rio de *Janeiro*, get it?"

After Andrew stepped off the plane in Rio, he ended up splitting a taxi from the airport with a man named Fred, who had talked non-stop all the way from Miami. Although he mainly talked about the "hot chicks" in Rio, Fred was actually a good source of information. The cab swerved in and out of lanes of traffic, nearly maiming them several times. They passed miles and miles of hill-side slums that peeked out behind high concrete fences.

"They're called *favelas*," Fred explained. "The poor people control the drug trade up there. If you go up there you can get real high-quality stuff."

Fred talked about how rich the drug dealers were, with their colour TVs and expensive cars. If they really controlled the drug trade, they wouldn't be living in those shacks. Andrew was going to mention the article he'd read about the South American slums and how the poor people invariably lived in the areas that got washed out during the rainy season. But he held his tongue. The expressway petered into a wide downtown avenue that bisected a modern business district, with its square high-rises surrounded by extensive plazas. Dusk was falling and the downtown area was jammed with movie-goers and buses full of office workers heading back to their homes. Everyone, it seemed, was on their way to Zona Sul -- the southern sector of the city -- with its world-famous Copacabana and Ipanema Beaches. To get there, the cab left the

downtown area and shot through a long tunnel that had been drilled through a mountain. These were not just hills, Andrew discovered. They were huge mountains in the middle of a city of eight million people. Before heading into the tunnel they saw Sugarloaf out the window, a strangely-shaped piece of rock so incongruous it seemed too beautiful to be real – a floating chunk of paradise, connected to the rest of the city by cable car and reflected in a glorious blue ocean.

"Back in the thirties, Copacabana was a real exclusive beach for the jet set," explained Fred. "See this wall of rock? Copacabana is just a thin strip, a few blocks wide and two miles long, surrounded by the sea on one side and mountains on the other. Before they blasted the tunnel, you had to get to Copacabana by boat or else go over that treacherous mountain road. Now it's like another Miami Beach."

Five blocks wide, two miles long. Andrew had read that after Hong Kong, this stretch had the world's highest population density. En route to the Rio Palace Hotel, Fred dispensed last-minute advice. He pointed out the best street corners to find money-changers, the best cafés to pick up hookers, the hotel lobbies to duck into when chased by robbers. They got out in front of the wide sand beach with throngs of people everywhere. Fred guarded the whole load of films that Naomi had given Andrew to take down to her friend Marisa Sanchez, coordinator of the Rio Film Festival. Andrew made a phone call and within twenty minutes a leggy brunette drove up in her convertible. After they packed away the films – Canada's contribution to the Rio Film festival – she took him on a fast scenic drive, pointing out important landmarks and inquiring after Naomi. Her apartment was located on a quiet side-street in Ipanema. She was very nice, but unfortunately they had no time to get acquainted, since she was leaving for Sydney

the next morning for the Christmas holidays. She was very direct: make yourself at home, but don't bring anybody else home (except Mark, who was on his way to Rio for Christmas.) She warned him to avoid the notorious beach hustlers, but gave him the addresses of the best gay bars in town.

The next morning he phoned Gina, who told him to meet her at a beach-side café in Copacabana. She jumped out of the Volkswagon taxi and hugged him.

"Welcome to Paradise!" she said.

"It's good to see a familiar face," he said, feeling both joyful and suddenly quite homesick.

"Let's have a beer," she said. "Carlos said he'd be along soon, but in Brazil, that could mean two hours or two days. Time has a very different meaning here. It's hard to explain, but you'll get used to it."

It took a couple of beers before Andrew could sit all the way back in his chair and relax. He breathed in the salty air and for the first time heard the palm trees rustle in the breeze. He finally felt he had arrived.

"You're not hiding from Bruce, are you?" Gina asked bluntly.

"He doesn't know where I am and he's not going to find out."

That night Carlos met them at a restaurant specializing in cuisine from the northern state of Bahía. All night long, he charmed them with stories of growing up in Brazil.

* * *

Although Carlos had been sent to a private boys' school in Rio at an early age, he'd spent all his vacations at his father's estate in the south. The region, known for its huge cattle ranches, was settled by Central Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century. His mother was a *Carioca* (an inhabitant of the state of Rio de Janeiro), whose father had been Brazil's ambassador to Germany during the thirties. Carlos' mother had witnessed the Third Reich's rise to power as a child in Berlin.

"She still hates Germans," Carlos said sadly. "And she's still in psychoanalysis fifty years later."

"You'd think she would have been sheltered from the war," Gina said.

Unfortunately, because her parents travelled so much, Carlos' mother was put in the care of a German governess – a closet Nazi fanatic who believed the family was hiding their true Jewish ancestry. When her parents were gone, the governess would tie her up, whip her and call her a Jewish pig. The governess threatened to have the whole family killed if the little girl told anyone. By the time her parents caught on to what was happening, the damage had been done. The family eventually moved to Geneva, where the family still owned a house. Carlos finished a degree in psychology there; his mother went back to Switzerland every summer to see the same analyst.

* * *

Now Carlos was back in Brazil doing research for his Master's thesis on torture throughout South America. Andrew was beginning to see why Gina was so captivated by this man; although he had a serious side, he was easy-going, sexy and flirtatious, even

towards Andrew. As Andrew got to know other Brazilians, he came to realize that flirtation was a national pastime.

Copacabana's main strip was an unbroken line of hotels, discotheques and high-rises. Two blocks away, entire families slept on cardboard boxes on sidewalks and in stairways. Returning home from the restaurant, they crossed a narrow alley where, at the corner of one house, a hundred candles burned. The wax dripped into pools, surrounded by weird statues, herbs, and other unfamiliar objects.

"*Macumba*," Carlos said.

Later, he explained that *macumba* was derived from various African cults practised by the slaves in centuries past. Andrew understood it to be a kind of polytheistic voodoo still secretly practised by many Brazilians.

"If you ask any Brazilian their religion," said Carlos, "they will automatically say Roman Catholic. But if you scratch the surface, you will find *macumba*."

The maids were apparently in on it. Carlos explained that almost all middle-class wives had maids. Although the maids were dependent economically on their mistresses, the mistresses were dependent on the maids for their magic. He recounted incredible stories about neighbourhood temples where the middle-class wives would bring their maids to affect special requests: a love charm, perhaps, or a curse to put on someone trying to seduce the woman's husband. The maid/priestess might fall into a trance, predicting the future or providing other vital information. Carlos warned the Canadians not to get too curious, because the power of *macumba* was tremendous; many of the deities were vengeful, he explained, and even the simplest ceremonies had been known to backfire. Carlos spoke bleakly about a Swiss friend who had met a magic man while

visiting Brazil; before long, he'd gone insane in a remote village in the Northeast. Apparently he was still in a psychiatric hospital in Bern.

Andrew's visit with Carlos and Gina was brief. They were off to Buenos Aires for the holidays. Gina was worried about leaving him alone, but Mark was due to arrive any day.

Andrew was content to wander and explore on his own. Rio reminded him of Miami and Los Angeles. Even with the beach, it had a sophisticated ultra-urban feel unlike any city in Canada. By noon, the sidewalks were so crowded you had to press against other people's bodies just to move forward. To Andrew, the women all looked like Sophia Loren, browsing at newsstands in sunglasses, sipping freshly-squeezed orange juice. It was a self-important, self-confident, self-contained garden of earthly delights.

On any given day, the beaches were literally covered with hundreds of thousands of people, most of whom, Andrew learned, were Brazilian. In Rio's social scheme of things, Ipanema was more exclusive than Copacabana. Ipanema Beach wasn't nearly as wide nor as white as Copacabana, but it was more intimate, less frenetic. *Well, the beautiful people have to go somewhere.* Armed with suntan lotion, sunglasses and flip-flops, he picked his way through the acres of firm brown flesh; each body-bulge displayed on the beach seemed like an extraordinary celebration of the human anatomy. Many women sported a thin strip of material yanked between their legs that was known as a *fila dental* -- dental floss. The sea was a shocking green, the water deliciously lukewarm whenever a wave trickled over his feet. Throughout the dense crowd, the sun-worshippers lay back in low-slung chairs dug into the sand, their asses suspended a few inches off the ground,

safe from sand crabs and litter. Brightly-striped parasols sprouted from the sand like exotic mushrooms.

The "gay beach" was actually a fifty-metre stretch sandwiched between families and tourists. There were no signs, no outward activities that would make this section stand out. In fact, most people passing by probably would not have noticed anything. After Andrew lingered for a while, however, he began to notice the shaded eyes turning in his direction. He saw small groups of slender Carioca women eyeing each other, singing and laughing and smoking cigarettes. The men dazzled their white teeth at each other in the hot sun, standing in clusters with arms folded, gazing at the bulging members stuffed inside their skintight swimsuits. They shared beers, gossiped and flirted with passersby. For Andrew, there was no other word for it but *mirage*. Neither on film nor in real life had he ever seen anything like it.

Mark arrived on Christmas Eve. When Andrew brought him to the beach on Christmas day, he was equally stunned by the human scenery. After several weeks on boats and buses through the Amazon region, Mark was quite exhausted. Despite Andrew's recent marital breakdown, it soon became apparent that emotionally, Mark was in a lot worse shape than Andrew. He had more blood-curdling stories to tell about Medellin, including Mafia murderers, CIA agents and the poor DEA agents -- from the Drug Enforcement Agency in Washington -- who were constantly being used as cannon-fodder to stop the hemorrhage of drugs from Colombia. The U.S. drug agents who weren't assassinated in Colombia were apparently co-opted into the drug chain.

"It's their biggest export," said Mark in a puzzled tone. "And yet it's strange how unacceptable drugs are in Colombian society. They're very xenophobic there. They hate

Americans because of their decadent drug habits, and they consider themselves to be lily-white in comparison. But then they justify the trade and say, 'Hey, somebody's got to do it, why not us?'"

"But don't you think North America is slowly getting corrupted by drug use?" Andrew asked, playing devil's advocate.

"Yeah, well so is a hell of a lot of *South* America," Mark said defensively. "They're always talking about how immoral North Americans are, but if they're so morally upstanding, I don't think they should be blowing each other's heads off with sub-machine guns in the middle of the city!"

"But look at how American banks and multinational corporations exploit these countries," Andrew said. "Look at all the people begging and sleeping on the street. You can't blame them for wanting to make some tax-free cash in the drug trade."

"It's a myth," said Mark. "The cocaine trade in Colombia is just as capitalistic as coffee or sugar cane. In fact, it's worse, because there are no government regulations or international controls. The money funnels into a few hands, and it gets stashed in Swiss bank accounts. The idea that all this money is going into the hands of poor, oppressed people is bullshit. In Third World countries it's hard to generate capital. When people get the scent of cash, they want more and more. So now the murder rate is out of control. The Mafia goes into slum areas and recruits teenage assassins to shoot anything that walks."

One day, Mark said he had been walking home from the language institute, smoking a joint on a quiet street.

"Suddenly I heard this thumping behind me, and these two young cops in big boots were running after me. They found the roach I had dropped and told me they were going to have me deported. In my best Spanish, I asked them if there was any other way to settle the situation. One of the cops mentioned that they would appreciate a present, so I pulled out my wallet with two 500-peso notes, worth about \$12. I was really scared. I just handed him my whole wallet and said, 'Take it! It's all I've got!' One of the cops said to me, very sweetly, 'Just give us one of those 500-peso notes and we'll split it between us. You keep 500 for yourself. We're honest cops.'"

* * *

They talked on the beach for days on end. Andrew let Mark do most of the talking, although he did explain that his relationship with Bruce was over. He didn't say much, since he was trying very hard to block everything out of his mind for a few weeks. The welts on Andrew's body were still partially visible when he was sunbathing. Mark discussed everything else: his travels, his relationships, his mother, the Jewish population in South America, the presence of Nazis, his drug experiments and the political climate.

"It sounds like you've become very conservative in your old age," Andrew teased.

"Not conservative," Mark protested. "The issues just aren't so black and white for me anymore. I always wanted to believe that people in Third World countries are dying for some kind of noble cause. But in Colombia, the only cause they're dying for is greed! I went to Latin America because I felt guilty about how much northern countries exploit

Latin America. I wanted to show South Americans that there are some people from North America who don't agree with the way the global economy is run."

"And?"

"I found that they didn't care whether I cared! As soon as I got there, I made a point of avoiding all those disgusting middle-class kids in Colombia who just want to imitate Americans and move to Miami. I met all these fascinating subversive artists and intellectuals — but then I ended up being a whipping-boy for frustrated Latin American left-wing intellectuals! As far as they were concerned, I could have been a CIA spy. And then, because I'm openly gay, they get suspicious, right? Theoretically, the left-wing groups support alternative groups but the *guerrilleros* are big macho heroes and they hate gays just like everyone else!"

"Like in Cuba," Andrew said glumly.

Mark said nothing, but sipped his beer and stared at the lapping waves.

"Mark, if this is the way you feel after all your time in the Third World, I think it's time to go home."

"Oh, I don't know."

"With all your languages and courses and travels, if *you* can't fit in here, nobody can! I think you've given it your best shot!"

"Maybe you're right," Mark sighed. "Maybe I'm not cut out for this. I think *you'd* fit in well because you're half-French. That Latin outlook makes a big difference, you know. You Catholics just jump into things and party. You don't analyze things like we do. You just go ahead and do it, and then if you feel guilty about it afterwards, you can always go to confession and be absolved."

"--and then go out there and do it again!" Andrew said.

"I'm twenty-five and I feel like an old man already," Mark sighed.

"If I'm so goddam easy-going," Andrew said, "why do I feel like I'm running away from my problems?"

"Yeah, well, count yourself lucky. You've been running for three weeks. I've been running for five years."

