



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file - Votre référence

Our file - Notre référence

NOTICE

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

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

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

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

AVIS

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

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

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

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

Canada

Snow White's Children

Patrick Salah

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

July 1994

© Patrick Salah, 1994



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED AN
IRREVOCABLE NON-EXCLUSIVE
LICENCE ALLOWING THE NATIONAL
LIBRARY OF CANADA TO
REPRODUCE, LOAN, DISTRIBUTE OR
SELL COPIES OF HIS/HER THESIS BY
ANY MEANS AND IN ANY FORM OR
FORMAT, MAKING THIS THESIS
AVAILABLE TO INTERESTED
PERSONS.

L'AUTEUR A ACCORDE UNE LICENCE
IRREVOCABLE ET NON EXCLUSIVE
PERMETTANT A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE
NATIONALE DU CANADA DE
REPRODUIRE, PRETER, DISTRIBUER
OU VENDRE DES COPIES DE SA
THESE DE QUELQUE MANIERE ET
SOUS QUELQUE FORME QUE CE SOIT
POUR METTRE DES EXEMPLAIRES DE
CETTE THESE A LA DISPOSITION DES
PERSONNE INTERESSEES.

THE AUTHOR RETAINS OWNERSHIP
OF THE COPYRIGHT IN HIS/HER
THESIS. NEITHER THE THESIS NOR
SUBSTANTIAL EXTRACTS FROM IT
MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE
REPRODUCED WITHOUT HIS/HER
PERMISSION.

L'AUTEUR CONSERVE LA PROPRIETE
DU DROIT D'AUTEUR QUI PROTEGE
SA THESE. NI LA THESE NI DES
EXTRAITS SUBSTANTIELS DE CELLE-
CI NE DOIVENT ETRE IMPRIMES OU
AUTREMENT REPRODUITS SANS SON
AUTORISATION.

ISBN 0-315-97681-0

Canada

ABSTRACT

Snow White's Children

Patrick Salah

The imbrication of desire and identification and the blurring of boundaries between subject and object are, in various formulations, constitutive strategies in much contemporary writing addressing the operations of colonialism and subjectivity, representation and sexuality. The increasingly fraught relationship between the writer and the written is itself staged as a complex interplay of identity, difference and desire. This thesis attempts to enact an examination not only of the unstable, multiple identifications and desires of a community of characters but also of the unstable and multiple identifications and desires of their writer/recorder. In a series of linking (meta)fictions, long and prose poems it unfolds overlapping, in places, contradictory narratives, punctuated at times by meditative or explosive voices of uncertain origin.

The scene is Halifax, Montreal, a northern Gulf island, memory. Poised somewhere between the Street and the Suburbs, Queer clubs and Punk arcades, the mid eighties and the early nineties, a writers' fantasies of his life entwine with reminiscences of a community...

*For Laura and Ummni
and the Back Streets and Moka crowds*

Thanks also to the friends who through criticism, support, tolerance and love enabled this: Jennifer, Dana, Constance, David, Eric, Luba, Elyse, Veronica, Joanie, Gwen, Drew, Michelle, Catherine, Shawn, Corey, Roo, my advisor Mary, and most especially, Samantha.

CONTENTS

Snow White's Children	1
Names, Remembered, Keep Slipping Away	14
Three Versions of a Defenestration	16
Wish You Were Her	51
Liszt Disappears	69
Tragic Lesbians	74
Double Agent	75
In Her Coffin, Beauty Sleeps	85

Snow White's Children

Contact lenses are too dry, like being dusted. Blink twice. For all the 'cid pump'n through me, might as well be dusted. I'm so fucking blank. This is bad. Cops may be coming, any sec, now. I'm reeling, near keeling over the side of two stories of scaffolding, staring into dark that ripples a lovely fuchsia and green. Two stories down the oil slick rainbow puddles still hold the imprints of my docs in the sludge. It's like I can see the trace of my body in time. In this alleyway, back of the west end mall, New Year's shadows are dancing crazy. Damn, I'm ripped. How did I get here?

Left Micky's trying to become invisible, inaudible. Pretty much silent now, except for the sharp rasping noise I make trying to breathe, except for the fingers won't stop their rapping; independent little fuckers, making like lacquered spiders cruising up the iron scaff beam. Crouched in the shadow and the mist, listening for the squelching of boots echoing up from black sludge, or else sirens.

Nothing close by, to trust my ears. I don't. Nazis in squad cars.

If I want to go up further could make a go at the fire escape, lie low, keep quiet until things chill a bit. On the roof looking down into the parking lot, surrounding suburban nightscape, wanting only X-mas eggnog. Ideal. Except for the vertigo's giving me a headache. Too bad, it's fucking beautiful up here. I have a flash of this scene, a city built of scaffolding, truly Blade Runner. Where are the Replicants? I've got to get out of here.

Rappatapparap-- Got to keep fingers quiet. I'm suppressing the giggles. I shove hands into pockets of my leather. Feeling something wet, something sharp-- right! Some thing, boy! That's my knife and your blood, Micko. Start sliding down the scaffolding.

Aw Fuck. Body buckles and I'm against this frame of cold iron, air and dark, puking. Gotta get out of here, hide out. (I remember now: cold iron is deadly to Fairies.)

I think, maybe it down to the Club, clean yourself up boy, someone will take you home... Yeah, right. Smelling of vomit and I'm sure there's a run in my stockings. Micko, why'd ya fuck up so bad.

So get a move on, so get a move on, I think, just get downtown and lose the knife and party. Drop half a story into a snow bank. Only hurt a bit. Everything's easy.

I drop the knife and dig my hands into the snow bank, scratchy, oily, gray crystal freezing. Lady Macbeth should have worn gloves.

Go out into the parking lot. No cars. Completely desolate. Except a few mounds covered in fresh snow. No cops for miles. Nobody but me. Nobody knows. How could they? Relax, man, relax...

I cross to the shelter and wait for the twenty-nine. I wish I were wearing jeans; my skirt's tight and ends way above my knees. Fucking stupid to be out like this. Forget the cold, I'll be lucky if I don't get the shit kicked out of me by either skins or sailors out bashing. That would be fucking hilarious. After all the shit I've given Jamie for being such a fag. He'd kill himself laughing. He's a sweet kid, my baby brother. Like I really care who or what he sleeps with. I've got my own shit to deal with. Wonder what'll happen with the band? Mick out of the picture, me going down, and Inga, god knows about Inga. Lover's triangle from hell.

There's a thought. Inga. Where do you suppose she is, probably off skanking some pretty boy rocker, probably-- don't even think about it.

The wind picks up, starts lifting the snow, batting it around. Blinding, could blind you. I get lost looking at it. Don't know how much time passes,

there's something, someone stumbling towards me across the lot. I watch him, feeling wary, thinking of Mick in his bathtub. Not Lady Macbeth, Charlotte Corday. Thinking, did I miss any of the blood? What did I do with the bandanna? Micko has this black bandana, with white skulls all over it. I used it to wipe down everything I might have left prints on. They can't do anything with it though, the cops I mean. There's no way they could tell.

If I still had the knife--

It's just this old crow. Jesus, for a moment I had this fantasy, that it was Mick's dad. Uh, sorry sir, I had to kill your son. He was fucking Inga you see, and she and I-- well, we were fated for one another, we're not like you folks, sir. Vampires. Angels. That's us. Better to stay out of our way, Mick should've. But it's not Mr. Lowell, just some old woman. God, I'm all hyped up. Real paranoid.

I feel better looking at her. Chill goes out of me. Makes me remember I'm young and beautiful, to die for; who cares what I'm wearing. This hag is dying in front of me. Decrepit. She sidles past me into the shelter, removes her hood. She looks me up and down, spits, then looks at me apologetically.

"It's cold." She croaks.

"Yeah," I say. I'm wondering if she lives round here, if she knows Mick.

"You can't complain. I know what you are, I do...". Creepy, sounds like she does. My hand grips for the murder weapon. Fuck, how could she know...

I take another look at her and relax. She's just some old lady. Got a guilty conscience there son?

I look for something to look away at. My watch, I remember I have a watch. I can't make out the hands. My nails are pointy, painted black. My

hands are still rust coloured. The shelter barely keeps out the wind. I stick my hands back in my pockets and pretend I'm somewhere else. At the Club, chatting up some prep deb slut, or better yet, at Inga's. I'd like to close my eyes. Wish I had my walkman. Could really go for some Cure right now, or XTC.

She steps closer, shambles really, I have to notice. She doesn't look like a bag lady, or a crazy for that matter. Better dressed for the weather than I am, even if the clothing is all Sally Ann. She's got a bag full of what looks like library books. I shouldn't have reacted at all. She was looking for an opening and now she has one.

"You can pretend otherwise of course, try to set yourself apart, but they know you won't succeed. There is no escape for any of us. 'Such is the doom of man'. You should know that by now. They've taken some of your friends, tortured them. I read it in the papers. Horrible! I felt so sad for you. All those broken bones. Bloody vises, saws and hammers. And not a whit of help to be had from the constabulary. You brought it on yourselves, when you flouted the protection of Mother Church. In the papers they are calling you punks. I know you're not. I know what you really are." Her eyes crinkle up and she smiles cunningly, scrutinizing me up and down. Looking for signs.

Loony, is what she is. They ride the buses a lot. Normally don't bother me though. She's probably just out of the hospital for the holidays.

Then she says, "I've seen you before. You're not invisible, no matter what you make believe. When I go to do my shopping I see you hiding in alleyways and backstreets, I do indeed. And looking out my window before going to bed, don't think I can't see you, taking your tea in graveyards, protected from the moon by the tall buildings. I can."

"What. Are. You. Talk. Ing. About." Still really hard to speak. Good thing it was only half a tab.

No matter, she's still rattling on. "Mostly it's what you've done to yourselves with the kohl and the dye-- you've released the free play of illusions. You thought you were just playing. Now the light and the dark wrap you up, make you like Her."

Old bag may be crazy, but she's brilliant too, I'm transfixed. She should be on telly.