* * *

"You guys American?" the blondish man in his thirties hollered while they were getting out of the water.

Terry was a flight attendant from Texas with a flair for southern hospitality. He immediately invited them under his parasol for a drink. Because Rio is a major international transfer point, hundreds of flight attendants from all over the world are on lay-overs there at any given time. The airline industry, for some reason, is full of homosexuals.

"You know what they call Varig, the national airline here?" he drawled. "They say it's short for 'very-gay!'"

"I guess we came to the right beach," Andrew said, winking.

Terry introduced them to a group of Brazilians he had just met. Mark and Terry both spoke Spanish to the young men, who answered back in Portuguese. Andrew struggled along with the most attractive man in the group, a tall, tanned Brazilian in a

sleek turquoise swimsuit who spoke little English. He managed to ask Andrew where he was from.

"Montreal," Andrew repeated.

"Mont-tray-OW," his new friend said, pronouncing it in Portuguese. "*Parlez-vous français?*"

Andrew was surprised at how well Miguel spoke French. He couldn't have been more than twenty-two. Although his skin was a nutty brown, every hair that rose from his arms and legs was bleached white. He touched Andrew's shoulder with his finger. A spot of white immediately appeared inside a blotch of red.

"You gringos have to learn to stay out of the sun," Miguel said gently in French. "If you're not used to it, the sun can be very dangerous."

Without asking, he pulled a bottle of suntan lotion out of his bag and ordered Andrew to turn around. A blanket of goose bumps erupted when Miguel squirted an ice-cold jet of lotion over his back. His fingers teased their way across Andrew's shoulders. Andrew looked around self-consciously to see if this act of intimacy between two men on a public beach would cause any kind of scandal. In fact, nobody was watching; nobody seemed to care. *In Canada this would be brazen. But here it's merely sensual.* He asked Miguel what the Portuguese word for "sensual" was. Miguel's eyes lit up like kryptonite.

"*Sensual*," he said, but he pronounced the three syllables over and over, rolling off this tongue like a kiss. "*Sen-soo-wow.*"

"*Sen-soo-WOW*," Andrew repeated, mesmerized by the sounds rolling off Miguel's tongue.

"Très bien."

He invited Andrew to his parasol, and found an extra chair for him by shooing away one of his friends, who laughed and seemed to be teasing him in Portuguese. Andrew heard the word *gringo* and *amigo*. It wasn't until he got out of the sun that he realized how quickly it had been baking him. Mark was on his way to dinner with a new-found friend; they had agreed to meet at a gay discotheque in Copacabana at midnight.

The afternoon was spent in an advanced state of relaxation therapy. Andrew and Miguel drank beer, smoked a joint and, when it got hot, jumped into the crashing waves. He bobbed in the buoyant water while Miguel darted beneath him, nipping his toes. Their feet probed, interlocked and retreated. From where he floated, Andrew saw the green mountains reflected in Miguel's eyes. He looked at Miguel as if to say, "pinch me." Reading his mind, Miguel began singing in heavily-accented English:

*Is this the real life,
Or is this just fantasy?*

It was an appropriate Bohemian rhapsody on a perfect Brazilian summer day. After they came out of the water, they drank more beer, smoked another joint, drank more beer, and swam some more. By late afternoon, the crowd was folding up chairs and filing back home. Miguel led him down a street lined with trees covered with fat shady leaves. At an outdoor café called "A Garota de Ipanema," they ordered dinner and drinks. This café, Miguel explained, was an historical site -- the actual house where

composer Vinicius de Moraes had written one of the world's most popular melodies, "The Girl from Ipanema."

"J'aime la musique sensuelle," said Andrew. *"Sensual,"* he laughed, pronouncing it the Brazilian way.

"Vive la musique," said Miguel. *"Et vive l'amour."*

Miguel had studied languages in a small town about a hundred kilometres up the coast. His parents were very devout, and had pushed him to marry his high school sweetheart. If he had chosen to study in his home town, his parents would have willingly paid for his university. But they refused to send him to Rio to study. In a society where university education was very difficult to obtain, it made all the sense in the world to stay home, become a language teacher and marry his girlfriend. Unfortunately, it would have meant staying in the closet and feeling schizophrenic for the rest of his life. His parents had disowned him when he moved to Rio, a city where he could be openly gay, but without any social status. He became just one more outsider flooding into the city to man the service industry. As the assistant concierge of a guest house near the beach he made a pittance, but had free room and board in Brazil's most glamorous neighbourhood.

It's the same everywhere. We leave nature, give up our family security, our upward mobility, our sense of community...we trade it all in to be a nobody in a ghetto in a big city. If it wasn't for the cruel small-town gossips and the conformity of the countryside, we'd still be there. And who would wait on their tables? Cut their hair? Type their letters? Clean their bedpans? Dress up in clown costumes to entertain them?

Miguel did not see a link between the intolerance of rural homosexuals and their world-wide migration to larger urban centres. Miguel just seemed happy to be in Rio - - and Andrew, eyeing his frame over mounds of fish and rice and cold bottles of beer, could certainly see why.

They walked along the beach and talked until midnight, when they reached the infamous strip, "Galeria Alaska" -- an arcade lined with dingy bars and lunch counters catering to gays. It was one of those critical junctures, where Brazil's high-life and low-life met on common ground -- a prowling-ground, that is, for transvestites, transsexuals and professional hustlers in leather boots and tight jeans and shirts unbuttoned down to *there*. Everyone who was anyone was there: boyish-looking gringos with international gay guide books that had led them to this spot; dykes and cops and drug dealers, dirty old men and, in general, a lot of dirty people in off the street -- begging coins, stiffing drinks, and hustling the rich, reviled gay men in their neatly pressed shirts who paid five dollars each to get into the discotheque.

They found Mark leaning against a bar in the Galeria, chatting with a drunken Argentine. The disco looked strangely familiar. It was vintage seventies, like the Camouflage in Sherbrooke way back when, with its mirrored ball and coloured lights and velvety-cushioned sofas. It was a tiny room with no ventilation and, as far as Andrew could tell -- judging from the swarming crowds -- with no fire escapes; there appeared to be absolutely no control over the number of people inside at any given time. The music was so loud that when he went to the bathroom he could hear his ears ringing. After his third vodka he discovered they made their drinks a lot stronger in Brazil. With no place to stand, he ended up on the dance floor, relaxed, radiant and jubilant. He was

at the pinnacle of his power. The troubles he had left behind in Montreal evaporated. A female voice blasted through the shakey speakers, asking the hour's most pressing question:

*So many men,
So little time,
What can I do?*

The dance floor was so packed Andrew could barely raise his knees two inches. His gaze took in the hundreds of half-naked, gorgeous, sweating, muscular gay men who bumped and rubbed their bodies erotically and unapologetically against him, smearing their sweaty backs over his, shaking and grinding their crotches, at one with themselves, in sync with the urgent, endless beat. Dance, he knew, was a sensual act; but this was an overtly sexual act! He was so buffeted by those bodies, he had to consciously stop himself from creaming his jeans. By five a.m. the mob of dishevelled revellers had thinned somewhat.

"Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir?" Miguel whispered.

Within minutes they were in a taxi, heading for a "motel" -- in Brazil, a hotel was a place you slept in; a motel was a place you fucked in.

The motel room was covered in a burgundy velveteen wallpaper. Blacklight fluorescent bulbs bordered the ceilings in an unbroken line, casting a strange hue over the heart-shaped bed. Mirrored tiles were affixed to the backboard, which also served as a control panel. Andrew lay back, high as a kite, on a bed that was vibrating as if it

were possessed. Psychedelic lights blinked and then, to his utter amazement, the voice of Karen Carpenter boomed from somewhere *inside* the bed.

*...What lies in the future is a mystery to us all;
No one can predict the wheel of fortune as it falls.
There may come a time when I admit that I've been wrong,
But for now this is my song and it's good-bye to love...*

After making love they lay together in a warm ball, joined like Siamese twins. Suddenly Miguel started talking about the future of their "relationship." Andrew thought he was dreaming.

"Tu paies mon université," Miguel said, "et je suis ton amant, okay? Fucky-fucky tous les jours, okay?"

Andrew moved quickly to remove himself from the situation, both physically and financially. He gave Miguel a ten-dollar "present," then emerged groggily into the steamy street. Instinctively, he headed into the tropical breeze that was blowing up from the sea. He staggered onto the barren beach and collapsed in the sand, just in time to watch the sun come up.

Once a hustler, always a hustler.

He laughed.

A hustler being hustled by another hustler.

Then he cried to think that Miguel had to prostitute himself just to be gay, just to have some semblance of a life on this continent. *At least Canadian prostitutes have welfare and medicare.*

His head throbbed. Looking at the mountains that towered around him, staring at the sea that stretched ahead to Africa, the pain he had been holding in for so long came pouring out.

Other North American gay men, looking at Miguel, saw a cocky green-eyed god, rippling with self-confidence; Andrew saw nothing but the loneliness and degradation he himself had felt on Dominion Square. Bruce had rescued him, yes. For that he would be eternally grateful. But now his shining knight's armour had rusted permanently shut. Despite his good intentions, Bruce had continued to see Andrew as a kind of private prostitute. *With a heart of gold.* His honeymoon with Bruce had taken place by the sea; now the relationship would officially end at the sea.

*Waves at high tide
Rush to shore
Only to be pushed back
By their own momentum.*

The cool sand wedged between his toes. Wet-eyed and relieved, he pulled himself together. *Now* he could go home.

Just how many degrees below zero it actually was Andrew was not sure, but when he stepped into the frozen street from the single men's hostel in the red-light district, he had a sinking feeling he wasn't in Rio anymore. The prospect of returning homeless and jobless to Montreal in the middle of the winter had not been an appealing one, but his ticket and borrowed money had quickly run out. True, the change had done him good, but the length and breadth of this winter -- its severe, unrelenting, bone-chilling wind and blowing snow that drifted through the abandoned streets -- plunged him into a black depression.

Going back to Bruce's was out of the question; Gina's apartment was sublet until summer; and he didn't want to impose on Naomi any more. She and her CBC boyfriend were pretty regular, and he didn't want to get blamed if it didn't work out. It was all very well to be independent, but how to survive? There were no jobs to be had, and welfare was not much of an alternative. Quebec was the only province in Canada that

punished people for being young. It was understandable that a distinction was made between "able-bodied" people on welfare (like Andrew) and those unable to work, but the provincial government had added a new twist: able-bodied people on welfare *over* thirty got \$450 a month; able-bodied people on welfare *under* thirty got \$180 a month. It was absurd.

An abundance of sociological studies and investigative reports indicated how impossible it was to live on \$180 a month in Montreal. The conclusion was always the same: the welfare system was encouraging crime in the under-thirty population. If he had gone back to hustling he would have had enough to rent a room. Instead, he opted for the men's shelter with free room and board. With his precious cheque he could buy vitamins and a transit pass and the odd beer. Still, he felt betrayed by a system that had treated him like a *cause célèbre* for a while, then dumped him. Where were all the armchair Marxists now? The ones who had applauded him, who'd told him how brave he'd been for throwing off the shackles of capitalist oppression? He toyed with the idea of going to the press with an update: *the hustler with the heart of gold, now rotting in a men's hostel near you*. He decided against it, in case anyone saw his tan and found out he'd gone to Rio for a month. ("Times are tough..." those jaded journalists would have probably snickered, going back to their Rolodex in search of another story. How could he tell them that the respected director of that internationally-acclaimed documentary was crazy enough to kill him? Besides, he didn't want Bruce to know anything about what he was doing.)

The gloves he had been given by the Sisters of Charity must have been made of plastic. It was only after he'd gone past the turnstile, way down deep into the *métro*

station, that his fingers began to thaw. Going off to the hospital with his sample bottle didn't make him feel any better. Stepping on the westbound train, he was mortified at the possibility that the lid would come off and people would start sniffing his packsack.

About ten days after he'd gotten back from Brazil the diarrhea had started, then the fatigue and dizziness. A nurse at the hostel convinced him to contact the Tropical Diseases Clinic at the Montreal General. Before diagnosing him, the doctors at the clinic needed three separate stool samples brought in on three consecutive days. At the same time, he had his blood and urine tests taken. When he phoned back for his results, the doctor said he needed more detailed information on his body's ability to absorb fat.

"You'll have to come in for the bucket," the doctor said.

"A bucket?" he asked, incredulous. "You want me to shit in bucket? How much do you *want*?"

"I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but we need to analyze everything you excrete over a five-day period."

"Everything? What am I supposed to do? Carry this bucket around with me?"

"You can do whatever you want, Mr. Lacasse, but every bowel movement over the next five days must be deposited in this bucket. And it has to be refrigerated."

"*What?*"

"We're doing a survey of all the parasites inside your body. If the bucket gets too warm, the bacteria will multiply inordinately. What you do is excrete in the bucket, close the lid very tightly, and keep it in the refrigerator until the next time you go. Do that for five days, then bring the results in to us."

"You're going to have a hell of a lot to analyze."

"That's our job, Mr. Lacasse."

At first the hostel wouldn't allow him to keep the bucket in their refrigerator. He talked to the director -- an austere nun who looked like she'd been around the block a few times -- who finally said he could put it in a shed in the back.

"Does it matter if my shit is frozen?" he asked, calling the doctor back.

The doctor said it would not do, explaining that all the parasites they wanted to examine would die in the cold of the shed. When the hostel again refused to let him put the bucket in the refrigerator, Andrew threatened to go on a hunger strike. Finally he was allowed to put it in the priest's refrigerator in an adjoining building. When he had cracked open the lid on the second day of his regime, he nearly keeled over. After that he had to plug his nose and mouth, hold his breath, then dump quickly and get the hell out.