"You young things, abandoning the warmth of your parents' homes makes you terribly wild. In the cold and the dark you emulate the beasts of the forest, foxes and owls, wolves and bears; creatures encountered only in fairy tales and zoos. You all have hair, black like the wing of the raven and your eyes are like raccoons for all the paint. And you wrap yourselves in cowls and cloaks, animal skins and furs, all as black as the night you wake to." She winks at me conspiratorially. "You're not unlike the mortal children vampires' would have if they could. I imagine you're flattered I say so."

She blinks, lost for a moment, then continues "Boys and girls alike, you subsume your sex for this. For your rites paint your lips bright whore red. You are all little white roses soaked in blood, and with your fine complexions like French aristocrats and nightshade hair you remind me of Snow White. You and your friends are Snow White's children, only grown up monstrous and somehow real. You'll be punished for that. There are rules you've broken. It's already happening."

She stops. I just look at her, agog. It's twisted, but I have to say, she's got the downtown scene pegged. She should write for *Propaganda*.

Then the twenty-nine downtown pulls up and I'm fumbling for a ticket. I'm numb, I'm a little bit spooked. It's as if she's been smothering me

with a pillow. As I climb the steps I look over my shoulder, she's just standing there watching me.

So stupid, I say, "Something wrong? Do you need money for the bus?" She nods, so I fish another ticket out of my jacket pocket and hand it to her. Maybe I've paid her off.

The bus is packed with hot bodies. The air is wet like a cunt. I elbow my way to the back and the old woman takes the seat across from me. I'm sweating. She's agitated, nervous, I guess. She looks at me, frowns, then looks away and begins playing with the fraying tasseled ends of her scarf. She looks back at me, I think to avoid looking at the gang of black teenagers sneering at her. I stare at her. Suddenly I have this feeling that I've done something wrong, that I shouldn't have given her the ticket to get on the bus. "Where are you going?"

She just looks at me, completely vacant. Doesn't say a word. She plays with the tassels of her scarf, not crazylike, bored.

So I crane my neck to look out the window, pretend that I've forgotten her. Snow is falling again, and the city is softened, gentler. Christmas on TV. The yachts on the Arm are blurs against a white backdrop. In the west end only street lamps and trees, elms, maples, and willows, can be made out. Even those are shadows. On Quinpool Road the bus purges one crowd and begins to gorge on another. Stuffed bellies departing Mary Brown's Fried Chicken, King Spring Roll, Armand's Fine Steak House, and countless other reputable establishments get on. My mom could be down here with her jerk off boyfriend. Either headed downtown for the evening's entertainment, or to the terminus. The old woman may have gotten off somewhere along that stretch. I'm not sure. My neck starts to ache as we circle south along the Commons and Citadel Hill, so I give it a rest and when I look she isn't there.

Which relieves me somewhat. I'm coming down, a little, and I've got to think of what to do next. By now my miserable fucker of a best friend is dead in the bathtub, but I don't really believe that. The cut was superficial. Mick was hamming it, he's a great ham actor. Or else he fainted. Uhhuh. In any case I should lie low for a while. Just supposing, I actually really did hurt him bad.

My ex, Natalie, and her kid sister, Alyx, get on at the stop across from the northwest gate of the Public Gardens. A convenient distraction, one I appreciate. They're grinning at me so I figure they've already had their drop for the evening.

"Hey, Josh. Sexy legs."

"Evening, ladies. I try. How ya doing tonight?" Nat takes a swing at me sways and misses, looks at me all cutesy. She's sloshed all right. Probably be slamming me tomorrow, or maybe later tonight, but whatever. I'm a pushover for a pretty drunkard. Even on a bad day Natalie is a hell of a lot safer than the evening I've had so far. Alyx, who believes she is the Cheshire cat, wears her usual grin.

"Doing okay, I guess."

"What you up to?"

"Drinking. In the Gardens. Ripped my skirt on the fence." Natalie lifts it to demonstrate. Great dimples.

"Headed downtown now."

"Yeah, we're probably late. Got the time?"

"Nine- fifteen. Approximately. Late for what?"

Alyx interjects, "Library, sis." They stand up and move towards the exit.

"You coming?"

"Sure." How often does Natalie smile at me these days?

It's only a few short blocks from the Library to Parade Square, but with snow on the ground we make them in record time, I'm sure. Alyx and Nat won't even pause long enough for me to ask why the bloody rush.

My mind goes back to the old woman when I notice the Square is more heavily packed with downtown kids than I can remember seeing it in ages; Snow White's brats out in force. There's got to be at least fifty milling about the snow covered steps of Saint Paul's alone, and maybe half as many spread between there and the old City Hall, on the opposite side of the green. A horde. In January that's off even for a Friday night. It's snowing, for Christ's sake. They're all leaving though, breaking up into ones, twos and threes heading out the eight gates.

"Fucking hell! We missed it."

"Missed what?" I can only ask. Nervous, I put my hand on Natalie's shoulder. What's going on?"

Natalie laughs. "Don't be an idiot, Josh."

"No really. I have no idea what's going on. Jamie and I just got in from Dad's place in the valley last night. You remember, the obligatory holiday visitation?" From the unpleasant look on her face, Nat does remember. I broke up with her after the last one, at Thanksgiving. Fuck, it seems like a long time ago.

Alyx answers. "Oh, yeah? You know about the beatings? Anything? Don't they have newspapers in Annapolis?"

I just look at her. I haven't heard a thing about any 'beatings'.

"Okay, well... two weeks ago, Friday, Peter, fat Peter, and Doug Phieffer were trashed by some guys down by the piers."

"So?"

"Hey Josh...", Nat begins, but I cut her off.

"Lots of people don't like Doug or Pete. No kidding? This should make the papers?"

"Josh, listen."

"They're still in the Vic. Night after the same bunch jump Georgia and some of her buddies outside the library. Every night since someone else has caught it. Bad. It's been in the Daily News."

"Every night?"

"Well almost. Two or three nights no one was attacked. That we know of."

I ask, "Cops done anything?"

"Nada."

Alyx adds, "You know, they're getting off on it."

"That's really sick."

"Yeah well, Lin thought so. He and Connor put the word out yesterday that anyone wanted a piece of the creeps that have been doing us should meet at Parade Square, eight thirty tonight."

"Do they know who's been doing it?"

"Bunch of guys in a red Camero. That's all."

Alyx goes off to find out what the scam is while we stand around shivering. I'm glad of the cold. The next time I'm warm my head will be pounding. I'm coming down to a lovely headache and drymouth and that lingering feeling of electroshock. Cold distracts. Natalie suggests we sit by the monument. We go over and she starts laying her head on my chest and I'm thinking what to do about it.

Then her sister comes back. "I was talking to Lin. We're going down to the waterfront, by the Law Courts. Most of the beatings happened there. The plan is to hide under the docks while a couple of guys skateboard around on top. They'll be bait."

I think of all the people in the Square. "If there's ice on the piers they'll be fish bait and it'll be goddamn freezing under the piers. Besides there's no way we can all hide down there."

"Lin thought of that. You think he's stupid or something? There are the Court buildings across the street. Water Street only runs one way. Some of us can hide there. They won't see us until we want them to." Obviously, she's repeating what he said word for word.

"Then what do we do?"

Alyx gives me the most withering look, then smiles. "Lin says, pay back."

I don't answer her. This is completely fucked. And dangerous, though I don't know for whom. I'd like to say leave it to the cops, but Alyx said the cops aren't doing anything.

"I don't think I'm up for this."

Alyx looks annoyed but Nat grabs both our hands and says, "Let's go for a drink."

The Club is packed, which is bizarre since there's no gig tonight: the place used to be a movie theatre and it's fucking huge. Weirder still, people have abandoned their usual pose of languor punctuated with boredom: everybody's jumping about, dancing or just circulating, restless, wired. The sound system is even more cranked than usual, and more to my liking; My Bloody Valentine, Crucifucks, T-Rex. Soon as we arrived, I made for the can.

Borrowed some eyeliner from Alyx. Cleaned myself up. Looking myself over in the mirror I think, I'd take me home. I'll be okay now, if I run into Inga.

I wonder if anyone's found Mick yet. When they do, Inga will know it was me. She once asked me if I would die for her. I told her that I couldn't die, being immortal, but that I would kill for her. She laughed, but seemed satisfied with that. That was the night she showed me her coffin. First time we fucked, too.

A tall guy, thin, wearing a black bandanna with skulls walks into the washroom. I head back to the table.

The Club doesn't serve alcohol, on account of its clientele being mostly minors, which is a pain in the ass for those of us who aren't. But it's also quite dark and the liquor inspectors have never been here as far as I know. Alyx has a quart of gin and a bottle of lemonade out of her backpack when I return.

"And now for a feast," she says.

We drink lots, fast. Natalie's coming on pretty heavy, which is weird; two months ago I was mud. Seeing Inga and me together must have changed her mind. Not that I'm interested. I'm for Inga; we made a pact. I wish it hadn't been Micko that sealed it though. Inga likes to hurt me; to test my loyalty, so she says.

As I'm thinking that she walks up. Looking kind of wiped out.

"How you?" Voice raspy, from hot knives for sure.

"Fucked up. I ah, I was at Mick's earlier."

"Oh. He here?"

"No. He's taking a bath."

She looks a bit confused. She shouldn't be. It's what we agreed upon. For a couple of minutes we don't say anything, we just look at one another.

Then she sits on my lap and I ask her what she's been up to and she says "not much" and I tell her about the old woman at the bus stop and she laughs at that.

When I try to pour myself G & T number five I notice Nat and Alyx have taken off.

Later we go down to the waterfront. I'm ripped and I'd rather go home but Inga's into this. She says we can drink the blood of our enemies and grow strong from it. Christ! Sometimes I think she really is a vampire.

When we get there some people are still milling about though most have holed up. I wonder what the assholes who did Georgia and Peter would think if they showed up and saw this huge mass of punks and goths crawling under the boardwalks and into the alley behind the Courts. I wish they would. They don't though.

I'm standing in the alley with six people in front of me and maybe ten behind me, including Natalie. She's glaring. Hmmn. Oblivious, Inga is holding my hand. I hear Nat telling someone Alyx is under one of the piers. I guess there are at least as many people hidden down there as there are where we are. The stink of fish must be even worse in their nostrils.