Now he was on the subway carrying five days' worth of shit to the clinic. Every time anyone looked vaguely in his direction, he withered in embarrassment. If he'd had the cash, he would have taken a taxi. He boarded the bus at Guy Street. When he arrived at the hospital with the bucket, the hog-jowled doctor seemed uncomfortable, staring at him accusingly over his thick black-framed glasses.

"Now where were you again?" he grumped, withdrawing a form from his file.

"Rio."

"Oh yes, Brazil," he smiled, looking like a teenager all over again. "I've gone to a few conferences there in my day." He winked and snickered. "The chicks are really something down there, aren't they?" He cleared his throat. "We're also checking out the

possibility of some venereal diseases. Did you have many sexual contacts when you were down there?"

"A few."

"And how many ladies did you sleep with?"

"None."

He stopped writing but kept his gaze fixed on his folder. Then he looked up, somewhat rattled, staring at him with a stupid expression.

"I'm gay," Andrew said.

"I see. And do you have a--"

His lips puckered. Andrew could tell he was trying to bring himself to say "lover" but it was too painful to pronounce.

"-- partner?"

"No."

"So you're promiscuous, then," he said, making notes.

Wait a minute! Is that the only choice I get? I'm either monogamous or promiscuous? Is that how straight people see the world? No wonder they're called straights!

"I've had a few different sexual partners in the last year," he said, watching the doctor, who was now furiously scribbling down volumes of notes.

"And do you know their names and addresses?"

"No! Of course not," he said, thinking of the blond man on the mountain last year. *Does that qualify as a sex partner? I guess so.* The doctor looked alarmed, and scribbled even faster.

"Have you ever engaged in anal intercourse?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever injected drugs intravenously?"

"Yes."

The doctor's face was now ghostly white.

"Please take off your clothes and put on this gown," he said. "I'll be right back."

He did what he was told, then sat on the bed and waited. Ten minutes later, the doctor popped his head in the door:

"I'll be there in a couple of minutes."

The doctor finally appeared dressed in white from head to foot. The only way Andrew recognized him was by the thick black-framed glasses that poked out of the white surgical mask now covering his face. Even his hands were covered, fitted in plastic gloves. He was followed into the room by two burly orderlies, similarly covered.

"We're going to have to take you downstairs for observation," the doctor said.

Everyone in the office had stopped working. The receptionist, so amiable a few minutes before, now wore a frozen look of terror. A rolling bed was already waiting for him in the hall; the orderlies hoisted him on top, raised the guard rails, and spun him down the corridor at a dizzying speed. *I must be a lot sicker than I thought.* Three floors down they wheeled him through the swinging doors that read:

ISOLATION WARD - MASKS AND GARMENTS MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES

A team of doctors streamed through the ward all day, poking and prodding. They would roll him over, take a few notes, then disappear. The nurse took blood by the

bucketful. When he joked about feeling like a pin-cushion, she scowled, gave him two blue pills and stomped off.

He woke up the next morning in a groggy haze. For breakfast he had an intravenous tube poked into him. When he asked the nurse if he could make a call, she informed him that the telephone was a dollar a day, minimum one week, paid in advance. There was a telephone down the hall, but he wasn't allowed out of his ward - - shared with five other people -- each patient curtained off into his own little compartment. Andrews's bed was beside the door, which was constantly closed. The window was obscured. All he could see was an intravenous tube, a symbol of his life, drip-drip-dripping away. He started to sob. It occurred to him that he might be dead soon, and that nobody would even know he was in there. Then he heard a voice on the other side of the curtain:

"That's okay. I can make a call for ya."

The voice had an American accent. He sounded calm and vaguely familiar. It hadn't occurred to him that there was a talking, living being beside him.

"I can't get up," he said to the curtain.

"That's okay. Just give me the name and number."

He phoned Naomi's office and left a message.

"Andrew," the voice said, after hanging up. "Do you remember me?"

Now this was something he was totally unprepared for.

"Who is it?"

"It's Hunter."

It took a few seconds for the name to register.

"Not John's friend Hunter?" he said, recalling the dinner party.

"Uh-huh."

"Wh-what are you doing here?"

There was only silence. And then finally:

"Welcome to the club, Andrew."

"What club?"

"You mean you don't know?"

"No."

Again, there was only silence.

"Is this the AIDS ward?" Andrew said, almost paralyzed.

"You guessed it. Can I come over, Andrew?"

He wanted to say no, but couldn't.

"Don't recognize me, do ya?" said a hunched-over figure, shoving the curtain aside.

He tottered into the chair, beside his bed, exhausted from the exertion. Andrew tried, but could not hide his horror at the sight of this wispy figure, last seen with a full head of hair and thick strong arms. Forty years old, maximum. He was now looking into the eyes of a wrinkled old man who needed a walker just to get over to Andrew's bed. His cheekbones jutted out obscenely, his face was caved in, his eyes sunken into his skull. His breathing was laborious.

"Well, my dear," Hunter said with his familiar smile. "Fancy meeting you here!"

"How long have you been here?" Andrew finally managed to say.

"Oh, I've been in and out for a few months now. I go home for a week or two, then the doctor brings me back. All this moving is getting me down."

"I can imagine."

But he couldn't. He had to force himself to look at the empty frame that flesh and blood and marrow had once inhabited. Hunter had been vacationing in Mexico when he had first started getting night-sweats and diarrhea. At first he had thought it was the water; back in Montreal, however, he was admitted directly into emergency. He'd almost died from his first bout of pneumocystis, the pneumonia associated with AIDS that kept filling his lungs up with ghastly fluids. Now he was on sick leave from his advertising job indefinitely.

When Naomi came to visit, she tried to hide her agitation behind the mask and gown she was forced to wear. Andrew assured her that he felt fine; the strange thing was, he *did* feel absolutely fine. For her part, Naomi did little to allay his fears. She wrung her hands and wailed about how awful hospitals were. It was nice to see a friend, but she looked so helpless. He wanted to make her feel better, even though that she was supposed to be making *him* feel better. He had to force her to promise she wouldn't tell Bruce anything until they actually confirmed he had AIDS. She went home reluctantly.

* * *

Over the following two weeks, he discovered how little he knew about AIDS. It wasn't a big topic of conversation in Montreal's gay scene. Fortunately, Hunter kept a file of magazine and newspaper clippings; more and more was being published each day. Like most others, Andrew assumed that it only affected a handful of promiscuous gays

in New York and San Francisco. He didn't understand the scientific jargon, but before long began to grasp the social implications of a disease described by some religious groups as "God's punishment to homosexuals." Leafing through the articles, he blanched at debates over whether to quarantine AIDS patients, the question of mandatory testing, and the widespread reports of mass hysteria, persecution, and even murder of AIDS patients. He could not even begin to speculate on green monkeys, swine fever, CIA experiments and the question of infected Cuban troops in Angola. For the first time he read about gay men who had been denied insurance policies, who were being thrown out of their apartments, who had been refused life-saving treatment by nurses and firemen.

Images of a smouldering holocaust loomed in front of him.

"The Jews got blamed for the Black Plague in Europe," Hunter said one day. "We're the new scapegoats."

Andrew's readings led him to draw parallels between the lifestyles of homosexual men, IV drug users and Haitians – the three groups most afflicted. The unhygienic living conditions of gays and drug addicts in North American inner city ghettos were not unlike the conditions in Haiti and Africa. The migration of hundreds of thousands of gay men from small towns across North America to huge gay centres like New York and San Francisco were compared by one anthropologist with the urban migration taking place in Third World countries. Just as Third World people would rather live in an urban slum (with poor hygiene) than face starvation in the countryside, many gays interviewed said they would rather live in their urban ghettos (with poor hygiene) than go back to their small towns. Another article by sexologist explained how easy it

was for a virus to spread through the gay community through bath-houses and bars with "back rooms." The intestinal parasite giardia, for example, was rampant in developing countries and in the North American gay community, but was rarely found in the bowels of North American heterosexuals, who had a fraction of the sexual contacts (per annum per capita) that gay men had.

A sociologist suggested in another article that, in terms of hygiene, men who lived together were generally filthy. Of the three social groupings studied (all-male, all-female and mixed), the all-male group had Third World levels of hygiene. As a result, parasites could be passed into each other's systems through shared towels, improperly cleaned dishes, even bars of soap. Other experts attributed the breakdown of gay men's immune systems to poor nutrition, fatigue and extensive alcohol and drug abuse. It took Andrew a long time to realize that these things did not cause gay men to get AIDS but may have helped the virus to take root.

Interviews with gay male AIDS patients by psychologists had confirmed what a lot of gay men did not want to hear: that their lives were no so gay after all. The majority of the men interviewed had never experienced any emotionally fulfilling relationships. Many were cut off from their own families, closeted from straight neighbours and work-mates. As a result, a split occurred: emotional, social and professional relationships took place on one level; on another, raw anonymous sex and drug abuse reigned, devoid of the emotional bond that was already lacking in many gay men's day-to-day lives.

Andrew forced himself to look at the dark purple blotches of *kaposi's sarcoma* that spotted Hunter's arms and legs. He thought how ironic it was that gays, of all people, should have to face this slow disfiguration. They, who had always been so preoccupied

with beauty, health and youth, were no longer able to avoid Dorian Gray's picture of ugliness, illness and death.

"It's a disease that rots you from the inside out and from the outside in," Hunter wheezed one day.

For a long time Andrew had been looking something to give his life meaning. His tribe was dying, and nobody seemed particularly upset about! At best, heterosexuals were indifferent; at worst, full of feelings of fear and vindication. Civil liberties for prostitutes was very low-priority compared to what was happening to people with AIDS.

* * *

A nurse came into the ward and told Andrew he could leave. He felt fine, but forced himself to ask the doctor what the verdict was.

"Your AIDS test came back negative," the doctor said, and walked away.

Andrew was relieved, but angry. It only confirmed everything he had been reading; being gay with a case of Montezuma's revenge was enough to have you locked away in isolation.

"Just thank God you're alive," said Naomi, insisting he stay with her. He had reached a point, however, where just "being happy to be alive" wasn't good enough. *Don't get mad, get even.*

* * *

Rio de Janeiro (still!)
March 3, 1985

Dear Andrew,

Carnival is over and I'm a complete mess. I have to write this down quick before I start thinking I just dreamed it. I hope you're fine up there in Montreal. It's too bad you had to go back. The fun started just after you left. The actual carnival takes place during the five days leading up to Lent, but the celebrations start happening about a month before and there are carnivals taking place all over the country at the same time. But the Rio Carnival is like the "Superbowl" of the carnivals, and everyone watches it on television all over the country. The main event is a sort of gigantic dance competition of "samba schools," which are like clubs in different neighbourhoods and districts who each put on their own spectacular dance presentations. The schools compete with each other with the most extraordinary parades, musicians, dancers, and the most outrageous costumes you could ever imagine. Then there are the exclusive private balls which sometimes cost over \$100 just to get in the door (equivalent to two months' minimum wage). Inside is the jet-set, outside all these poor people crowded outside the door of the castle like Cinderella.

But that's the touristy part. The residents of each neighbourhood have their own celebrations called *bandas* which are like local parades. Very spontaneous. They pick up instruments and put on costumes and just boogy in the streets. It's total anarchy, they block off the streets and party. The *bandas* get more and more frequent (and bigger and bigger) as Carnival approaches so that during the five official days it's like a big orgy. There's so much electricity in the air, it's amazing. Remember that café, Garota de Ipanema? Try to to imagine a thousand gay men blocking off the street in front of the Garota in wet clingy bathing suits, standing around in the heat, drinking beer and rubbing up against each other, getting totally carried away, going into trances, pulling off their bathing suits and fucking each other in the street. I mean, really, I didn't dream this, it actually happened!!

The "climax" of the Carnival (for me anyway) was the Carmen Miranda banda. Carmen Miranda was a big Brazilian film star (before our time), sort of a Bette Midler of the 40's, I think, adored by gays. Her trademark was the fruit basket-hat. It felt almost like a religious ceremony, like her spirit was being revived or something. There were hundreds of very straight-looking Brazilian men in outrageous drag prancing around in high heels with baskets of fruit piled up on their heads. It was like, anything goes. At Carnival there are no rules, and you can do whatever you want with as many people as you want (So I did.)

Gina and I are sharing an apartment in Copacabana and teaching French. She has even convinced me to take up aerobics and we're trying to give up smoking! I'll be back in Montreal in June. I'm applying for grad school in the fall at McGill and Concordia. I'm feeling exhausted but I'm pissed off I spent so much time in Spanish-American countries that are so uptight compared to Brazil! Brazil's fun but the pay is lousy here and it's expensive, the economy is in ruins, and I'm tired of South America. Gina and

Carlos are still in love, and she doesn't want to go back to Montreal. She wants to know if you and I will take over the lease of her apartment July 1 because she's planning to stay here. Write and let me know what you think.

Love,
Mark

* * *

After three months of fresh air, good food and herbal remedies, I was feeling better than I had ever felt in my life. One day, out of the blue, Mrs. Coon said, "I guess we'll be going back to the reserve soon."

It was hard to go back to civilization. The reserve was about ten miles from a white mining town. On the road to the reserve, we stopped the truck a few times to pick up Indians walking home from town. We turned onto a narrow side road and passed a hand-painted sign that said, "Beaver Lake Indian Handicrafts." On either side of the road you could see houses falling apart. After being in the middle of nature, it was so depressing to see these shacks with their front yards full of weeds and old refrigerators and rusting tricycles and burnt-out cars.

* * *

The more he thought about it, the more pissed off Andrew got when he realized how the hospital had treated him. Telling the doctor he was gay, he thought, had been the most responsible thing to do. Instead, the information had been used against him. Guilty until proven innocent, but guilty of what? Of being gay? He told Marlene the story and she suggested he complain to the Human Rights Commission. He phoned John, who had organized an ad hoc AIDS committee for concerned gays. When John

invited him over to the new temporary office in his living room, he began to relive the drama that had begun in John's dingy walk-up on St. Mark Street almost five years before.

The posters from New York jolted him when he entered John's living room: GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS. The message was clear. *It's our problem, not theirs.* John's apartment was the headquarters for a coalition of various gay groups in the city who were concerned that the government had done absolutely nothing to assist AIDS patients or educate the community. The committee was officially bilingual, although almost all of the dozen or so people involved in the committee at first were anglophones. Most of them, like John, had moved here from other parts of the continent. Because they tended to have friends who were already afflicted in the larger American centres, they were more attuned to the severity of the crisis than the average gay man on the island of Montreal in 1985. John was hoping Andrew could use his contacts in the francophone gay community -- where AIDS was still basically perceived as an American, or at least anglophone phenomenon. Although proposals had been drawn up for federal and provincial funding, so far all grant applications or assistance had been denied.

There were file folders stacked up to the window-sill and half-clipped newspapers were strewn over the carpet. Fat manila envelopes overflowed from a single drawer in John's filing cabinet, stuffed with brochures and documents from San Francisco. Andrew thought back on that scraggly band of men he had seen at the disarmament demonstration in New York and visualized the numbers getting bigger and bigger every day. John came back from the kitchen with tea, reciting statistics on the number of new cases in Quebec, the overwhelming percentage of which were gay and bisexual men with

AIDS. *My God, it's happening here.* Because there were so few people on the AIDS committee, Andrew could basically do whatever he wanted. John suggested he familiarize himself with the environment by working as a "buddy" -- an able-bodied volunteer assigned to bed-ridden or home-ridden AIDS patients -- who ran errands such as shopping and banking. The buddy's most important function, John explained, was to be a companion, to be there to talk and to listen. Andrew agreed to help Hunter, who was now out of the hospital.

"Have you heard from Bruce lately?" John asked Andrew matter-of-factly after their discussion.

"No, have you?"

John played intermediary haltingly. Bruce was so depressed about the break-up he had taken a leave of absence from the Cegep and was seeing an analyst. He'd heard about Andrew's trip and was anxious to re-establish contact. Andrew felt a sour-cherry lump slowly dissolving down his throat.

"Tell him I wish him well," Andrew said, rising.

"I will," John said, touching his shoulder lightly.

* * *

As the fetid snowbanks shrank to the size of snowballs in the back alleys of the Plateau, the frost that coated Andrew's heart gradually began to thaw. Mark and Gina phoned him from Rio to wish him a happy birthday; Gina announced she was getting married "sometime soon." Mark was moving back to Montreal to go to graduate school;

he and Andrew made plans to sublet Gina's apartment at the beginning of July. Naomi took Andrew to the Santropol for his birthday, then handed him a card with \$50 in it.

"Now go out and get laid," she said, smiling. "You deserve it."

"I thought you were afraid I'd get AIDS?" he said, surprised.

"You're a good boy," she said. "I know you'll play safely."

The cash burned a hole in his pocket. He caught the Friday night Ste. Catherine Street wave and rode it east. To keep moving forward, he avoided the crowded sidewalk and plunged headlong into the street. A flashing neon sign beckoned him upstairs to a strip show. Within seconds of taking his seat, he heard his name.

"Andy!"

"*Salut, mon beau!*" Andrew said, excited to see his old mentor, Michel.

Andrew whistled, admiring the buxom body in front of him, nude save for a glittery G-string and a pair of tan cowboy boots. He came running back with a complimentary beer, and sat down with him for a *petite cigarette*. In his familiar slang, he praised Andrew's jet-set status. He wanted to know about Andrew's travels and, in true provincial fashion, was more impressed with visits to Key West and L.A. than with his trips to Brazil or Europe. As Andrew fed him adventures, he gazed admiringly at Michel's mischievous eyes and that same self-assured smile. His face was getting older, but his body seemed to be getting younger. For a brief moment Andrew envied his freedom, his uncomplicated sleaziness, his ignorance of the political and economic forces that dictated so much of his daily life. True, Michel was a commodity to be consumed, but at least he had graduated from the street. He had his own apartment in the east end

now, and boasted about the latest piece of furniture he had just acquired. He made Andrew promise to drop over some day and bring photos of his trips.

Next stop was the "drug store," the gay tavern beneath Bruce's loft. Since Andrew had been back, the only drugs he had taken were for diarrhea. Although he never considered himself a *drogué*, he had been a regular consumer over the years; Bruce had convinced him that drugs were serious business -- mind expansion, increased awareness - - not necessarily for having fun. As a result, his experiences with hallucinogens like acid and psilocibin mushrooms had often been unsuccessful; he was usually so distracted by the people and events around him that he never got a chance to let the magic take effect. As part of his new policy of taking his life into his own hands, he decided to get high and enjoy it, without feeling obligated to analyze it or even share it with anyone else.

The waiter offered him acid, hashish, MDA and mescaline, all conveniently wrapped in foil packages and tucked into a pocket of his leather change apron. Andrew chewed slowly on a blotter with a micro-dot of acid and downed it with a draft.

Then he stopped at the sex-shop for more treats -- condoms (which he now used regularly), water-based lubricant and a bottle of "poppers" or butyl nitrate, a sort of gay love-drug. When you unscrewed the cap of the small bottle and breathed in the vapours of the liquid through one nostril and then the other, the drug produced a rush, causing temporary light-headedness, disorientation and rapid heart-beat. Although primarily taken by gay men during sex to hold an erection, poppers were also à la mode at the disco. In fact, it was considered a ritual of bare-chested male solidarity to pull the bottle of poppers out of your pocket and share them with the apple of your eye on the dance floor. Back in the "good old days," according to Bruce, a discotheque in California

actually *piped* butyl nitrate right onto the dance floor, simultaneously turning the entire crowd into a horny, ecstatic mass of moving bodies.

In a set of seemingly-abandoned warehouses known as the fur district, Andrew slipped through a garage door that served as the discreet entrance to Le Garage, Montreal's hottest club, plastered with posters for next week's "ladies' night." (On all other occasions women were denied access to the cult of Quebec's secret, ultramasculine gay world, but once a month women were allowed to enter -- if accompanied by a man - - and the line-up went around the block.) As the bar's name suggested, the motif was automobilia. The decor included real gas pumps that served as counters on which you could place your drinks, along with suggestive pictures of stubbly mechanics with bulging coveralls, holding phallic-looking grease guns. The front-fenders of old cars had been cut off and stuck imaginatively against the back wall, against whose bumpers you could lean on, crotch out-thrust, looking cool and cruisy. Overlooking the dance floor the entire cab of a transport truck, complete with front tires, had been mounted and remodelled to serve as a DJ's den.

There were two different types of people who went to the Garage: the lean, hungry types who roamed the dark crannies and long passageways in search of game; and the pretty preppies who shopped at Le Château and stood in clumps among other fresh-scrubbed faces, gossiping and occasionally stealing looks at the pool players -- invariably the hottest men in the joint, although they tended not to be great conversationalists. Because Andrew had been away from the bar scene so long, he had forgotten how predictable it all got once the excitement of the novel decor died down. The loud music, the smoke, and the sheer density of people were oppressive, and not

exactly conducive to socializing; indeed, everyone was so busy moving -- to avoid being trampled -- it was hard to fix on anyone's gaze. He retreated to the back lounge where the music was a few decibels lower. Pressed against the hubcap-lined walls and leaning against a steel oil drum, he rolled a spliff and stared at the steady stream that filed past him like a chain-gang. *Where's everybody goin'?* asked the Rose. She knew.

So many men passed by, in their leather suspenders and tank tops and teased hairdos and designer jeans, glancing at him for a split-second before transferring their gaze to the body beside him. The bored expression on these zombies' faces made anonymous sex on the mountain seem like a vibrant human connection in comparison. One man yelled at him over the roar of the loudspeakers, but it was no use; he eventually wandered off. Finally a tall man in a jean jacket with dark eyes asked him to dance. It took five minutes to wedge fifty feet through the crowd and onto the dance floor. If he strayed more than an inch in any direction, he was bound to step on somebody's foot. The thumping disco music reached a high pitch and Andrew could feel the whole thundering mass of humanity stomping furiously under the winking hypnotic strobe light. The acid kicked in without any warning. Now he was back in Sherbrooke on the dance floor, now he was in Rio, now he was here; on the walls the paintings of beefy mechanics flashed in the blacklight and turned into skeletons; then the paintings turned into posters like the ones in John's apartment -- and the secret message flashed urgently from every hidden corner of the bar: GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS.

But nobody else saw what he was seeing. He felt his lips move. He sang along to the chaotic blare but couldn't remember what the song was until the chorus came on. He had always heard it as a gay hymn, but for the first time he heard its lament:

*So many men,
So little time.
What can I do?*

When he looked up, his companion had vanished. He needed air. The acid seemed to have a will of its own, and was leading him out of this smokey club, down Bleury Street, as though an invisible string was drawing him in the direction of Old Montreal. He sucked in the spring air greedily. Along Ste. Catherine Street, the crowds had thinned somewhat. At de la Gauchetière, he craned his neck to see Place Ville-Marie's rotating light wind its way around the city, searching for what? Survivors? Escapees? Rebels of the night? A starless sky hung overhead. He stopped at the sign that read, "For men only."

Montreal's largest bath-house stood in a silent row of warehouses on the edge of Montreal's financial district. Andrew had never actually paid to go there; when he had been hustling, a client would sometimes pay his way into a room at the baths instead of in a cheap hotel. On these occasions, he would fulfill his necessary duties, then get back on the street as quickly as possible to turn another trick.

The bath-house was open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. When he entered, a young man behind a thick glass window slid him a form to fill out and made him pay in advance. He handed him a clean white towel and a key for his "roomette," then buzzed him through. The main floor featured a lounge, a snack bar, a heated swimming pool, a whirlpool bath, showers, a steam bath and a sauna. The second and third floors consisted of over a hundred individually-numbered cubicles, divided one from the other by flimsy plywood walls that rose half-way to the ceiling, allowing smells and sounds to flow freely. (Not everyone went to the baths looking for sex, but it wasn't

exactly the best place to go for a good night's sleep.) His room had a little bed with a clean, well-worn sheet and a pillow, a locker to hang his clothes in and a round dimmer switch that adjusted the red lamp suspended over the foot of the bed.

No street clothes were allowed outside the room. At 4 a.m. the place was packed with over a hundred towel-clad men between eighteen and sixty. True, many men went there for relaxation and that Roman feeling of camaraderie, but for most patrons it was a sex-supermarket; more accurately, a vast McDonald's. As Andrew padded barefoot for miles along the carpeted corridors, he pushed open the cubicle doors one by one.

Andrew had told very few straight people the dark secrets of the baths. For gays, to discuss this world-wide network where men went for relaxation and casual sex was taboo, a betrayal of tribal secrets to that moral majority of heterosexuals who would be shocked and revolted (he assumed) by how easy it was for gay men to have sex.

All he knew was that he was much safer here than on a street corner or in a seedy hotel. Here, if things got out of hand, you had only to yell for help through the paper-thin walls and thirty people would be at the door. The presence of potential witnesses kept violence to a minimum. And the baths were cleaner; in contrast to a back-alley blow-job or a messy fuck in the bushes, here you could take a shower after sex, steam yourself clean, gargle and brush your teeth. And there were always condoms around. People didn't necessarily use them, but chances were greater at the baths than in the back of a car.

Andrew went down to the steam bath, easing his back against the tiled wall as hot droplets of condensed steam spat down on him like rain from hell. He slipped into the whirlpool, where a bald man played footsy with him. In the shower, a tall, well-built

man kept squirting soap out of the dispenser and staring at him. As the hot mist rose around them, Andrew foamed myself into a frenzy, starting at his chest and working his way down. Although sex was discouraged in public areas of the bath-house, he enjoyed the sheer freedom to admire another man's body in a semi-public place without being arrested or beaten for it.

"Could you scrub my back?" the admirer asked.

Before Andrew could answer, the man had flattened himself against the wall in front of him, as if ready to be searched. Andrew glided a hand over the man's smooth white skin and scratched his back. For a few minutes they took turns thrashing their hands sensuously over each other's torsos, stirring up a sea of lather. Then Andrew took a cold shower, picked up a Coke and brought it back to his roomette.

A second wave of acid percolated through him. He suddenly became very aware of the smells and sounds around him. He stoked his pipe and smoked some hash to calm the flutters in his stomach. He propped up the pillow and leaned it against the wall, then turned down the light a little and waited. Within a minute, the door creaked open.

A tall short-haired man with pleading eyes:

"Non, merci."

A curly, burly man with a beer belly:

"Non, merci."

A boy with high cheek bones, soft blue eyes and a thin frame:

"Non, merci."

A kindly-looking grandfatherly man, mouth hanging open pathetically:

"Non, merci."

He finally settled for a wiry-thin tattooed man with tremendously large red hands. All he remembered of their brief intercourse was the man's appendix scar. He wanted to at least ask his name, but the man had already grabbed his jangling key-ring -- along with the towel he had dropped on the floor in a fit of passion three minutes before -- then he was gone. His needs momentarily satisfied, Andrew leaned back against the wall with his now-damp towel draped over his groin. The door opened. He gazed wordlessly at the loosely-knotted towel that hung below Bruce's navel. It rode very low on his buttocks like a Ceylonese sarong.

"Aren't you even going to ask me in?" he said sulkily.

"Since when did you ever ask?" Andrew managed to say.