Every time a car comes down the street I tense up.

Maybe half an hour passes before one stops. We're all nerves now, really vicious. I can still feel the acid in me, in fact this waiting has made me hyperconscious of it. I hear distinctly the sound of four doors opening and then shutting. I can't breathe. Then it's the sound of feet scuffing on the pier. Some laughter. God they're in for it! I hear one voice, rustic, a bit slurred, mean, "Looks like we found us some tail, boys or, wait a minute, are those fairies?"

You don't know the half of it, you fucks! I'm pushed to my feet, running. The car is red. We're black rising behind them. My body's shivering like at Mick's place.

It's slow motion; bizarre watching them backing up from the dark shape coming out of the water. They haven't noticed that they're cut off and are still trying to save face. Dumb fucks. Remember they've done your friends. They deserve it.

I can feel the old woman's eyes upon my back. She is in the alley watching. I want to turn and ask what does she see, but I can't, I'm moving and can't imagine stopping. She must be surprised. Snow White's children have grown wolves' fangs and claws. Pay back.

I can't see anything. It's bad, they know, we're all around. I wish Mick were here for this. We're going to eat them alive.

Names, Remembered, Keep Slipping Away

in the bone chair on the beach tormenting himself with the shades of former
lovers and trying to remember their names
he's not after the ones they had
this recalling is after all
a recalling
he is a writer and he's calling them anew
not unaware, they're new names
as much for himself
as for those others
whose names he can't reach
towards the names they didn't
bear with him

Once he wrote:

*she and i made ourselves up from books we'd both read, endowing ourselves
with the attributes of our favourite mythic figures, vampires, to compensate
for the paucity. the insufficiency of our feelings for one another, i think
we found it romantic to be dead together*

the risk is memory

can he tell a memory

as if made up

can he tell it without making it

true,

*so Jennifer reads these lines
confused as to whether
she ought to want to kill me or
maybe i am a good writer, but she knows i lied about her
i'm immoral, i've turned her into such a tramp
and we never even had sex and
isn't this exactly what the feminists are talking about?*

*anyway was he anything like Joshua? he was a mistake, a meconnaissance, if
you will like the man on the moon and Troy the arson boy all folks he
willfully found himself in but when did he split from the writer? who
always wanted to be Lulu? but could never quite pull it off? settling for Liszt
girl with a boy's name how she slips between voices who could trust him
after that funny how all the boys i imagined myself to be are so confused
about their relations to the girls i wanted to become...*

*in the bone chair sitting
the chair made of driftwood
bleached white by the north BC sun
wondering what he's done to his lovers
and his friends and himself
in these stories and poems and
is it any different from what
they did in Back Streets before
he started telling stories, he insists
there was a time before the stories
he'd like to go back there and see*

what they think, if they see
what he's done to them,
for that love
it made sense

Three Versions of a Defenestration

Inga

Five days before, the day after the tea party, Jamie disappeared. That colored everything that came after and they all wondered and waited. Not much else went down as a consequence of that: Butch snagged some cheap 'cid so we all partied a lot. Checked out Blue Monday at Cabbagetown. Everybody got in. I talked Andy into doing drag. He's really sweet as a girl. Especially when he's drunk. Very pretty too. But he was in a foul mood that night. A mess about Jamie. I was especially nice to him but there wasn't much I could do. Except tell him what was actually going on. I was considering doing just that when Jamie finally showed his face in the apartment, around six on that Friday.

Lester and I were in the kitchen, chopping veggies for a stirfry. Lester is great-- he's the only reason we sit down to dinner. He's a complete mother hen, much more than my mom ever was. Though he can be a bit much at times. When Jamie showed up he was rattling on about my posture, and how I was going to end up bent like a pretzel if I didn't stop my slouching. I was cutting garlic up with this fucking meat cleaver. I asked him if he wanted me to dice up a couple of my fingers for the stirfry.

Before he could reply Jamie stepped into the kitchen. The front door must have been open because we didn't hear him coming in. Jamie pads like my cat, Bertolt, but the kitchen being the first room off the stairwell, he couldn't exactly sneak past us. Lester spoke first. "If it isn't the very "home and away". What happened to you?"

I didn't like the smirk on Jamie's face. "Is Andy here? I bet he's been whining."

"No," I answered, "You know, he's been miserable."

"I don't doubt it. How sad for him." Then after a pause, "Oh, don't tell me. I can't bear the thought of him. The faggot!" He was grinning like he'd said something clever.

Lester mugged right back, though I could tell he was pissed off.

"Assimilated and self-loathing today, are we?"

"I'm going to my room. Don't tell him I'm here, okay?"

"He'll know Jamie..." I started to say but he just waved his arms and walked past. Lester and I exchanged looks, then he shouted out that Andy was coming to dinner. Jamie didn't say anything, he just shut his door and cranked Gen X.

Erin must have heard him come in, because a few minutes later she emerged from her bedroom, all crinkly eyed and cute in her Snoopy t-shirt. When she wears it she always reminds me of Barney from the Flintstones.

"What's that asshole doing back? Is there coffee?"

"Coffee?" Lester echoed back, as if it's a ridiculous question. He thinks she drinks too much of the stuff. They occasionally argue about it, but she must've been still half asleep because she just looked at him all blank and spacey.

After a moment he said, "I'll put a pot on for you sweetie," and ruffled her white seal pup crop.

She batted vaguely at his arm and said, "Thanks. Fuck. Does he have my money?"

"I didn't ask. He's all zipped up though, and hiding out in "his" bedroom. Doesn't want us to tell Andy he's come back. Can you believe that?"

"Balls to that. His boots are in the hallway."

Lester looked shocked as he fished in the freezer for the coffee tin. "Jamie removed his boots upon entering our humble home? Where has that boy been?"

After Erin got her coffee she went back to bed. She was reading the Anne Rice vampire books and hadn't moved much in three days. Kind of funny since she sneered at how wrapped up I got when I was reading them. Meanwhile Jamie had gotten tired of Gen X and had switched over to DOA, Dead or Alive, not Dead on Arrival.

Around seven o'clock Marla, Bryn and Andy got in. That was a scene. They were all giddy-- they had been feeding ducks in the Public Gardens and this old man had come up to them and started shoving Andy, calling him a limp wristed pouf, so they surrounded him and started shouting and waving their arms and chanting "Limp wristed pouf", and throwing bread crumbs at him, so he was swamped with pigeons. So they were all in a really good mood until Andy noticed Jamie's combat boots. His face fell all of a sudden and he must've noticed the music, Culture Club-- which no one but Jamie would be caught dead listening to-- because he looked really upset.

"Uh, Andy," Lester wanted to be nice but there wasn't much he could say.

"When did he get back?"

"Maybe an hour ago. A little less."

"Where's he been?"

"He didn't say."

"Oh. That's okay. I'll ask him myself."

I cut in. "That may not be a very good idea right now. He said he didn't want to talk to you. Sorry." Andy looked a little dazed. Like a bunny about to be roadkill. Well, someone had to tell him.

Marla declared, loudly, "What a little prick. What a fucking little prick." Lester was getting nervous. "He's in the next room, you know."

Andy put this resolved, brave sort of look on his face. "That's what he said? I want to talk to him, but, he'll have to come to me."

"That's right, baby." I say, "Let him come to you." Fat fucking chance, honey. Andy knows it too. He looks so pathetic I want to hug him. Or slap him, I'm not sure.

Bryn, who's been silent throughout, chooses this juncture to snort. "Lester, is dinner ready? I'm starved. I'm a famine."

Les sounds grateful. "That's famished dear. Yes, could someone get plates and chopsticks?"

So we do that, all pile into the living room. The big family thing that I find totally cheesy even hypocritical, but love anyway. We have pita bread and a cold beet soup and this cabbage-carrot-tofu stirfry and beer and mid-way through Erin comes out so we're only missing Jamie, who's gone back to listening to Gen X. He's obviously in a mood. Erin's complaining about the "fucking vegans", which is a schitck because she was a vegetarian until she went to Pakistan with Canada World Youth. So nobody minds. Then I offer to paint Andy's toenails to cheer him up which doesn't quite do the trick but it gets me out of washing up because he agrees anyway. Lester is getting plates together and looks like he's about to start delegating when the front door bangs open and someone stomps into the kitchen.

Marla yells, "Who is it?" and there is just this grunt in reply.

Bryn screams, "Butch!", and jumps up, knocking over her beer and runs into the kitchen.

Then there is this series of furniture moving noises, the thump of bricks being dumped on linoleum, followed by the sound of something in the kitchen shattering, maybe lots of glass.

Jamie sticks his head out into the hallway and demands, "What's the ruckus?" He ignores Andy's presence completely.

A moment later Bryn reappears grinning. "Butch's defrosting our fridge. He bought a pickax at Canadian Tire."

"Oh." We all say. Jamie adds, "That sounds reasonable." and ducks back into his room. A moment later Ministry starts pouring out. Conversation sort of lulls and we're obviously all distracted even though this is the sort of thing we've come to expect from Bryn and Butch. An old crowd couple, they've been together so long that their relationship has come down to three things: sex, acts with shock value and beating one another up. I do mean beating one another up-- Butch may be the bigger and stronger of the two, but he only uses his fists. And Bryn is no slouch, she drums for a hardcore band, and I've seen her go after Butch with everything from an umbrella to a straight razor. As for "acts with shock value", that's Bryn's phrase, they are mostly Butch's doing, presumably, to please her. She loves saying, "Butch is such a psychopath!" or "That Butch, he's crazy," so I guess they still love one another.

Abandoning Andy's toes I joined the clean up detail and slipped into the kitchen to watch the psycho at work. I couldn't help but think that I wouldn't mind a piece of old Butch myself. He'd stripped off his shirt and the muscles in his back rippled every time he swung that Canadian Tire ax. He looked just fabulous standing there with ice flying around him and frozen bags of Kraft Dollar Fries and Kraft Frozen Peas at his feet.

Marla must have caught my look because she quipped, "Drool much? Don't piss Bryn off." But she was standing there twirling one red braid around her finger and watching as much as I was. Before I could say as much, Butch turned around to look at the two of us and smiled at me in that stupid sexy way of his.