Bruce entered and closed the door behind him, frowning visibly, even in the dim light. Andrew drew his feet up -- as if he were recoiling from a snake -- and tightened the towel around him.

"I'm not going to bite ya," Bruce scowled, scrunching himself down at the edge of the bed. "How are you?"

"Fine."

"John says you're working on his committee."

"Uh-huh."

"I'm sure Hunter appreciates it," he said, his voice catching a bit. He paused, as though choosing his words carefully. "You never gave me an address to write so I could explain to you."

"Explain what?"

"Andrew, you know I --"

"You what?"

"You *know* I've never loved anyone else but you, Andrew," he sobbed. "You've gotta believe me!"

It was disquieting for Andrew to watch this tough hunk crumpled at his feet, sobbing and begging forgiveness. Next door two men were slurping loudly and smashing against the wall. Somewhere in the distance he heard the slap of a leather strap on bare ass-flesh followed by the joyous howling of pleasure-pain, echoing through the farthest reaches of his brain, now whizzing with acid snowflakes. The feeling that overwhelmed him most was fear; not for his immediate physical well-being, but for his future. Instinctively, he knew what he had to do to save his own life. *Don't look back.* For years Andrew had kept looking back, slowly calcifying. At that moment, in that sordid little chamber that reeked of smoke and sweat and sour cum, Andrew knew what he had to do. In his blurred state, he felt the need to enact some kind of ritual that would keep the demons at bay.

He snapped out of his reverie and stoked up his hash pipe. As though administering a bottle to a hungry baby, he fed the drug to Bruce, who squinted his eyes and sucked in a lungful. Andrew complained vociferously about the heat and pushed open the door. A few men paused, assuming this was an invitation to join them both for a *menage à trois*. Bruce seemed a bit calmer now.

"Dante," he said, shaking his head.

"What?"

"You know how he wanted to punish homosexuals?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Andrew said, addled.

"You know, in Dante's *Inferno*, every sinner had a different punishment when they got to hell. You know what the homosexuals' punishment was?"

"No."

Bruce stood up and pointed out to the dozens of towel-clad men milling around outside.

"To be always moving," he said. "What a punishment, huh? We can't sit still. We can never be content with what we have. We're always looking for something better to come along."

Then it occurred to Andrew: *Bruce thinks I'm dropping him for somebody else.* He said nothing and held the door open until Bruce finally left, dejected. Every time Andrew did the rounds that night, there was Bruce, it seemed, fucking somebody else, then somebody else. It felt good for Andrew to watch somebody else getting screwed by Bruce for a change.

* * *

I shared a bedroom in the basement with three other boys. There were nineteen people living at the Coons' house on the reserve; twenty including me. I still don't know who they all were. For breakfast we would go through several dozen eggs and pounds and pounds of bacon. The Coons kept sending me into town with their truck just to buy groceries and bring in mountains of dirty laundry to do.

One morning when I got up, Mrs. Coon was scrubbing the floor frantically, preparing for the social worker's visit. Mrs. Bradley sat down at the kitchen table and

took notes and chain-smoked. She looked like a nervous wreck. I caught a ride into town with her after the interview. She told me the Coons were one of the "good" families on the reserve, which meant the kids were clean and well-fed and the parents encouraged them to go to school. The "bad" families drank everything on the first day of the month when they cashed their welfare cheques so that there was no food for the kids. Mrs. Bradley explained that the kids from the "bad" families sniffed gasoline and got into fights and froze to death. I said:

"If the Coons are such a model family, then why do nineteen people have to live in one house?"

She said everything had to go through Ottawa.

"It could be two years before they get enough houses," she said. "Maybe five or ten. Who knows?"

* * *

Andrew threw himself into his committee work. The number of members grew very slowly, partly due to resistance within the gay community, partly due to government indifference, partly due to public hostility. One day, the switchboard of the city's most popular open-line talk show was jammed with callers, responding to a rather leading question, "What should we do with people with AIDS?" Andrew sat in John's living room, sorting files and listening to John, who was at the studio as one of the invited guests. He listened politely for about half-an-hour to suggestions that people with AIDS be jailed, tattooed and/or sent off to Arctic islands. John finally blew up when one caller

proclaimed that "at the pearly gates, the sinful sodomites will be smitten and sent back on their long descent into hell."

"Listen, lady!" John said, a bit shrilly. "I'm sick and tired of hearing poisonous people like you imply that AIDS is God's punishment on homosexuals. If that's the case, then please explain why almost all the cases in Africa are among heterosexuals? Does your God hate blacks too? Are you God's PR-lady? Who the *hell* gave you the right to pass judgment?"

They applied for every possible grant, loan and public works program on every level of government to establish an office, a hotline and a decent public education program. The bureaucratic resistance was mind-numbing. In order to combat his feeling of helplessness, Andrew took comfort in his duties as Hunter's buddy. Landing on Hunter's doorstep in the McGill ghetto, he felt like a gay Boy Scout, ready for a morning full of good deeds. Because of his persistent diarrhea, Hunter had a lot of dirty clothes that Andrew would wash at the local laundromat while buying groceries. And there was always something to pick up at the pharmacy: anti-fungal lotions, anti-viral pills, antihistamines, anti-depressants and anti-diarrhea suppositories.

When all the household tasks were finished, the two would retire to the sunporch. The fascinating anecdotes of Hunter's life poured out along with the cups of cannabis tea -- the only way Hunter could get high, due to the deteriorating state of his lungs. It reminded Andrew of the times he would drink tea with Aunt Pearl and ask her about the depression and the war. Hunter reminded him that for gays, the sixties weren't so fabulous, since liberation didn't come until the end of the decade.

"You either had to either move to a big city or join the military," Hunter said, summing it up.

Andrew didn't understand the military option.

"Believe me," said Hunter. "When you're nineteen years old and it's 1967 and you're gay and you've grown up in a small town near Erie, Pennsylvania, all you want to do is meet as many men as possible. In the sixties, the best way to do that was to enlist. I was in the Air Force in Vietnam for a couple of years," he said matter-of-factly.

"I guess you'd rather not talk about it," said Andrew reverently.

"The trickiest thing," Hunter said, "was figuring out who was and who wasn't. Back then you had to be very creative. You *knew* there were a lot of gay men around, but you couldn't just ask someone or else they might beat the shit out of you or worse, you might get court-martialled!

"One night I had to keep watch by myself all evening at a supply store. Before I went on duty I went to the central latrine and wrote the phone number of the supply store on the wall in pencil with a message that said, 'For hot sex, call Joe at such and such a number.' I was the only one on duty, so I knew that if anyone phoned asking for Joe, they'd be interested in meeting other men.

"Sure enough, a couple of hours later, the phone rang and somebody asked for Joe. I lowered my voice and said, 'This is Joe! Whaddya want?' The guy on the phone sounded very nervous but finally we agreed to meet in front of the flagpole at midnight. After he hung up, I ran back to the latrine and erased the message on the wall. After my shift, I went to the flagpole, but the problem was, there were about ten other people there, and I didn't know which one he was! This one guy kept staring at me for about

an hour, and eventually everyone cleared out except him. So we started chatting and it turned out he was scared shitless to admit he was the guy who phoned because I was his superior, and I could have turned him in.

"Anyway, he ended up introducing me to all the enlisted men in our division who were gay. Everyone knew each other and you had to trust that nobody would talk. It's fascinating to see how gay culture survived under such adverse conditions -- I mean, just think, we were in the middle of a fucking war!"

"You obviously didn't have gay bars in the jungle."

"No, but we *did* have private parties," said Hunter fondly. "There was a whole underground scene, and rank and class didn't really mean much. We would have these parties and airmen and admirals would be sitting in each other's laps, drinking and watching drag shows. It didn't really change the way we felt about each other as gay men. It's funny, kids who come out today must think it was really horrible to be gay during the war, but I can honestly say I had the time of my life. It was like being a member of some private club."

"Or tribe," Andrew said.

"Uh-huh. That's more like it. It's funny, even in a terrible situation like war, everyone has his place. I know there were gays on the frontline, but it seemed like the most of us were 'nurturers,' you know, providing care the best way we could. My division shuttled back and forth from the Philippines carrying planeloads of blood and medicine into the combat zones."

He paused, his voice reed-thin.

"We brought the planes back loaded with coffins," he said, his eyes soaked with tears.

Andrew tried to picture a planeload of coffins, but couldn't. While Hunter waded through blood, Andrew had danced at his Grade Six graduation party.

War!
What is it good for ?
Absolutely nothing...

* * *

One day, Mr. Coon announced he was going to bring me to a Cree sweat ceremony on a reserve a hundred and fifty miles away. He told me to bring along a towel and a pair of shorts. On the long bumpy drive, he told me the ceremony was an ancient ritual, perhaps thousands of years old. He told me about miracles that had taken place inside the sweat-lodge. Later on, I realized that Mr. Coon was quite a well-respected medicine man.

"It purifies your body and it purifies your soul," he said.

According to the radio, the temperature was -30 C. We parked the truck and followed a path into the forest. The sweat-lodge looked like a wooden igloo. It was a low-lying shell, very hard to see because it was camouflaged by all the trees. There were two flaps on either side that were big enough to crawl in and out of. In front of the sweat-lodge, two men were poking a large fire that contained several rocks.

I slipped off my clothes in the truck and entered the sweatlodge wearing just my shorts. I was told to move clockwise around the dirt floor, which was covered with hay. Along with twelve

other men, there were five women dressed in nightgowns, who all sat together on one side. The attendants kept shovelling rocks into a pit in the centre of the dirt floor. Mr. Coon came in after everybody else and sat in front of the entrance. Then the attendants sealed up the flaps and threw moosehides over the top of the sweat-lodge to keep in the heat.

* * *

Things gradually began to fall into place. Mark returned from Brazil, ready to settle down; he and Andrew took over Gina's lease and proceeded to turn her long-neglected apartment into a home. The economy was also beginning to pick up; Andrew landed a summer job mowing lawns and hauling wheelbarrows full of leaves and topsoil for the parks department.

Hunter eventually went on medical benefits, making him eligible for visits by a homecare worker and a nurse, who both visited him twice a week. Andrew performed minor tasks that made his life a trifle more bearable: he rented porn videos for his VCR, hunted down grass for his cannabis tea, and sought out particular books and magazine articles. A year had passed since Hunter's diagnosis, and his spirit was on the wane. There were no dentists in Montreal willing to treat AIDS patients; when his teeth began to rot out of his head, the hospital magnanimously offered to pull them all out. There was severe hemorrhaging and infection upon infection set in. Then his body rejected the antibiotics. There were dozens of other things that could, and did go wrong. Like comedienne Gilda Radner (who eventually succumbed to cancer) used to say: "There's always something."

For example, an improperly-closed window might cause a draft that could lead to a sore throat, a cold, and pneumonia within 48 hours. On hot summer nights Hunter and Andrew would watch television together. While Andrew sweated in his shorts, Hunter shivered under a quilt with the electric heater blasting.

By now the media was flashing out hysterical scenarios full of backlashes and demonstrations. Statistics -- including "estimates" of the number of people with HIV, were always "worse than previously feared" -- a phrase that seemed to sum up the straight community's inability to cope with the crisis.

Due to the lack of government funding, John absorbed a lot of the dirty work, dispensing counselling, medicine and social services to AIDS patients languishing in rooming houses on Tupper Street. These men were the earliest casualties, long disowned by their fundamentalist farm families from Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, by the embarrassed bourgeoisie of Rosedale and West Vancouver -- whose sons had gone off to Montreal to be gay, who were not welcome back, who never came back. This was before businessmen's wives took Liz Taylor's lead and organized fashion shows for AIDS "research" which was then funnelled into emergency funds for starving, homeless people with AIDS, now referred to as PWAs.

As depressing as it might sound, working on the committee had breathed fresh air into Andrew's social life. Now that dating was in, he felt sixteen all over again! (For Andrew, "date" had always meant something completely different.) Mark, now doing a Master's at McGill in Third World geography, was a gracious co-host for their pot luck dinners and informal parties on the back balcony. Andrew began to imagine what university life was like. Although they lived across the alley from Naomi, she was now

away almost every weekend with her boyfriend or else working hard at the Film Board. Gina and Carlos, meanwhile, were working their way around South America. Carlos attended conferences and worked on his thesis while Gina wrote articles that she tried (unsuccessfully) to sell to various publications. Her postcards from Cuzco, Manaus, Otavalo and La Paz were all glowing.

Then one day they got the following letter, postmarked Barbados.

* * *

On board the *Pinta*
September 12, 1985

Dear Andrew and Mark,

We're only stopping here long enough to bring on water and mail our final correspondence before setting sail. I left Carlos two weeks ago for good. No more Latinos, I've decided. As the song goes, I'm gonna wash that man right out of my hair.

I guess I owe you an explanation. After I moved to Brazil, Carlos announced he was bisexual. My first reaction was very accepting; it was very important, I felt, to be "open" (whatever that means!); Carlos interpreted my "openness" as a green light to take home whoever he liked, whenever. We had some great times (ménages à trois, other women, etc.) but I started getting paranoid, because you hear more and more about women getting AIDS. So he calmed down. We got back to Rio after all our travels and I told him I wanted to stay put and concentrate on my career, writing articles, etc. I guess he felt I was pressuring him to settle down to domestic heterosexual life (which I was), but you know what Rio's like -- boys, boys, boys, everywhere you go. He kept disappearing and finally I asked him if he was sleeping with boys again and he accused me of a being a "repressed WASP" and said I should have sex with women so that our relationship would be more "balanced." We got into a fight over AIDS again and he started screaming that it was only spread by "promiscuous faggots," and I said, "Well, what are *you* then?" (I know it was unfair, I was so frustrated after two years of this.)

Before I knew it, bam! He gave me a black eye and raped me. I guess he was trying to prove what a macho jerk he was. I flipped out! I felt so isolated when I realized he was my only friend in Rio. When I told him I was going to leave him, *he* flipped out, and said he'd kill me if I tried to leave him and then kill himself. It was getting really looney, but fortunately fate intervened! I met this rich French couple with a yacht anchored in the harbour in Rio. (Knowing languages can be very useful.) They were heading up the Brazilian coast to Barbados and then across the Atlantic to the Côte

d'Azur and when they invited me on board I just broke down and begged them to let me on as a cook or something because my crazy Brazilian boyfriend was trying to kill me.

And here I am, flipping pancakes across the Atlantic, in search of emotional stability and a good meal. My French is a bit rusty these days. Don't forget to be good to my plants, and feel free to buy any of the furniture and stuff I left in the apartment. I'll need the money once I arrive in the Old World. I'll write you as soon as I have an address.

Love,
Gina

* * *

The committee was now going into its third year. The gay community was as unreceptive as ever. One day Andrew went to a bar to put up a safe sex poster beside the door (next to an announcement for the Mr. Leather contest). The manager refused permission, explaining it was bad for business.

"People come here to forget about their problems," he snarled.

The provincial government, which organized and dispensed almost all health-related grants, still refused to recognize the group's existence, but did nothing to establish a parallel organization. Morale was low on the committee, and they often wondered why they even bothered to do educational work in such a hostile environment. The AIDS Committee of Toronto, they had heard, already had an office and some full-time employees. John, on the other hand, had to photocopy safe sex materials on the sly at his regular social services job. A strange contradiction presented itself: although nobody wanted to divert precious government money to the AIDS committee, everyone -- including out-patients, journalists, bureaucrats, doctors and social workers -- was referred to their group.

John's apartment looked like Grand Central, with people tramping through and phones ringing at all hours. At his own expense, John flew to Atlanta for an AIDS conference and left Andrew his keys so he could stuff envelopes over the weekend. A reporter from *The Globe and Mail* called, explaining he was writing an article on the underfunding of AIDS services in Quebec. Hallelujah! She needed certain statistics immediately, since all the hospitals and government offices were closed for the weekend. Andrew raced over to John's regular office, where all the AIDS committee files were kept under lock and key. He knew John wouldn't mind if he rooted through the documents for such an important article.

It was Saturday; the office was empty. Andrew went straight to John's desk, which sat in front of a window on the twenty-first floor that looked out towards the river. A small silver key unlocked the filing cabinet next to John's desk, leading Andrew to a file marked "AIDS COMMITTEE." There was a letter from a member of Parliament, explaining reasons for lack of funding; a proposal for a hot-line service that had been denied; an abortive application to hire summer students; and hundreds of clippings, along with a thick envelope marked "AIDS CASES - QUEBEC", and stamped "CONFIDENTIAL" beneath it. He flipped idly through the charts. Every month's new cases were listed on a separate sheet in alphabetical order, pinpointing the date of diagnosis and the doctor. At the end of the column an X appeared if the patient had already died, followed by the date. He went back month by month, looking for a summary of the statistics. When he got back about a year, a name suddenly left off the page:

BARNES, Bruce
January 12, 1985
Dr. Emery, Montreal General Hospital
Diagnosis: AIDS

He felt woozy and lowered himself into the chair. *Sit down before you fall down. So that's why John kept the files away from me.* He briefly entertained the thought that he had also been infected, but then suppressed it. At that moment it occurred to him that Bruce was dying, and then his mind went blank.

He forgot to phone the reporter back, and went for a long walk. He strayed up to the mountain like a lost lamb. His running shoes crunched through the crispy leaves. *Why us? After everything we've been through already, how come we're the ones dying? Are we so undeserving of God's affection?* He staggered over to a gray boulder, embraced it with both arms and wept, thinking of the sad, unfulfilled lives of gay men he had known along the way. *Oh God, and maybe me... there I go, acting like a victim again.* Eventually the sun came out and he skidded down the hill. His heart was yanked apart by two forces - fear and anger - the way Popeye and Brutus used to pull Olive Oyl. As he made his way down St. Urbain Street, the graffiti, spray-painted on the wall of a deserted house, read:

AIDS: THE DISEASE THAT TURNS FRUITS INTO VEGETABLES

He went straight to Bruce's apartment. By the look on his face as he opened the door, Andrew was the last person he expected to see. He had lost some weight and, for the first time ever, was wearing a full beard. Still, he looked very good.

"I was in the neighborhood," he said sugar-sweetly as they climbed the stairs together.

The apartment was in the process of reverting to the junk-heap Andrew had moved into five years before. Bruce, he could tell, was nervous and flattered by the visit, especially after all the months of utter rejection on Andrew's part. After the second beer he inquired in an off-hand fashion about Bruce's health. They discussed common friends, vacations, work; everything except what was on their minds. Bruce looked up at Andrew and said suddenly:

"You know."

"Yes."

"John told you."

"No, I found out by accident."

The shadow of shame that had covered his face was quickly supplanted by anger.

"Some accident!" he snapped. "You were spying on me!"

"Look, Bruce, as far as I'm concerned, our relationship is over," Andrew said, surprised at how adult he sounded. "But I'm concerned about your health."

"Oh yeah?" he snorted sarcastically (as only an ex-lover could). "So now all of a sudden you're worried about me? Well, that's really fucking cute. If you really cared about me you'd be here instead of screwing around."

Andrew realized that "screwing around", used in this context, meant extramarital sex. They were still married as far as Bruce was concerned.

"Five years," Bruce said bitterly, while Andrew slumped back down on the couch and lit a cigarette. "I gave you five years of my life, and all you do is give me shit."

"When I said I was concerned," Andrew said, "it's because I'm worried about who you're going to infect!"

They were back to the good old days of their relationship, with accusations and denials being hurled back and forth, guilt splattering the walls like shit hitting a fan.

"I'm not going to leave here until you promise to remain celibate!" Andrew said.

"Well, you're on your high horse now, huh? What I do with my dick is my own business!"

"It's everybody's business!"

"Don't tell me what to do! I'll do whatever I want with whoever I want!"

"Then I'll just have to warn people to stay away from you," Andrew said, rising.

"Hey! My generation fought for gay rights!" he spat. "Just so you ungrateful little bastards could screw whoever you wanted. So don't you dare tell me I can't screw whoever I like!"

"You're a lot sicker than I thought," Andrew said, unnerved.

Three days later John arrived from Atlanta.

"Why did you hide Bruce's illness?" Andrew screamed.

"Because it's confidential," he said thinly.

Even *he* didn't sound altogether convinced.

"That's bullshit!" Andrew said. "You've put lots of men at risk just to cover up his sexual activity!"

When John denied this, Andrew pointed out that he had seen Bruce have unsafe sex with at least eight different men at the baths in just one night.

"You don't need a degree in mathematics to figure that one out!" Andrew said. "You're the head of the AIDS committee, for God's sake. Who the hell do you think you are? You think *you* can play God and decide who's going to live and who's going to die? The virus doesn't work that way!"

"Andrew, you're being theatrical again."

"Fuck you! All you older guys, it's the same thing. Screw in the name of the revolution, right? Nothing else matters, right? It doesn't matter who you infect, it doesn't matter whose rights you trample on, as long as you get your rocks off, that's the important thing. And if anybody doesn't agree with your ideology, then they're 'repressed,' right? They're 'hysterical' or 'theatrical' or 'reactionary!' Find another do-gooder!" he raged, and stormed out.

A few days later Andrew told Hunter everything. He said he would continue helping him, but wanted nothing more to do with the committee. Hunter sipped his tea with a furrowed brow until his tirade was finished.

"John is an old friend," Hunter said after a long silence. "He phoned me in tears yesterday and explained the whole story. Andrew, don't throw the baby out with the bath-water. John is working in a full-time job to support himself, and he does another full-time job on the committee on his own time. And to top it off, a lot of his close friends are dying. He can't do everything! I can understand that you're upset, but don't blame it on John. Don't you think he's told Bruce to practise safe sex? I'd say, if you're feeling this way, stay away from the committee for a while."

"But I still want to do something," Andrew said.

"Good," he said, as though he had been waiting for the right moment. "Can you help on our PWA Committee?"

"But I thought it was only for people with AIDS," Andrew said slowly.

"Uh-huh. But there's something you could help us with. The next meeting is going to be at my place in a couple of weeks."

* * *

The first snow arrived just after Hallowe'en. It melted into little grey smudges, then evaporated -- another sign that winter was around the corner. At this time of the year, as Andrew cut through the back alley first thing in the morning to pick up the paper from the *dépanneur*, the puddles would be veiled in a crust of ice that crunched when he touched the toe of his boot lightly on it. In a few weeks the puddles would be no longer crispy, but frozen through and through.

Although he was on unemployment at the time, he was allowed to take courses on a part-time basis. As he flipped through the calendar at Concordia's guidance office he ran into Randy Dupont, a tall pony-tailed languages professor who worked at Bruce's Cegep. He had met him at various political and social functions. Randy was an infamous gossip, and alluded immediately to their break-up.

"As you can see," Andrew said, egging him on, "I'm not exactly in mourning."

"And neither is Bruce, *obviously*," Randy said with a smirk.

"Oh, so you've seen him cruising around too."

"Oh, honey," Randy said, flapping a wrist. "Where *haven't* I seen him! The man is utterly *tireless*. I saw him on the mountain last Sunday afternoon with some gorgeous hunk in tow. The kid looked like a dog with his tongue hanging out!" *Poor kid. That was me once*

"That's Bruce for ya, all right," Andrew said, hiding his sorrow. "See ya."

* * *

It was pitch black inside the sweat-lodge. All I could see in front of me was the orange glow from the hot rocks in front of me. Mr. Coon started off in English and welcomed "our brother," which was me, because I was the only white person there. He explained the ceremony had four stages. During the first round, we were supposed to pray for ourselves individually; in other words, I was supposed to meditate on myself. In the second round, we were supposed to pray for others in the group; in the third round, we could pray for different people; and the fourth round was like a free wish. Then he switched to Cree or Ojibway. Some of the elders said some prayers and then Mr. Coon started wailing and shaking his rattle. He sprinkled some water on the rocks and the heat rose in waves.

Hi-ya-hi-ya-hi-yayaya

The heat was almost unbearable. Then I heard the men pounding their chests and the whole sweat-lodge just shrieked. The attendants opened the flaps from the outside and cold air blasted

in over our bodies, dripping with sweat. We lay around on the straw for a few minutes, recuperating.

* * *

The PWA meeting was late getting started. Andrew had to carry a few wheelchairs upstairs, since Hunter lived on the second floor. The phone kept ringing, announcing late-comers and last-minute cancellations. The men were a bit uncomfortable with Andrew around. He assumed that his role was to set things up and leave, but Hunter insisted he stay.

"You sure he's not with the press?" one of them whispered loudly to Hunter.

It was the most pathetic gathering of people Andrew had ever witnessed. Ben, who was unofficially chairing the meeting, was a handsome, sharp-beaked man with wire-rimmed glasses. Diagnosed quite recently, he only had a limp and a slight shortness of breath; by far, he was the most agile man in the group. The most seriously ill was Charles, whose entire body seemed to have shrunken to nothing. He wiggled in his wheelchair like a little boy in a high chair; his shirt and pants, much too large for him, flapped like a set of hand-me-downs. Ben cleared his throat and started the proceedings. After taking attendance and discussing new business, he said in a straightforward tone:

"Now, the main topic we're discussing tonight is euthanasia -- that is, mercy-killing. We've all done some research and we'll be presenting different aspects of the question. Hunter has asked for this young man to attend because, as I understand it, he's sympathetic and willing to give us a hand when we need it."

Although his face registered nothing, a chill brushed up Andrew's spine. He sat riveted in his chair for the next hour while every member of the circle talked about their views on suffering and death, and debated the overlapping concepts of suicide and murder.

Ben's opening remarks were general in nature. He talked about the "do-gooders" in the medical establishment and in social services for whom euthanasia was a taboo. He discussed illness as a metaphor, quoted Shirley MacLaine, raised the question of individual rights and presented a history of euthanasia in a cross-cultural perspective. Hunter looked almost scholarly in his half-moon glasses, was the next to speak.

"There are some states in the U.S. where euthanasia has been all but decriminalized," he said, reading from his notes. "In Canada, no distinction exists between a regular killing and a mercy killing. Anybody found guilty of killing a loved one, even if that person *wants* to die, faces the same punishment as a regular murderer. There is a minimum twenty-year sentence for first-degree murder, and second-degree murder is between ten and twenty. In some cases the lawyer can get the charge reduced to manslaughter. Now, according to the Criminal Code, if you pay somebody else to do it not only can the contract killer be charged, but also the person who paid to have it done in the first place. That's about it."

"Jim's going to talk about euthanasia and loved ones," said Ben, nodding to a man wrapped in a thick blanket on the sofa with a pile of notes on his lap.

"I couldn't go to the library to research my topic," he said, blushing a little. "Two years ago I asked my lover, Bill, I said, 'Bill, if the pain gets too bad, would you help me pull the plug?' Well, I didn't say it just like *that*, I sort of buttered him up a bit, you

know. He said, 'How could you ever *say* that? You're going to be just fine, I'm never going to leave you,' all that stuff. So then I did a kind of survey. I got other people in this room to put the same question to their lovers, or to a close friend or a family member if they didn't have a lover.