I started to smile back. Maybe Butch wasn't so in love with Bryn after all, or maybe that just wasn't relevant. I mean, he was giving me this come hither look. I actually took a half step towards him.

Then Marla started cackling like the witch she is. I nearly died. I could have brained her with that pickax, but Butch was still smiling at me, so I just threw her a different sort of look-- slow death by torture for you, sweetie-- and stepped into the hallway. The problem there was I didn't want to go into the living room where Bryn and everyone else were hanging out. Call me superstitious, but I thought seeing her then would jinx whatever might happen with me and Butch.

Instead I knocked on my own bedroom door feeling annoyed that I felt I had to. Maybe I could knock the bullshit out of his royal highness.

From the living room I could see Andy giving me the worried look he'd been giving me all evening. Bryn was watching me too, with what looked like pure malice in her eyes, which I couldn't understand unless she had overheard and interpreted what had gone on in the kitchen. Unlikely, given the volume of music coming out of our room. I wasn't even sure Jamie heard my knock.

"Who is it?"

Fuck this was stupid. "Inga. You know, your roommate. Can I come in?"

The scum bag actually took a second to think it over. "Just a sec." I heard him get up and move something. A moment later he opened the door with one hand and was backing away with a chair in the other.

"Jesus, Jamie! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I wanted some privacy. Okay?" He set the chair down and stepped over my futon to curl into the windowsill, one leg dangling over the ledge onto Hollis. I hate it when he does that. Twice now he's gotten the attention of drunk johns who maybe thought he looked better than the girls strolling below. Of course what did Jamie do but play up to them like Juliet at her balcony. At least until he got bored. The last guy, he spat on. He was furious and tried to get into our apartment. Luckily, with the Mister I-Got-It shop on the first floor, and , until recently, Twist Again Retro Clothes, just below us, the whole building complex is wired for security. So the asshole ended up in the drunk tank where he belonged. Still that sort of thing makes me nervous.

"You want a smoke?"

"You offering?" Jamie is usually a stinger. Not that he won't share but he always makes a big production of it. He really was in a weird mood.

He cocked one eyebrow. God, I wish I could figure out how to do that. "Well, as long as we're not nagging at one another-- say please."

"Can I, can I, huh huh?"

"Okay, but be nice." He tossed me a cigarette. "What's he saying about me next door?"

"You could ask him yourself. Light?" Jamie tossed me his matches.

"You owe me a lot of smokes."

There's the Jamie I know and love. "I owe you some smokes. Oh, Andy's not saying much. He's just wondering where the fuck you've been

and where things stand between the two of you. He's not being unreasonable. I mean, you did just disappear for five days." I looked at him seriously. "We all wondered."

"We all wondered." He mocked back. "Well. Isn't that a boring way to spend your week? Worrying about little old me?" He picked up my bear Sunny and set him on his knee. "Don't tell me you wasted an entire week wondering where I was, Sunny bear?" Then in a gruffer voice he replied while making Sunny's head bob up and down, "Nope. Didn't even notice you were gone. Too busy getting fucked." After a pause he replied in his normal voice, "That a bear. Tell Inga she's a idiot, Sunny bear." Then again, in his gruff voice, he made Sunny say, "You're an idiot, Inga."

I didn't say anything at first. I was enjoying my smoke and looking for something of Jamie's. I spotted it next to his altar-- Aerobic Action Barbie. I rolled over a mass of floor pillows and picked her up. Turning to the window I said brightly, "Look Sunny bear and Jamie. It's a two in one Barbie. Not only is she Aerobic Action Barbie," at that point I made her dance around a bit, "but when her owner's an asshole, off with her head," and then I popped it off to dangle in my hand by its long blond hair. "And like magic, she's Sleepy Hollow Barbie. Or is it French Revolution Barbie? What do you boys think?"

For a moment he was really flabbergasted. I don't think I've ever seen anyone look so shocked and so distressed before. Over a doll. Then he looked really pissed off. "Put her head back on."

But then I was angry too. "Maybe I will. Maybe you should have a talk with Andy about Tyler?" I enjoyed watching his jaw drop. "Oh come on Jamie, don't look so surprised. Word does get around. If you listen."

"And you do? Well fuck that, Ingabitch, and fuck you, too." He said that in his cool snotnose voice. And then-- I couldn't believe it-- as he got to his feet, taking a drag from his cigarette, he tossed Sunny bear out the window. "Catch me if you can." He said as almost as afterthought.

I wasn't listening though. I'd already dropped his stupid Barbie and was pushing past him to the window. Sunny bear was in the middle of the street and there were cars coming. I ran downstairs to get my Bear.

I didn't speak to Jamie again that evening.

Instead, after I'd rescued Sunny, an arm and a leg flattened by a BMW, I went back to the living room and sulked. If your roommate tries to destroy your bear I think you have a right to sulk. At least. Bryn and Butch had gone off somewhere-- I'm not sure where-- but Marla snickered when I came in cradling Sunny. Andy was very sweet to me though, lending me some cigarettes and running and getting me beer whenever I emptied my glass. I kept wondering if I should tell him what was up, but I guess I still hoped Jamie would. I mean he's normally not a bad guy. Jamie stayed in his room, blasting the Smiths. I guess we were both feeling pretty shitty.

At around midnight Lester got out his Ouiji Board and we decided to summon a spirit. Erin had finished the second of the vampire books and wanted a break so there were five of us.

It's a good thing I was there. They didn't have a clue how to get started. I got Les to get five black candles and some incense out of the trunk in our room. We drew the drapes and closed the door, muting the music only slightly. Then when the candles and incense were lit, we sat in a circle and concentrated on bringing a spirit to the board. After a long minute of quiet I

felt the energy in the room change and I lay my hands on the pointer. The others followed suit.

In a low voice Lester asked, "Spirit, what is your name?"

The pointer moved quickly, without hesitation. "A Z A R E I L". To make sure no one was faking it, I asked a couple of routine questions: my mother's birthday, when my last period was, stuff like that. Then we asked who in the room was going to get fucked next: the spirit answered, "E R I N". She went bright red. She knew that we all knew she had been celibate since she and Susan broke up months ago.

Then, I'm not sure what possessed me, but I asked, "Which of us will be the first to die?" That earned me several annoyed glances as the pointer swirled about indecisively. Then it regained the deliberateness of its earlier movement: "J A M ". Andy took his hands off the counter and nearly yanked it off the board in the process. "Stop doing that. That's really mean."

He was speaking to me. I was in a strange space, feeling very detached and clear, but kind of drunk at the same time. "I'm not doing anything, Andy. I'm sorry if this upsets you. Let's ask a different question. Azareil, when will this death occur?" Marla sort of giggled and, after a second, Andy put his hands back on the pointer. He didn't look happy. Again its motion was deliberate, decisive: "T O N I G H T".

Andy got up without saying anything and went into the kitchen. Lester followed him. The rest of us sat around for a bit, unsure of what to do next. Then Marla packed the board up.

A little while later Marla and Erin went for a walk. Bryn and Butch still weren't back. Andy asked if I was going to take the hideabed tonight. I just shrugged and looked towards our room. "Because," he said, "I'd really like some company tonight."

"Of course" I said, and started to pull it out.

Lester was puttering about the kitchen when I got out of the bathroom, and I could see Jamie sitting in his bedroom windowsill, smoking again, or still. He'd finally turned off the music. I almost wished him goodnight, but then I thought of Sunny.

It was at about three in the morning when I woke to the sound of someone screaming and a heavy crash on the street below. Even without looking and still half asleep I knew it had to be Jamie.

Joshua

On my knees, choking, head over the toilet bowl, I wondered if mother and her boyfriend were in fact conspiring to kill me. Or perhaps this was just a spontaneous homicidal gesture on her part, a spiteful reminder that she did not appreciate being wakened in the middle of the night, as she had been around four that morning. But then, I reflected, this was just far too common an occurrence for it not to be premeditated. Scenes of mom and Bill sitting down each Sunday night with a stack of cookbooks looking for dishes containing almonds, one of my worst food allergies, played through my mind as I retched again. If they weren't trying to kill me why didn't my mother warn me there were nuts in the curry.

What I couldn't get over was the fact that upon seeing what was for dinner I'd actually asked if I could eat it. Mother had said of course, and I loaded up my plate with couscous, steamed beans and baby carrots and the apple potato curry. I'd been chowing down for two or three minutes when I started feeling a nagging pull in my stomach. Then Bill said in this

thoughtful tone of voice, "You know Iris, I could swear there were almonds in this."

I looked up then, thinking, "I don't believe this, not again." Bill was grinning widely.

Mother looked quite pleased with herself. "Yes, dear. That's right, in the curry. I ground them up in the cuisenart. That's why you can't see them. It turned out nicely, didn't it?"

"Mom!" I practically screamed.

"Oh, that's right dear. I don't know where I left my head today. Well, it was only half a cup... I'm sure it won't kill you. But I could bring the bug around."

"Don't bother." I groaned. I got up and walked into the bathroom, feeling sick more in anticipation than because of the nuts.

I don't understand my mom at all. She had practically turned the family vegan to humour the kid brother. Not that Jamie ate at home any more often because of it. And here I was puking my guts into the toilet again because my mom couldn't remember my allergy to nuts. I probably ought to have made her drive me to the hospital, but the toilet method had worked before and sitting in a line up at emergency with those two, waiting to get my stomach pumped, was not my idea of a great way to spend an evening. Besides, my band, H.P. Lovecraft, had a gig that night.

"Shall we save you some couscous and vegetables dear?" Mother called out from the kitchen.

I just closed the bathroom door. The pleasure of ruining their meal with the sound of my sickness wasn't worth enduring her overlate concern.

When I finally emerged from the washroom she was gathering up the dishes for washing and Bill had retreated into his study with coffee and Agatha Christie.

"I've saved you some dinner Joshua. Michael called. I told him you were indisposed. Do you suppose he knows where your brother is? They hang around together, don't they?"

"Mom, I told you he's gone camping with Andy and Kristof. He should be back on Sunday or Monday." I wondered where she'd put Mick's number. Walking over to the phone I added, "By the way you know I can't eat after I puke."