"This was the result: most people reacted the same way Bill did when I asked him the first time. At the beginning they say, 'How could you ever say that?' and then as the years wear on, the reality of a terminal illness begins to sink in. Not always, but quite often, loved ones will start to adopt a more accepting approach towards euthanasia when they realize how much physical and emotional suffering is involved with something like AIDS or terminal cancer. Especially when they realize what a strain it's putting on their own lives. So, in my case, I'm happy to announce that my lover has consented to do what's necessary to put me out when I wish it. Of course, some loved ones will never accept it for moral or religious reasons. But I would say that you'll never know unless you push them on it."

Andrew focused on the floor, afraid that some glances might fall on him, trying to determine whether he was for or against them. He had never really thought about the issue, although it was hard not to empathize. Still, he dreaded the final discussion topic.

"Euthanasia techniques," said a wiry man named Martin, a bald and bearded ball of energy, holding up various brochures and newsletters. "I got these from Dying With Dignity, which is a euthanasia lobby group. They have general information on legal battles and so forth. They also have information on how you can kill yourself at home; you know, like Drano milkshakes. I was just reading a *lovely* recipe for rat poison stew!"

The group tittered nervously.

"Unfortunately," he continued in a more serious tone, "these home remedies can only be used for sick people who are able-bodied enough to administer it themselves and leave a suicide note. Otherwise, if an autopsy is performed, the loved one could very easily be suspected of murder. The other thing is it's hard to sneak home remedies into a hospital. But there are other euthanasia methods that work well in a hospital setting - - in fact, a hospital is actually the *best* place to perform euthanasia because there are a lot more possible suspects. It's much harder to lay charges."

"You make it sound so simple," said Ben. "What about all the expensive security systems?"

"It *is* simple," said Martin. "For one thing, a lot of gay people work in hospitals as nurses and orderlies. My lover works in personnel at the General and he certainly knows who *is* and who *isn't*!"

The chuckling dissipated once Martin got onto the grisly subject of how to kill patients in their hospital beds. Andrew listened with a mixture of horror and fascination. He was too terrified to ask where he fit into it all.

There are two ways to kill people in a hospital.

The first method involves tampering with patients attached to an IV tube. You enter the ward at night while the patient is sleeping. There is a juncture between the bottle of nutrient and the tube that feeds into the patient's arm. You take a syringe full of lethal fluid and inject it into the tube at the critical juncture. Between the time the fluid is injected and the time the patient dies in his or her sleep, the tube that was connected to the patient's arm is replaced and discarded. Some chemicals are impossible to trace in the system; even if an autopsy reveals the presence of foreign chemicals, there is no

way to prove how they got in there, providing gloves have been used in the handling of tube and bottle. When the patient is seriously ill, the death is almost never questioned.

The other method, designed for patients connected to life-support systems, is more complicated but even more undetectable. These machines are supposedly tamper-proof; in the event that the system is in any way disconnected, it triggers an alarm at the nurse's work-station. The trick is to distract the nurse long enough to disconnect the warning buzzer. At that point it's a matter of pulling the plug -- literally. You simply pull the plug out of the wall and wait for the patient to stop breathing. Then you plug it back in before reconnecting the buzzer. The body is discovered the next morning -- dead, apparently, of natural causes. With both methods, Martin explained, hospital insiders are absolutely necessary.

"But what if the staff isn't sympathetic?" asked Ben.

"Hospital workers are notoriously underpaid," Martin said. "It's just a question of greasing a few palms."

"And this is where you come in, Andrew," said Hunter.

And now all eyes were upon him. Andrew felt like the white-haired Mr. Phelps in a trench coat, sneaking down a back alley and pulling a tape recorder out of a garbage can that said:

"Your mission, Andrew, should you decide to accept it, is to infiltrate Montreal General Hospital, don hospital garb and befriend the staff in the aim of setting up an insidious network that will allow for the humane, expeditious deaths of people suffering with AIDS. This tape will self-destruct in five seconds."

"I hope we haven't put you on the spot," said Martin.

Andrew laughed -- not to be vindictive, but because it could have won a prize as the understatement of the year. Then he realized he would have to say something quickly or arouse even more suspicion. A dozen eyes -- eyes pleading to be released from their suffering -- circled him, immobilized him, tied him to his chair. His breath quickened and sweat streamed over his ribs. He pondered his future. Six months or two years from now, would he be like them, wizened and twisted beyond recognition? And if he ended up back on the isolation ward, who would put *him* out of his misery? In an instant, he understood his role. He would be their Angel of Death.

"I'll do anything I can," he said.

* * *

It was just before Christmas, as many hospital staff were taking holidays, that he began his new vocation. The plan was to centralize operations by gradually getting PWAs to receive their treatment at the General, where Martin's lover worked. It was the first time Andrew had ever worked the midnight shift. He didn't object to the work -- cleaning bedpans, changing sheets, fetching emergency medication -- but he hated the dead pace. In the beginning he had angered his fellow workers, even his superiors, by working too quickly. Fortunately the endless stream of coffee breaks and card-playing offered him ample opportunity to find out who was simpatico. Within days, he'd befriended Joe, an Italian from St. Leonard, who quite clearly had his eye on Andrew. They went out for breakfast one morning a couple of weeks later.

"I've seen you somewhere," Joe said. "I know it."

Andrew suggested Le Garage or perhaps the popular club K.O.X., but Joe was adamant he had seen him somewhere else. In fact, Joe had probably seen him on screen, but Andrew didn't dare raise the possibility that he was anything else but another fag on the midnight shift.

Meanwhile, he had enrolled in an introductory sociology course at Concordia. One day Andrew decided to make another surprise visit, this time to Bruce's office at the Cegep. Mark had mentioned that he had run into Bruce at the baths; the pity Andrew had initially and instinctively felt for Bruce was quickly losing ground to disgust. Bruce looked tired and cold when Andrew found him; a supplementary electric baseboard heater churned hot air into an already over-heated office. Bruce spent the whole time talking about Andrew, lauding his decision to take a university course, and offering to lend him certain books. When Andrew tried to shift the conversation towards Bruce's health, Bruce explained he was already late for a meeting.

"I heard you were at the baths," Andrew said gravely. "You have to stop being Mr. Superstud."

He stood behind his desk, clenching his fists.

"Get out of my life, you little creep!" he seethed. "You're worse than the fucking born-again Christians! Now get the hell out of here before I call campus security!"

* * *

It was a brutal winter. Andrew went to work in the dark, went to bed just after daybreak and woke up at sundown. He tried to channel some of the hopelessness he felt into his studies. The papers he wrote on AIDS and euthanasia helped him put the suffering he saw around him into some kind of context. He and Mark pined for the Brazilian palms that had shaded them only a year before. They began to bicker, cooped up for days on end. After receiving their first exorbitant heating bill, they shivered their way through the rest of the bone-chilling winter wearing several sweaters. Gina ground salt into their wounds by sending postcards from sunny Malta, sunny Tunisia, and sunny Crete. He and Mark stayed out of each other's hair by taking care of Naomi's place. She and her boyfriend were in the Seychelles for six weeks working on a documentary. Rio had spoiled Andrew. He realized he was no longer capable of stoically enduring four months of miserable winter. *It's a third of my life, for God's sake.* The sad truth about Montreal winters was that it was a class thing. If you were poor, you froze. You spent half your money trying to heat a crummy apartment, and half your energy wading through gusting snow, shivering on windy street-corners waiting for buses that never came. If you had money you went somewhere warm; more importantly, you could afford to live in a housing situation where you ran from your warm kitchen to your warm car to your warm office.

* * *

One Sunday afternoon, while flipping through the magazine *L'Avion Rose* at the gay bookstore, Andrew had an idea. He phoned Pascal Beaudoin, the editor who had

interviewed him during his film days. Pascal invited him over to his office on St. Joseph Street.

"I hear you and Bruce aren't together any more," he said, offering Andrew a coffee.

"It's been over a year now."

"How is he doing anyway? Do you see him much?"

"That's the reason for my visit."

He told Pascal he wanted to write an article about the fact that Bruce had AIDS and was still promiscuous.

"I'm afraid that's out of the question," he said briskly.

"Why?"

"Because Bruce is a friend of mine," he said.

"You just said you hadn't talked to him for two years," Andrew said.

"*Peu importe*. This is a serious magazine, not a scandal sheet. We're not in the business of destroying people's reputations."

Andrew tried another tack. He asked a question guaranteed to elicit a response when posed to any professional born between 1940 and 1955:

"Where's your sense of social responsibility?"

"What about my responsibility as an editor?" Pascal countered, avoiding the question. "We would be a laughing-stock if anyone found out that we had allowed you to denounce and defame your ex-lover on our pages."

"But don't you feel you should warn people if you know there's a -- a *killer* on the loose?" Andrew said.

"Shame, shame, Andrew," he said, with the same condescending tone that the whole age group often used when dealing with younger *confrères* like Andrew. "You're so melodramatic! Don't you see what will happen? Even if it's true what you say about Bruce, if we portray a negative stereotype in our magazine we fall right into the hands of the straight media. You know how much they hate us as it is. Why feed the flames of homophobia? It's better to play up the positive."

"Pascal," Andrew said. "Your lover sleeps around. How would *you* feel if he had sex with Bruce at the baths and then brought you home a little present?"

The skin on Pascal's face tightened and turned white.

"I don't have time for these petty vendettas!" he said, raising his voice a little. "Now, if you don't mind, I have work to do!"

* * *

Hunter was back at the General with pneumonia. Andrew would drop into his room during his shifts, smuggling in pots of cannabis tea. Hunter was down to eighty-five pounds and fading fast. He looked like a shaved mouse, a kind of laboratory animal with tubes shooting out of every orifice. His withered body was a map of pain. Andrew saw the outline of bones he never knew existed.

"The candida is spreading so fast they can't stop it," Hunter said in a detached voice. "And this interferon is freaking my body out. But you know what's the worst, Andrew? It's the pain. I feel it everywhere now -- in my arms, in my lungs, in the soles of my feet, everywhere, it's just --" He looked through Andrew as he talked. "-- you don't know

what it's like to be in such pain. It's like an alarm clock. It's the first thing you feel in the morning when you wake up. The pain gets so bad that it breaks through your painkillers and your sleeping pills and you can't think about anything else all day. All you want to do is sleep. Andrew," he said, pulling him in closely.

Before he said it, Andrew knew what he wanted.

"I want to die. Let me die. Please."

In that moment of anguish, on a hospital ward at 2 a.m., two people came to a decision.

"When?" was all Andrew could manage to say. There was a lump the size of a golf ball in his throat. His eyes sizzled.

"As soon as you can. I've got everything ready. My will is in the top drawer beside the bed. Take the bank card. I wrote the code number on the back. Take all the money out before I die and use it for yourself. The funeral's already paid for."

Andrew stared at him, disbelieving.

"Good-bye," he said, looking up at the ceiling. "Now go."

He pulled up his blanket and turned on his side.

Andrew left the ward and sought Joe. He pulled him into a storage room, told him what was happening and bawled his eyes out.

"What am I gonna do?" Andrew sobbed.

Joe hugged Andrew for a long time, but said nothing.

"Joe, can you help me?" Andrew said finally.

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"I - I've gotta find *some* way to put him out of his misery."

"And how do you intend to do that?"

"I was hoping you might know."

Joe stepped back and stared at Andrew, transfixed.

"What do you think I am, a murderer?"

Andrew began to cry again. He covered his eyes with one hand and turned towards the wall.

"How would you like it if that was *you* in there?" Andrew said, almost angrily. "If you were in that bed and you asked me to do it, I'd do it!"

"Andrew, this is so dangerous," Joe whispered. "It's a criminal offence. It's like murder, you know, even if you're doing it for somebody else."

At that point, Andrew realized Joe knew what he was talking about. Joe was the one. Andrew wouldn't let Joe go until he promised to do it. Reluctantly Joe agreed to make inquiries and let him know the following night.

Andrew was so afraid of chickening out that he didn't stop to see Hunter the next day. Joe told him everything was arranged.

"You mean tonight?" Andrew said, a bit shocked.

"Why not?"

"I thought tomorrow I should see him for one--"

Joe's dark eyes hushed him. He had seen his own share of death, Andrew knew.

"Don't torture yourself," Joe said.

"But his papers are in the drawer."

"I'll bring you everything, trust me. Now go back to work."

Joe came back with a thick envelope towards the end of the shift. He lingered, squeezed Andrew's arm, then left him to mourn his dear friend's death.

At first, Andrew's feelings were mixed. He refused to believe the act had actually been carried out, but at the same time he was afraid of going into Hunter's room to find out. He walked home in a quandary. Was Hunter really dead? And if so, who really killed him? Who was to blame? At home his heart pounded as he dialled the hospital switchboard.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Hunter Browning in room 822."

"One moment, please."

There was a long pause.

"Who's calling please?"

"I'm a friend of the patient."

"Our records show that Mr. Browning died last night in his sleep."

There was another long pause.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you," she said gently.

"I'm sorry too," Andrew said.

* * *

The attendants put the flaps down for the second round. In the darkness, Mr. Coon went back to English again for a little while and talked about suffering. "No gain without pain," he said. So then I got down to some serious praying. I felt something inside the sweatlodge, but it's

hard to describe. A kind of spirit, maybe. Except it felt almost solid, as if all those prayers had filled up the space around us so we could barely move!

The water sizzled and the steam kept filling up the tiny space that seemed so full already. I must admit that of all the hundreds of times I went to church, I had never really prayed like this before. It was the day I learned to pray. It was the day I learned that somebody or something out there was listening. It felt like the skin was peeling right off my body. It got to a point where I couldn't really meditate because I was too concerned about being burnt alive. The more I tensed my muscles, the more it stung. The trick was to crouch close to the ground, which made me feel like I was bowing to the Great Spirit. After that we passed around the "peace pipe." I held the bowl in my right hand and with my left hand I grasped the end of the long stem. Then I twisted the bowl in my palm and passed it on to my left.