"That's crude Joshua. I know. I put the leftovers in ziplocks in the fridge." Finished loading the dishwasher she closed it and turned to face me. "I also know you lied about the camping trip. Andrew called for Jamie today."

"Hmmm. Well, maybe Andy backed out at the last minute. Or maybe Jamie knows two guys named Andy. Did you ever think of that mom?" I watched her drying her hands on the cotton checked apron she was wearing. In the background I could almost hear the theme from the Brady Bunch.

"Don't be a smartass, Joshua. If you know where your brother is I want you to tell me.

"Did you take down Mick's number?" She was looking at me with some combination of annoyance and dismay on her face. "I told you he's gone camping. In Shubenacadie" I focused on the wall behind her. I'm an awful liar.

"Fine, then. If Jamie's not back by Sunday..." she trailed off helplessly, giving up. "The number is by the phone. On the board." Mom was still watching me, hoping I'd give in now that she wasn't pressing me. Almost did, she looked so unhappy. It's not like I like lying to her.

Fortunately, the phone rang just then and I ducked into the rec. room, grabbed the receiver and collapsed into the couch. It wasn't Mick though.

"Hello."

"Hi Joshua. Miss me terribly?"

"Oh so, baby brother, oh so."

"Careful. Mom'll hear you."

"That's sort of the idea. She knows you didn't go camping with Andy and she just finished ragging me out for covering for you. Where the fuck are you anyway?"

"The apartment."

"Don't bullshit me. If you were staying there your friends wouldn't be calling here making a liar out of me."

"Chill. I just got in. I'll talk to mom tomorrow. What's up with you tonight?"

"Just the gig. I should get going though or I'll be late for soundcheck "

"Those things always start late. Who's playing?"

"The Lonestars, Desdemona's Icepick, October Game, H.P. Lovecraft, some other bands. You should come."

"You should think of a new name for your band."

"Says you and every other asshole, I know."

"Yeah well, all us assholes can't be wrong, can we? Centre for Art Tapes, is it?"

"That's right"

"Maybe I'll get down there. Listen Joshua, I need a favour. I'm not moving back home at the end of the summer. Can you smuggle some of my stuff out in your van tonight?"

"Are you nuts--" I started. Mom walked by at that point and, for a moment, I contemplated just handing the phone to her, instead I copped onto the sibling solidarity thing. "Sure Mick, that'll be tough but I think I can do something about it."

Jamie practically squealed with delight. Fuck, he can be juvenile. "That was Mom wasn't it." She stepped out of the room then.

"Yeah." Suddenly I was feeling annoyed. "Are you moving out cause you're fucking Les?"

"Am I fucking Les? You've finally found me out, bro." Then, after a pause Jamie added. "Christ, Joshua why do you have to be such a phobe?"

"I'm not. I just don't want you fucking any of my friends." I waited for him to point out that I meant male friends, but Jamie let that pass. We've had this argument more than once.

Instead he said, "Well Les is safe from me. He's nice but he's too fat."

"That's a shitty thing to say."

"Would you rather I fucked him? Besides when's the last time you made it with a girl who wasn't fucking anorexic?"

"Can we get off this topic? When do you want me to drop this stuff off?"

Jamie sounded like he wasn't paying attention. He was probably stoned or watching TV. "Say, after the show."

"Forget it. I'm not hauling all your shit up two flights of stairs at three in the morning. After a gig. How about tomorrow afternoon when I wake up?"

"No good. I'm coming over for lunch to confront the parental unit. All my stuff needs to be out. You know they're gonna flip."

"Don't know why they should. You haven't exactly been a regular presence around the house."

"Yeah but that's summertime rules. You know they're convinced I'm going to drop out of QE."

"Guess you're right. Christ, I should move out while I still have a chance."

"Probably. Anyway my stuff has to come tonight. Don't worry: you won't have to haul anything. I'll get my room mates to help."

That sounded doubtful. I knew Bryn and Butch would be at the gig, and partying later. The rest of them wouldn't move to avoid a tidal wave. "If you say so. I'm just bringing it and dumping it on the sidewalk though. What do you want?"

"Winter clothes, blankets, books, my posters and stuff. I've got all my summer clothes and my music over here already. Just throw it all in garbage bags. Don't worry about furniture. Vicki sold me her bed and her dresser when she moved out. I want my big brass mirror that Aunt Lil gave me, but I can grab that tomorrow."

"Generous of you to offer. How do you expect me to get all that shit out of here without Mom and Bill noticing?"

"Josh, you carry weird shit in and out of the house all the time. You could be running a drug cartel and no-one in that house would lift an eyebrow. Don't worry about it."

"Yeah. Okay. I don't have time to argue."

"Don't sound so put out. There's some 'cid in the freezer for you and I'll get beer and pizza."

"Cool." I thought about asking him where he was getting the cash, but thought better of it. The answer would probably just piss me off. "Well, I've got to call Mick."

"Ciao."

When I rang Mick's place Mr. Lowell told me he'd split for the evening, with some girl named Elena, so there was nothing for me to do but get dressed and discreetly pack my runaway brother's things in with the band's equipment. Fortunately we had loaded our gear up a few nights before, after rehearsal. It was already seven thirty so I had an hour to kill before we were due for soundcheck. Of course Jamie was probably right: I've never done a show that started on time, and the reason is that nobody ever shows up on time for the sound check. Still, I really wanted that night to go off well. It was supposed to be a really big show for us -- a showcase of twelve local bands performing on three stages, running between eleven and two in the morning. The whole thing was being video taped for cable TV, and the money raised by the show was going to cover the remaining production cost of *Strange Harbor*, a compilation album featuring a track by each of the bands that performed. At least that was the plan: the Center is not the most happening venue: but Fearless in Paradise and the radio station at Dalhousie had put a lot of energy into promoting the gig. At least they'd managed to get a license to sell beer. The idea of playing to a mostly dry crowd is only slightly less daunting than the idea of playing to no crowd at all. The only time I'd been to the Center before was when we recorded our track for the compilation: "Cthulu Sleeps In Saint Margaret's Bay".

My then girlfriend Daphne thought our lyrics pretentious and obscure, and she was right, but what I always said to her was: "What can you expect from a band that specializes in industrial dance music and conspiracy

theories?" Besides that song was not, strictly speaking, our idea. Someone tipped us off. I don't know what else I could call it besides a tip off. Mick, Klaus and I were hanging in Christopher's Restaurant one evening, eating french onion soup and minding our own business, when these three guys in lab coats came in and sat at the table next to us. Well, that was odd enough for me to cast them a sideways glance. Just to see if they were bearing any other signs of Weirdness. They had also momentarily captured Klaus and Mick's attention, which was a minor blessing because it halted whatever inane argument they were enmeshed in to that point. Something about the pros and cons of a Thomas Mann novel they had both read and I hadn't.

Besides the lab coats there was nothing obviously wrong with these guys. Nothing visible, anyway. They were young guys, clean cut. I figured they worked in the photo lab down the street until they started talking.

"Cthulu! I don't believe it" said the first.

"Right here in Nova Scotia." agreed the second.

"Jeez. In Saint Margaret's Bay. Sleeping for untold millennia." added the third.

"It's really hard to believe." repeated the first.

"But there's no way that kid was making it up," the third said thoughtfully.

"Definitely not," agreed the second and after pausing a moment adding, "Scary kid." to which the others sounded emphatic "uh huhs!". Then they turned to their menus.

Obviously we wanted to speak to them. It was plain from the expressions on Mick and Klaus' faces that I was not the only one awestruck. But we were in a difficult situation and unable to confer as that would tip them off. We were nervous: they were wearing lab coats after all. Suppose

this was just a test, or a joke. Someone may have put them up to it. So we finished our soups in silence, got the check and headed out. When we ran into Annette, our guitarist, and told her about it, she just said "groovy" in that dismissive way of hers, the way other people say "so" or "interesting". That was a bit of a let down-- we felt we were onto something. But five minutes later she announced that she had a new song: "Cthulu is sleeping in Saint Margaret's Bay".

None of us have seen the lab coat guys again. You better believe we've kept our eyes open though. Bog only knows who they work for: the men in black, the illuminati, Rhyleh? Annette claims we're overreacting but she didn't hear them talk. Besides she's not serious about conspiracies, just music. None of us have suggested what must be on all our minds, that we go out to Saint Margaret's Bay and have a look around.

Before heading to the Center, I zipped downtown to see if anyone was around-- Daphne was out of town and I couldn't get hold of Klaus or Annette by phone-- but yuppies, tourists and sailors either wrapping up shopping or starting the evening crawl were the only bodies in evidence. So I headed over to Gottingen.

Mom and Bill were pretty tightlipped when I mentioned where the show was. Dumb move on my part. I should have remembered that Gottingen Street is where the Negroes live. Mom and Bill aren't racist, they're just concerned. There are good blacks and bad blacks, right? I might be attacked by a junkie. I mean if you were out to mug someone would you go after a warehouse full of punks? Never mind that more muggings happen in the neighborhood we live in than uptown...

Of course when I got to the centre, the first band to be playing on our stage was only half set up for the check, so it didn't really matter that half of

Lovecraft was fuck knows where. The show would be late anyway, as usual. Hell, the only reason Klaus was there, was he was helping set up the bar. Pete, a guy from NoseDiverse, a sort of warbly guitar with too much feedback, Sonic Youth wannabee band that I don't like at all, was being generous with his smokables, which was something. We headed upstairs and away from the equipment and I rolled a couple of joints which we then proceeded to smoke. Grade A stuff, too bad Pete is such a poseur. A certain amount of attitude is de rigueur if you're playing in a band but Pete goes over the top. Like you're smoking my weed so you have to listen to me expound my personal philosophy of life, which today is brought to you by the letter "I" and the psychiatrist, Carl Jung. It did occur to me that I could take Jamie's stuff over to the apartment but the weed was really good and I had been broke and so, straightedge for almost a month, so....

We didn't get the check done until fucking quarter of eleven. By that time the building was crawling with cute young trash waiting for the show to start. I have, well, had, a policy against mixing with a crowd I'm playing for, which is a bit of a joke because there is only one crowd for gigs in Halifax, but it was my policy so I headed back stage. Kevin Fearless was back there, grinning like an asshole, and sitting on several cases of Moosehead purchased for the edification of the presiding demigods.

Annette was always saying we should move to Montreal or Toronto but in Halifax everybody who's in a band gets to be a demigod and I had this suspicion that in a larger city you have to be in a good band to hold that station. Not that H.P. Lovecraft wasn't great, it was: Annette is mucho talented, as is Mick (for such a fuckup), but I always figured Klaus and I would get lost in the shuffle of a larger city. Actually, I'd probably be okay, being

resourceful and multi-talented, but Klaus kind of bites as a bassist. He's a nice guy though.

By the time it was our turn to play and the stage was set up we were all in a right fucked up state. And we very nearly didn't go on. Not because of the drink, not directly anyway. But a few moments before Kevin called "time" we had this crisis, having to do with Mick's friend Elena. I had never met this chick before, she had just moved to Halifax, but she had a couple of strikes against her due to her association with Mick.

Mick's problem is that he's oversexed and confuses sex with love. Which means he's constantly falling in love, and not only with girls. He's always seducing girls and getting beat up by guys that he tries to cruise-- for some reason he's never interested in queers. Go figure. I've talked to him about it and it doesn't make any more sense to him than it does to me. For a long time I thought he had a thing for Jamie. It would have been the last straw. I'd have killed him, for real. The thing is, even when it is a girl he's got a hard on for, it's fucked because he only ever obsesses on girls who are psychotic, or dating his friends.

So I wasn't exactly predisposed to think much of the girl when I heard her say she had moved to Halifax to be with Mick. To look at her she was nothing scary though: blonde hair, olive complexion, too much make up in that gothic way, in a poet's white blouse, big black skirt, granny boots. Kind of blandly trendy, but cute. Then she opened her mouth. This is how she introduced herself.

"Elena Magdalena Hessian. Glad to meet you. So glad to be here. Everyone has been so kind. I had no friends in Musquidobit, where I was before. My parents were refugees when we came to your country. Intellectuals fleeing the purges. In Russia. What kind of place was Musquadobit for

intellectuals, I ask you. I'll tell you. We were suffocated, suffocated. As in "Three Sisters", by Chekhov. Only I made it out of that hell. With Mick's help."

She spoke all that in one breath-- she had done so several times already that night. I know because I heard fragments of it as she and Mick made the rounds, about fifteen minutes before we were to go on. I was already pissed because Mick had blown off the sound check and I had to set up his gear for him. So I was feeling kind of nasty when it came to be my turn.

"I'm Joshua. I'm sure Mick has told you all sorts things about me. But he hasn't said anything about you. Tell me, how did you two meet?"

She smiled in a way that suggested I think she was being shy, demure, or something-- and slipped her arm around Mick. After a short pause he started to say something but she cut him off.

"Mick and I spent a week together at the Nairopa Institute in May and we have returned there to meet and study Buddhism on several occasions this summer."

I suppressed the urge to puke in her face. Instead I gave Mick a macho "bonding" slap on the back and an exaggerated wink. "You sly ole dog, you! You told me you were going down to--" I enjoyed watching him tense, before continuing, "see Allan Ginsberg " and relax again, thinking his ass was safe, "... and to skank some deathbunny."

Then he hit me. I should have expected it. In fact I did expect it but after her Russian expatriate romance I just had to say something. And that was how he put it: "skank some deathbunny". Still I suppose it was cruel of me to say so. He and I sort of got into it after that, but we were both pretty drunk and neither of us is that big, and before long, Klaus, who is very big, was standing between us. The Russian princess had run out of the room at some point and

both of us were off in our corners sulking and ready to throw the gig, the compilation, hell, the band, just like that. It's hard to argue with Annette though, especially once Kevin joins in, laying a guilt trip on you about all the money out of his own pocket that he's put into the show and the scene in general. I was still hesitating when I saw Elena reenter the room and go over to where Klaus was presumably laying the same trip on Mick that Annette and Kevin were laying on me. Two minutes later Mick lurched over to me and apologized for slugging me and asked me to play.

"I don't get it." The idea of Mick apologizing for anything was novel to say the least. He never apologized for fucking Inga.

He cracked a grin. "Elena and I talked and we're splitting for Vancouver in a couple of days. She says she finds the people cold here. I figure we can join the big squat out there. So this is Lovecraft's last gig."

This I did not expect, not even from Mick. "She's psycho, buddy." I told him.

His grin just got wider.

"You're pulling my leg on this one, yes?"

He just kept smiling, and shaking his head back and forth, enjoying my disbelief.

"You can't do this man. We're about to get vinyl. Tell Mick he can't leave, Annette."

She looked stony but kept her mouth shut.

After a minute Mick said, "Elena doesn't want to talk to you, but she wants to know how much you want for your van."

"Oh." I said.

So we played. It wasn't our best show by a long shot, but even though we were all pissed off and piss drunk, it was kind of fun, and it ended up being

the gig our track on *Strange Harbor* came from. Annette read some of her poetry at the end, which we had all been wanting her to do for ages. The room we played in was packed and stayed that way. People had a good time.

Mick and Elena disappeared right after we got off stage. That was probably smart because I was feeling like starting something.

It wasn't until after we had packed up and I told Annette I'd give her a lift home-- she lives in Darkness across the water-- that it clicked that I had all Jamie's junk to get rid of. And having agreed to sell the van to Elena the next day (five hundred bucks is five hundred bucks), I couldn't put that off. So that's what had us turning onto Hollis at 2:48 a.m., Annette driving because she was closer to sober, me glancing at the car clock wishing I was home in bed-- whose home, I'm not sure. As we pulled over, we saw the hookers gathered in front of my brother's apartment, screaming "do it" and laughing, and following their upward gazes we saw someone falling towards the street. Jamie.

Jamie

Everybody sent flowers. Or chocolate. Lots sent chocolate. I've had no end of visitors. Even people who hate me have been by or sent flowers. Or chocolates. Inga brought both. Contrite is what she was. She should be. She was a fucking cow the night I fell. At least she hasn't told Andy yet. I don't think.

I guess I'm quite the celebrity now. Apparently there are several stories floating around as to why "I did it". It's like we all get to be in a murder mystery together. Everybody's assuming some sort of bungled suicide. People can be so stupid. It wasn't like that, not really. Even if they're all hypocrites, I

can't say I'm not enjoying the attention. Some of it anyway. Andy, for instance, is driving me nuts.

Andy, Jeezus! He's been here every day, smiling, with gifts-- books and games and candies, like I'm a kid who needs cheering up. He even made me a tape full of sappy songs. I had to admit that was kind of sweet. Still, you'd think I had AIDS or something. I mean, the fall was bad enough. If I hadn't been drunk I could have been paralyzed. But hell-- I was drunk, I wasn't paralyzed. In three or four days I'm out of here. I've got to wear a neck brace for maybe a month, which sucks, but I'm fine. Anyway, I can tell just from looking at him, that Andy is terrified about 'our relationship', but waiting until I'm out of the hospital before he demands 'the talk'. Maybe he expects me to bring it up. He's trying to grow a beard. Which looks cute, to be fair.

The pseudo parental unit seems torn between angst and horror. Bill told me I'm leading a "suicidal lifestyle". I laughed in his face, which provoked a minor incident. I'm sorry but I couldn't help it. Josh informed me that they've been leaving Tough Love literature in choice positions around the house. Still, I do hate to upset Mom. Gay sons identify more with their Moms-- two out of three doctors surveyed say. I guess I'll be living at home until I get out of the neck brace.

Half the time I think Josh is trying to guilt me into staying. I guess it's Mick's quitting the band that's got him so uptight lately. If I were him I'd say good riddance. But it must be rough, being a college drop out at twenty, living at home, not having a life, and even your pose of being a cool alternative rock guy falls to pieces, 'cause the only guy in your band with any talent leaves to squat with some piece of fluff.

So I'm a bitch. If I had a therapist I'm sure he would tell me it's because I'm really feeling bitter about Tyler. Why not? Look. Two months

ago I was, like they say, on top of the world. This totally beautiful man was telling me he adored me. That he couldn't live without me. He was just so nice to me. He paid attention. And he's a man. Not a boy, a man. You know what that means? It means he knows what he's doing. At least he did.

The whole week before I fell he was moody and mean to me. I don't know why he asked me to move in because he wouldn't fuck me and he sure didn't want to talk to me. What a lousy week. The night I went back to the apartment he told me on the phone that he was making a decision-- that Judith wanted to "try again".

Since the fall Tyler has not been by. He hasn't so much as called. He sent flowers. Everyone did. But on the card all he wrote was (or had them write, I should say, it wasn't his handwriting so he must have called the florists and dictated his message): Get well soon, T. Can you fucking believe the nerve of the guy. I only broke my fucking collarbone for him. It was probably a stupid thing to do. I'm sure he's scared of me now, if he wasn't before.

I've called him at his work a few times. Of course he apologizes for not coming to see me. He insists, every time we talk, that he loves me. But if he's going to get back together with Judith I don't know what that means. All along he insisted we be discreet. I could go along with that for a while. I wasn't sure what to do about Andy anyway. Tyler didn't want people to know we even knew one another, and he's been massively jealous of Andy. Because we're the same age, and he's an old fart, he says. I used to thank God they didn't have children. Not that it matters now.

What kills me is he started it. I mean, he'd scoped me out before I'd ever done a guy. When I first started going to Rumours, because they let kids in. He says he spotted me last fall, which means one of the first times I went.

That means he was watching me, wanting me for months and months before I even knew he existed. Think about it. Starved for fresh young flesh, I guess. He never cruised me though. He just went there to look, he said. Sure.

Which makes all this my fault. One night I noticed him checking me out and as soon as he saw I saw he left. He was wearing his hair tied back with a piece of ribbon and he looked just like Julian Sands in *Room With A View*. I was so excited when Sonja said that he sometimes tended bar at The UpHere Bar. I started hanging out there, hoping, I guess, to be discovered. Expecting, I don't know, The Big Seduction Scene.