* * *

For days he walked around in a stupor. Poor Hunter. A year ago Andrew had thrilled to his life story, never believing the diseases would torture him the way they did; they were so confident a cure was imminent. Intellectually he was grateful Hunter's suffering was over, but emotionally Andrew was plagued by the knowledge that he had taken somebody's life.

Another difficult question remained: what to do about Bruce? If the gay press was going to stick its head in the sand, Andrew felt he had no choice but to try the straight media. He had no idea where to start. In the movies, there was always a City Desk. To his surprise, the switchboard put him through.

"City Desk."

"Hello, my name is Andrew Lacasse. Maybe you've heard of me?"

"Should I?"

"I was in this documentary a few years ago about male prostitution."

"Is that what you're phoning about?"

"No."

"Well, what is it? We're really busy around here."

"I have this story about AIDS that maybe you should write about."

"There are lots of stories about AIDS we should write about."

"No, but this is big news."

"Oh yeah? Hang on."

"Science."

"Hello, my name is Andrew Lacasse, and I had a story about AIDS you might be interested in."

"I don't think so. We just did a big feature article last week."

"But this is big news!"

"What's the story?"

"There's a man in Montreal who has AIDS and is spreading it."

"Since when is that news?"

"But he's doing it on purpose!"

"How do you know?"

"Because he knows he has it and goes around having unsafe sex."

"How do you know he's having unsafe sex?"

"I've seen him! He goes to the bath-houses and he also goes up to Mount Royal Park."

"This guy has AIDS and has sex in the park?"

"That's right."

There was a short silence.

"Give me your name and number, I'll call you back."

The next day, he phoned.

"I talked to the editor about that AIDS story. Look, we're running a newspaper here, not a tabloid."

"I know."

"I'd like to help you out, but the editor won't touch it with a ten-foot-pole. It's too sensitive right now. We're in court at the moment because of the gay schoolteacher story. The Human Rights Commission is on our tail. It's like, you can't even say 'gay' anymore without somebody suing you for being homophobic. It's just not a very popular issue at the moment."

"You mean it won't sell newspapers."

"It too inflammatory. We would have to get photographs, witnesses, and then we run the risk of getting sued for entrapment. For a newspaper article, it's too complicated. Sorry we can't help you out."

At the time, Andrew didn't realize that one newspaper's rejection was another paper's coup. He assumed that all editors would have the same fears, so he gave up.

One morning he and Joe went out for breakfast. Andrew let it drop that Hunter had other friends who were more or less in the same situation. Joe's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"I helped you with that guy because he was your friend!" he whispered, turning around to see if anyone was listening.

"I know! I appreciate it," Andrew said. "But I have a lot of friends with AIDS. Do you know anyone in the hospital who might be able to help them out?"

"You're crazy, Andrew! I can't believe you're telling me this!"

Andrew sighed and changed the subject. A few weeks later, he broached the subject again, explaining that he had a "rich" friend in the hospital. Joe perked his ears up.

"In a situation like that, people would have to stick their necks out," Andrew began cautiously.

"Damn right," Joe said.

"I mean, why should *they* get stuck holding the bag?"

"That's right."

"Unless there's something in it for them."

Joe looked at Andrew for a long time.

"The nurses on the cancer ward get relatives coming up to them all the time with their chequebooks," Joe said. "Very hush-hush."

About a week later, Joe told Andrew that a few of his friends might be able to help Andrew's friend.

"And what sort of present do you think they would like?" Andrew said, avoiding the word 'fee.'

"If they're on IV, it's pretty easy; it would only cost five hundred. But if they're on the life support it's a lot riskier because the nurse has to be away from her station. So that would be a thousand."

Death is part of life, Hunter used to say. If you fear death, he said, you'll never be able to live life to the fullest. The PWA meeting in his apartment would never fade from Andrew's mind -- those thin, desperate faces, looking towards him for help. *It's a strange way to help somebody -- by killing them*. He was starting to believe the media's summation of AIDS: a death sentence from which no one was reprieved. In a society that hated homosexuals -- and completely disowned people with AIDS -- who was he to prolong these people's suffering? If a bunch of Legionnaires or some other group of straight white men had started getting AIDS in such vast numbers, the cynics whined, a hell of a lot more money would have been spent to find a cure. Nobel prizes would have been dispensed.

For Andrew, these moot points; it all came back to *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*. It was almost as if these marginalized critics were playing Joan Crawford's role: "You wouldn't treat me this way if I wasn't a gay, a black, a prostitute or a Hispanic drug user."

"But y'are, Blanche, y'are."

Andrew was starting to feel that in the eyes of straight society, AIDS was the final solution. *Learn to live with it. And die with it. It was 1986.*

* * *

He never killed anyone directly. He liased with friends and lovers on one side and hospital staff on the other. He kept no share of the blood money. It was hard not being able to tell Mark about it, but he didn't want to implicate him. Mark, he knew, thought Andrew was wasting his life in this dead-end midnight job, taking a course here and there.

"Is there something wrong with Bruce?" he asked Andrew one day.

"Why are you asking me?"

"Naomi said he's been off sick," he said. "She phoned the Cegep and they wouldn't tell her where he was or what was wrong with him -- just that he was sick. And the phone just rings and rings at home. Do you think he's in the hospital?"

"Why are you asking me?"

"Because you work in a hospital!" he said. "Can you find out, or is that too much to ask, for Naomi's sake?"

"Oh, all right."

"He's fine," Andrew said, lying to Naomi the next day. "He's at the Royal Vic."

"Does he have AIDS?" she asked instinctively.

"No, it's just a routine set of tests."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Oh, thank God."

What really happened was this: Andrew didn't see him in the AIDS ward at the General, so he dropped by the Vic on his way home. In contrast to the General's modern design, the Vic was a foreboding Gothic structure with stark gray Victorian arches and

ivy-covered walls. It reminded him of a sanatorium in the English countryside, the type he had seen in movies; primroses on the outside, madness on the inside. The Vic probably looked similar during Norman Bethune's tenure in the thirties. The building seemed rooted into the side of the mountain, built in various chunks over the century, with passages and tunnels connecting the wings.

Without asking for permission, he went straight to the AIDS ward. He poked his head into each room; this time he had more difficulty recognizing Bruce. He had a bed by the window. His face was much thinner and he had a brush cut. His chest was sunken beneath his smock, and for the first time he looked sad and scared and fragile.

"So you finally caught up to me, huh?" he said, smiling wearily.

"I can't seem to leave you alone," Andrew said, leaning against the window.

They stared at each other in silence. The shadows from the swaying tips of the maple tree outside the third-storey window played tricks with the morning light, throwing shadows on the white curtain that was pulled half-way across, separating them from his neighbour's space. In their silence Andrew reminisced, enumerating the changes they had seen each other go through over the past six years. "Are you happy now?" Bruce said maliciously.

"Happy about what?"

"Happy that I'm finally going to die," he said.

"You'd better try something else," Andrew said tautly. "That line won't work on me. If you want sympathy, phone Naomi."

Bruce gave him a dirty look, then crooned, Broadway-style:

*I am what I am,
I don't want praise,
I don't want pity...*

He rustled the sheet can-can style and showed off his thin spotted legs, smeared with cream.

"Are you still sleeping around?" Andrew said abruptly.

"You never quit, do you?" Bruce moaned, rolling up his eyes.

"And neither do you, it would seem."

"I use condoms," Bruce said, mock-indignantly, then added with a smile: "Sometimes. But you know me, I've got such a big one, some guys just can't wait for me to take off the wrapper."

"I don't want to hear it."

"You were the one who brought it up, Andrew. Really, you'd be surprised how many guys ask me specifically *not* to use one. As far as I'm concerned, those guys get what they deserve."

"Nice guy."

"Nice guy *yourself*," he said, his bile rising by the second. "I was reading about how many AIDS symptoms are brought on by stress. I wouldn't even *be* here if it wasn't for you. You probably gave it to me! And then you just left me to die."

"I'll *kill* you!" Andrew roared.

He had never put his hands around someone's throat before, but it felt good. Within seconds, a nurse appeared.

"It's all right, ma'am," Andrew said. "He was choking. I was trying to help him."

"Who are you?" the perplexed woman asked.

"Just a friend," he said, rushing out of the room. He descended the nearest fire escape and found himself behind the hospital in a deserted walkway, filled with leaves, that wound gently up the side of the mountain.

The accumulated frustration of six years in hell with that crazy man bubbled over without warning; from that moment on, anger and revenge ruled over common sense. He started keeping tabs on Bruce, who left the hospital shortly after the incident to recuperate at home.

* * *

One Friday night, not long afterwards, Andrew cashed his cheque and spent the evening at the baths before heading to work at midnight. He was in the mood to let off some steam. Since none of his gentleman callers appealed to him, he began making the rounds. Presently he stopped in front of a door and peered into the darkened cubicle. Someone inside had turned the dimmer switch right down. It was Bruce. When he saw Andrew peek in, Bruce turned away and shook his head, afraid to speak. His body was draped in an extra sheet.

Andrew went to the police station the next day to file a complaint. Every time he repeated his story, he was told to wait, then referred to someone slightly higher up, and then someone higher. Within an hour, everyone in the precinct knew. The fact they made him wait so long to file a complaint should have tipped Andrew off that they were checking him out; how could he have known that an investigation at the General was

already underway? They duly recorded his name and address, the details of his relationship with Bruce, and where he worked. The officer in charge finally sent him home, explaining that although it was illegal to knowingly transmit a disease like syphilis in Canada, there was no law that forbade people from spreading the AIDS virus. From that moment on, he was under 24-hour surveillance.

That night over dinner he told Mark everything. Mark's life was going so well Andrew hated to drag him into the whole mess. Mark had a new lover now and had just won a scholarship to do his doctorate. Andrew admired Mark's innate conventionality and his ability to slip from one stage of life into another -- while Andrew remained errant and aimless.

"If the press ever gets ahold of *this* one --" Mark said, afraid to finish his sentence.

He went back to the Vic the next day and found Bruce back in the ward where he had last seen him -- this time attached to an IV bottle. Andrew cased the floor for emergency exits and hiding spots, then followed each potential escape route to its logical conclusion; some led to the boiler room, others to dead-end stairwells. He memorized the most direct exit and an alternative route, then went off to work at the General, where Joe gave him a syringe loaded with a lethal dose of ... something. Andrew didn't want to know.

After his shift, he went home and waited for the night to come. He became very agitated, sitting in his room, guts churning, body burning. He put his hospital garb on beneath his clothes and crumpled a plastic bag into his back pocket.

He entered the hospital just before the end of visiting hours and went up to Bruce's floor. He ducked into a bathroom down the hall and sat inside a stall for two hours until

the coast was clear. *When it rains, it pours.* Bathed in sweat, the intimate moments he had spent with Bruce came crashing over him.

I woke up pressed against his heart. I stared out the window of our guest house, hypnotized by the blue-grey sea, and sat down at the little desk to scribble my verse. We made love. Later, as we sat in our breakfast nook — just the two of us, drinking coffee by the bay window — we heard the ocean pounding outside, felt our hearts pounding inside. My palm was sweating as I clutched the wrinkled scrap of paper. It was my first poem, don't you know, I was afraid, I knew nothing, this man, he taught me everything, he touched my heart. When he read it, he kissed my hand and brushed my cheek. And then I knew.

*Waves at high tide
Rush to shore
Only to be pushed back
By their own momentum*

He peeled off his outer clothes, placed them in the plastic bag and lowered them gently into the bottom of the garbage can. He put on the surgical gloves and tied the surgeon's mask over his face. In one palm, he fidgeted with the syringe. He tiptoed breathlessly down the corridor to Bruce's room and eased the door open with a creak. At the threshold he froze, making sure everyone was asleep.

Bruce was turned away from him, snoring softly. A pale moonray shone through the venetian blinds, landing eerily on his upraised cheek, slicing his face into stripes of black and white.

*Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray, oh Lord, my soul to keep
If I should die before I wake
I pray, oh Lord, my soul to take.*

Andrew's greasy plastic-coated fingers found the critical juncture, poked in the needle and pushed down the plunger. It was over. *Don't look back.* Bruce shook violently, as though demons were flying out of him. He tried to sit up, but couldn't. He looked like Dracula rising from his coffin, sputtering and hissing and foaming. *This isn't the way it's supposed to end.*

"Maaaaaaaaaaa," he shrieked in his final breath.

Andrew bolted for the door, already blocked by a policeman. Somebody was calling his name, and then he was on the floor.

"Good-bye, my love," Andrew said, relieved.

And then he was taken away, mumbling and stumbling down the corridor, down the stairwell and into the waiting van.

* * *

The third round was the hottest thing my body had ever endured. The water splashed over the rocks again and again and again. That mysterious presence I had been feeling at the beginning grew stronger and stronger. The heat rose and the chanting got louder and louder. Suddenly there was a WHOOSH of air that scorched my body.

For a moment I thought I might be scalded alive. Not only was I about to faint, I was very confused because the blast of air was so strange; the sweat-lodge was sealed up tighter than a

drum. By the end of the third round I was crying, flowing with sweat and beating my chest. I jumped up like a man possessed, ran outside and dove into a snowbank. I rolled around for a few seconds then came back for the final round.

During the fourth round, I thought of that poor truck driver Frank. I felt so sorry for him. I prayed for his soul. By the end I felt light on my feet, and seemed to float over to the truck. We all went to a nearby house for the sweetgrass ceremony, followed by a tremendous feast. Mr. Coon came by with a thick braid of sweetgrass that was smouldering. He told me to spread the sacred smoke all over my body to heal me and protect me. When he leaned over me I noticed he had a big smile on his face. I had survived. I was a blood brother now.

THE END