Anyway, one night it happened-- a Sunday around seven o'clock, and I was heading home from HDA, when I thought I'd pop in and take a peek. Of course, he was there, and of course the entire place was empty. His back was turned, but I knew it was him immediately. That blond ponytail. And me in sweats, and sweating after three hours of dance class. I was suddenly incredibly self-conscious. What would I say? Suppose I couldn't say anything? I had to get out of there, right away, before he turned and saw me. But what if he turned just then and saw me leaving? For a moment I stood there, petrified, watching him dry glasses over the sink. Then I bolted.

I think it took me about two hours to get cleaned up and chase down some smokes-- Marla owed me a pack and I was low on cash. Then I spent another hour trying to find Sonja. I needed someone to pant and stare with. When we returned I was sure he'd be gone.

He wasn't and there were a few people there so our staring probably wasn't that obvious. We spent the rest of the evening guzzling sangria and taking turns skipping up to the bar (to the annoyance of the waitress), smiling brightly and waiting for this god to divine our intentions and choose one of us. It's probably not the most efficient way to pick someone up, but...

At around midnight and round number three he asked me, "Would you like a pitcher?"

"No. Thank you, " I said, brightly.

"It's cheaper, if you're going to have two more glasses each. " he informed me.

"Oh. Well, no. Thanks, though."

"You're heading off after this drink then?"

"No," I smiled again, beginning to feel truly goofy.

He looked perplexed at this point. So I stood there, attentively waiting for his rejoinder. I could hardly explain that we enjoyed ordering. So I was beginning to feel desperate. I didn't want him to think I was stupid.

Which is when he finally recognized me. He asked, "Have I seen you at Rumours then?"

I said, "You may have." Coy, huh?"

Then this come on smile sort of creeps across his face, real slow like. And he turns around and fills a pitcher with sangria. I must have looked confused or disappointed because he laughed at me when he turned around.

And then he said, "Compliments. I'm having a party next Friday. You can bring your friend if you like." I was already thinking of how not to tell Sonja, because I'd have to tell her something. Then I thought, it's okay, it's a party. Then I wondered what sort of party it would be.

"Great! Where do you live?" He was fishing around in his apron for something. After a moment he pulls out his wallet and removes a business card, hands it to me. "Thanks for the pitcher," I said and I was about to turn back to the table when he extended his hand for me to shake. I suppressed an urge to kiss it, the way you would kiss the Pope's ring.

"Tyler Farrell."

I slipped the card into my pocket and took his hand. It was soft like warm butter. "Jamie. Jamie O'Connell." Suddenly I felt so stupid. I was going to leave without even exchanging names.

Of course Sonja devoured all of it. She was pretty green. But she was nice about it. She said "congratulations" and made it sound as if she meant it. And she asked if she could come to the party, she didn't just assume. We left after that pitcher. I was really trashed and starting to feel like a Lizard. He was busy with someone, and Sonja had to catch a bus so we couldn't wait. But as we were going down the stairs, he called out, "Take care, Jamie."

All I thought about that week was the party: I got kind of nervous about it and I guess so did Sonja, because on Friday she called me from school, wanting to know if I was still into going. I had been cutting school and crashing mostly with Bryn and Marla and Butch, and having a really hard time not telling them about Tyler. They all knew I was sort of seeing Andy. I said, "Yes, aren't you?" and she said, "Yes, can I bring Celia?" This girl was a Convent twat and Sonja knew I couldn't stand her. So I said, "He only invited the two of us." She kept pushing for my permission, "But can I bring her and see if he minds, and if he does we'll both leave?" So I said, "Sure", not feeling like arguing with her, " Meet me at Bryn and Butch's place. Above Mr. I-Got-It on Hollis."

Besides me, Erin was the only one home that evening. The rest of the house was at the Sea Pig shooting pool. She and I didn't get along very well at that point. She was a real snob. But we hung out, mostly just listening to her new SWANS tape. She was heavy into industrial at that point and working, so generous. We were drinking gin and smoking, and I kept looking at the clock wondering when the fuck the Wondertwins would show.

She eventually sent out for pizza and started dropping hints I was wearing out my welcome. Like if Bryn and Butch weren't around, why was I. So around nine I decided to head. It wasn't like I really wanted to go with those two, anyway, but some moral support would have been nice. Of course the problem with leaving was that Sonja and Celia might still show up and I was sure that if I left without them they'd think of something bitchy to say to Erin. But I was about to take off anyway when I heard a shrieking from outside the apartment. I looked out the window and there they were, the Wondertwins. So that was one less thing to worry about.

Erin buzzed them in, looking totally less than overjoyed, and I threw on my jacket, said goodnight, and intercepted Celia and Sonja halfway up the stairwell. There was no way they were even going to talk to Erin. I made small talk with Sonja and ignored Celia while we walked up Granville to Tyler's place.

That was surreal, like a movie set. It was a two bedroom apartment and seemed huge, with high white walls and low hanging fans. But it seemed bigger than it was because it was mostly empty-- there were a couple of tatami mats on the hard wood floor, two blocks of black marble that served as tables, and a third that I realized after a moment was a combination stereo-cd-vcr set up, all matte black, very futuristic. And there was this huge black and white print of this beautiful Japanese bodybuilder. There was a bamboo bookshelf with all sorts of books in Japanese. Tyler's very into Mishima. It was very 9 1/2 Weeks. Even the music was chill and empty-- Cure, David Sylvian, Philip Glass. The guests were completely disappointing by comparison, NSCAD and Dal theatre snots, except for a few people I knew and was completely pissed were there. My brother Joshua, for one. Fortunately he hates being in the same scene as me almost as much as I hate him being around, and he cut out

fairly early. He was there with Natalie Taylor, a total cow. She's a freshman at Dal which is how she knew Tyler's roommate, Tracy. Tracy teaches part-time there.

Tyler wasn't there when we arrived, which freaked me a bit. Tracy was nice though, and said we should stick around, that he would be back shortly. I asked where he was and Tracy said, "He's out with his wife." Sonja said my face fell and my lower lip started trembling like Bette Davis's. I'm not surprised, I felt like I was about to start blubbering. It's a good thing Josh wasn't in the room at the time. Tracy looked kind of embarrassed, but tried to be sweet, "Judy's almost his ex. She's just going through a rough time right now." So I got my face together and we hung out. It was a pretty good party for what it was. Tracy shared her coke with us and they have a really great liquor cabinet. Natalie stuck around after Josh left and played bartender, mixing us all Long Island Ice Teas and these great Singapore Slings. A couple of Tracy's actor friends were putting the moves on me but I was kind of uptight knowing Josh would get a detailed report the next time he and Natalie got together. Besides I was obsessing. I was sure Tyler had forgotten he'd invited us and would think we were crashing. Sonja went off and schmoozed with some art school friends, but Celia was worse than I could have imagined. She kept trying to get me to take my clothes off with her. She didn't want sex, not right there, anyway, but she wanted to play stripper and was too chicken to do it by herself. I wasn't into it. Eventually she took off her jeans and her sweater so she was just wearing panties and a bra. Tracy smiled at her the way you'd smile at somebody else's child who just vomit-launched all over your car. I just sniffed as much coke as I could and played with this dayglo orange slinky and this little blacklite lamp Tyler had on his desk.

When he got in, it was almost one and Tracy was occasionally throwing "get out of my house" glances in our direction, well mostly at Celia who was trying to coax some guy out of his pants. I'm sure she was faking it: can you imagine having sex coked up? can you imagine wanting it? Anyway, I got up and said hi, and he gave me a little smile and apologized to Tracy across the room. Apparently Judy was having a depression. She has them regularly. And he couldn't leave her or she'd flip, kill herself or something. Tracy nodded, like she'd heard it before and asked who was up for a trip down to Alfredo Winestein and Ho's- She felt like munchies, she said. Her friends looked doubtful, but were game enough. Sonja joined them, but Celia just fluffed her curls and said she wanted to stay where it was "cozy". We should have tossed her out then and there, but I didn't want to seem like a jerk in front of Tyler. He thought she was one of Tracy's friends--

Earlier I had said that I didn't think she and Sonja could crash, so I was wondering what was going on with her, but mostly I didn't give a fuck. Tyler had finally arrived and he and I were mostly alone, and he seemed pleased to see me. I just wanted to kiss him and was determined not to mention his wife. So he took off his shoes and got himself a drink, while the others were taking off and I sat there blissfully watching him move around. Then he asked me if I wanted to join him in his room 'to talk'. He just ignored Celia and I figured I'd do the same.

I followed him into the bedroom and closed the door behind me. We both just flopped down, side by side, on his futon and talked for a while. Or I talked and he listened. Stroked my hair. It was so good, the feeling in that room, both of us totally eager but still kind of shy. I told him about my dancing and was explaining the design project I want to do at NSCAD when out of the blue he asked me how old I was.

If I hadn't known he wanted to fuck me, I would have known then. I considered telling him the truth for, oh about seventeen seconds. Instead I did my cover girl pose. "How old do you think I am?"

He didn't smile at that, but he said, "Seventeen, maybe eighteen."

He was being honest and didn't look like he enjoyed it. "You're kidding me-- I just turned twenty. I've been out of school, just bumming around, for a couple of years now." You don't know how relieved he looked at that, the poor dear. But I think he was also a little disappointed-- maybe was turned on by the idea of himself as a pederast. In which case I should have told him the truth, but I don't think he could really have handled the idea of having a boy half his age. Not then. Maybe not later either.

He had rolled over, closer to me, was about to kiss me, I think, when there was a knock at the door. Celia, whom I had already forgotten about. Tyler thought the expression on my face was pretty funny. I didn't notice him cracking a grin. I was wishing death upon her when after a moment, she knocked again. Tyler asked, "What is it?"

Celia opened the door, wrapped in a quilt that had been on the couch, naked, I assumed, underneath. I think she was surprised to see us still mostly dressed. There was a pause while we both just looked at her wondering what was up. I wasn't at all prepared for what she said to Tyler.

"I'm sorry to interrupt. But I came here with Jamie and I don't really know Tracy, so would you mind if I slept in here tonight?" Then, for effect, "I don't take up much space."

I could feel Tyler's hard on getting harder against my hip. Celia might be a bitch but she's no dog. I was so pissed with him. I mean I should have figured, because he was married, but I didn't until then. That's when I remembered him asking me to bring my friend.

I nearly said forget it. I probably should have, because now he has this thing for threesomes and I can't say I'm not into it because I went along with it then.

If I didn't know Celia was such a bimbo it would've been okay as a onetime thing. If I didn't feel totally scammed, I mean she'd obviously planned it all evening. At least we kicked her out around seven o'clock, once buses were running. It was much more fun after she left. I mean it was fun before, I just felt a bit manipulated. I think Tyler got off on that too.

In a way that night totally foreshadowed what's been happening lately. Judy wanting back into his life and confronting him about me. Him suggesting the three of us get together. To talk, he said that night on the phone. I didn't even hang up before going to the window.

Wish You Were Her

which i opens?

*want to start where the danger is/am playing it safe/ thinking obliterate my
self/ you'd think i'd know better by now? so*

*Lulu/ Liszt/ Jennifer etcetera how many names for the other can one (i)
come up with to obscure his (my) own?*

1

the shaking greaser slipped from back the bandstand
in one hand a pack of matches
his fingers alight
Jennifer was six that day
her first day in The Real School
doesn't remember what she thought
before she saw the Teenager crossing
smiling sneering burning
but always after her fear
came in the stench of singed hair

*

who thinks of the broken past?
she was Goddess, or soon would be
in drawn down moon circle
already the aspect upon her
though the others had not yet come
antlers part hennaed hair

and silver hoops jangle at wrists and ankles
such possession beneath her white linen
and acquaintance with spirits
what saved her

*

the first time he appeared
a spectre in her looking glass
she merely arched one brow as
at an unexpected visitor
knowing
your fear feeds them
"Troy, I thought you... you're dead, don't you know?"
but you can't make small talk with a ghost
his precise charcoal finger tip and thumb callous twirling
whisps of black, his eyes squint
lips mouth,
"What's a matter? No kisses for an old flame?"
her fingers pass over open eyes
closing
opening,
she says
"Be Gone" in her best Goddess voice
and again,
until he fades
her fear wound nearly burst

*

14, her first year as Lulu

"Lulu's got her gun"
the cartoonist would sing
from behind the folds of his
Doctor Who scarf -- his coke bottle
glasses icicle white and his breath
with jagged edges shaking
through the arcade punker boys all turned
girls posing indifferent or too engrossed
at Tempest or The Empire Strikes Back
which is fine
its not for them
Lulu struts her stuff
mexican wide brim over peroxide curls
sixshooter cap guns holstered low on hips
over blue denim and high leather
boots of red wine
Puss in Boots
in charge for the first time
everytime through that door
that year

*

less easily opened
the door between her legs
between her gigs
with her cartoonist Baal
it was Liszt who made her Lulu
Liszt, formerly Kelly

some girl from around, somewhere
played piano
pronounced Jennifer too mudane a name,
 but Lulu..., and besides downtown
 everyone becomes new

Liszt laughed,
 warming to her subject
maddened in the burbs
they changed one another
and their affair
was drunk like cheap wine
soon forgotten:
it never happened
no earnest kisses, nor tentative hands
 nor mouths musing in the dark
and this happens again
and again

*

*do you sometimes feel a voyeur/creeping around inside you /when you're
not looking?/it's self indulgent/ that phantasy/ indulging in selves/ stepping
on and off/ staging characters/ desire watching from the wings*

2

filling in the details: Baal sketched in black and white
the cartoonist an ugly nigerian boy
spit too much for a love object

or so she thought when
after six years of love
on again off
again
she studied and loved one fall in Montreal
working in a gallery café
her hair clipped and black and
she was Jennifer again, and secular
briefly, his job in the sex shop furnished
their running joke: they served
the same clientele, her bohemian classmates
but he would not go down on her
and always came first

*

Jennifer in repose
in Montreal
only the cartoonist
calls her Lulu
in half lotus half grinning
an acolyte imperfectly
able to suppress
her sense of comedy
performing zen devotions in a salon
cozy with bric a brac, art books, magazines:
Art Forum, i.d., Insurgent Architect,
culture she's cultivated
leads her to wonder

if her passion for collection
is past
or merely passed into
a new phase
collecting faiths, mysticisms:
the Cabalist Tarot deck beneath her pillow,
Vedic dance classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays,
daily meditations (today Prajnaparamita,
yesterday the Five Scandas, tomorrow
Nirvana)
and the weekly Womanspirit study group
yet she is sure
something is missing from my life

*

*where are the ghosts? she knows better than to ask
suppose speaking called them home*

*

Jennifer dreams near sleep
but not in it
she roams a two dimensional country
looking for a piano
her imaginary ex-
a grey stick figure fleeing
the Eraser
she is hot white burning stick
she wants to come
Liszt,

she wants to flee

Troy,

and the hand that draws him
black fingers close around her
crush her lungs
put her out

*

in her journal she writes

Turned 21 today.

Baal forgot.

I can tell.

Almost seven years,

He kissed me when he got up

but he was already gone

before he was gone.

Dreamt of Troy

again last night.

He killed me. Have

to talk to Molly,

not Liszt

Molly

at Circle on Wednesday. She'll

say he's my animus, my

burning cock fetish. My

Lord, Lady, sometimes

I think I'd be better off with

a Freudian.

★

one winter night at Impromptu Café
a beautiful feminist poet where the spotlight was
moments before like Piaf
in the fall away high of the poetry
the cartoonist likened her reading to a seduction:
another woman we all want to fuck,
especially the girls
-- as if that made it okay
Baal spoke excitedly and squeezed my hand
with his boy's grin of shark's teeth
squeezed my agreement out
with his boy's grin of shark's teeth
squeezed again:
let's take her out for a drink
and I slipped my hand free
excused myself and wrote off
the line and into an other body
my textual transvestism painful
pumps pinching too large feet

★

*it's beginning to come clear/ my drift into this Lulu/ my ex's smile, my
sister's memories, that waitress' voice/ how is this search for an other/not
just the same old romance musing/ except blunted/ exacerbated by the
narcissistic slant?*

I left Lulu because
because
she was not real
I mean, she was
a creature so ethereal
fantasies touched her
like memory
I love her in memory
in time I grew nostalgic
for a real girl
I'm a cartoonist
an artist spends so much
on fabrication
on the work of fantasy
He must surround himself
with the real
--Keats said that.
Lulu was
a flake
a free spirit
too emotional
a cliché, I might have drawn,
the crazy girl
my love
she fucked around

with that witch

with my head

too much

*

how do you leave the body?

first you need to know

what body are you in,

before you astral project your self away

i was Lulu, no, Jennifer,

(trying to be the beloved)

any unnamed girl

my hair was blonde

black in an Eton crop

in a sheath dress, Bohemian

and sexy, hot, but really i was just

a hand being squeezed

and eyes, not really, eyes

the register of vision

and hearing him

but he squeezed too hard

and i gave up that ghost

or flesh, was a self

conscious drag queen

splitting and thrilling at the seams

then gone, embarrassed by all this incest

all this mess

well, how do you leave the body?

i have to know

i haven't left any of these skins

yet i can't be in all at once

*

sitting in impromptu café

Jennifer rolls her eyes at burnt chili

notes they've raised the price again

might as well get to work

Moll says Troy is with her all the time *now*

that he's dead

he's carrying a torch for you

like she doesn't know that

well this is as good a place as any to

let the fire genie out

she reaches for pen and paper

at another table

another writer

watching

*

You, looking like you might be Lulu

for me

...if i called you "darling"

as a prelude to stealing you away

the delusion that i could call you must be symptomatic

of what? my rapture in proximity?

--sitting at the window, ostensibly charting

lovers' progress up the main, rather scribbling longing out longhand, not

long enough for retreating backs, not until light breathed you in
light breathes us all
and drifting you up, steam off yellow pavement into impromptu café's
humid disappearance
i see us in dust motes, in the fever of light, in the unfinished poem lodged
in my spine, shivering desire

to efface myself
to say
the poem wants
to erupt in a body of mist
to be dispersed

sometime after the girl who was not Lulu
who was Lulu?
i was thinking of getting up
going
leaving impromptu café
this poem
when i heard this boy screaming at another girl
who left
shameless i called him to me
said sit down
i'll buy you a coffee
tell me
you're angry with her
your name is Troy

*

the writer reminds her of Baal

Thinking of telling him off

(it's Molly's idea, in fact)

Molly, not Liszt

Lulu wonders if she resents

rescinds recants recounts reasons reZens

rightly, this writing of her life

though she knows the writer

a fiction of convenience, an imaginary prick

to action, incentive, she's incensed

What does it mean?

Am I writing like a man? Imagining myself,

a man's writing explaining me? To who? To who?

What's to explain?

I'm just this girl

with this life.

I do stuff,

stuff happens.

It adds up or no.

So she asks, (am I asking for it?)

why do I need a writer?

*

You're forgetting

your stuff at the beginning:

the burning inside your mirror,

the fire that puts you out

*

I've forgotten nothing.
I got back on the page in summer 21
having dumped Baal, or been dumped, it was not so bad
I met this really cool woman, a witch, in yoga
and we read H.D. together and Djuna Barnes
and I started feeling really ready to write
Moll and I worked together on prayers to the Goddess
she said I had the gift and I felt stapled to her
after that we kissed and I joined the coven.
Then you came along and offered to help. Some help.
Well slower than that, but there are lots of coming
out stories, even some by witches, and I wasn't going
to tell mine except, my writer tried to write me straight.

*

*Lulu in polka dots like a gamine, an ingenue
poised upon her stool the heart
rig of the world, of impromptu café
where specters of artists gone by dance:
beyond the ink scratched on the page, she is a dream
Anais, hair tumbling in the wind, her bicycle
near spilling her desire, naked
legs clenched to the tops of her stockings:
oblivious to the comings and goings of eyes, deep
spring of the dozen visions, of the roses
and hopes of a waitress, some students,
a lovelorn priestess, even her Writer.*

*

this, she knows, is all wrong
she came to this writer for catharsis, for exorcism, she is
on fire with this effrit from some breath

whispered on the back of her neck

Troy died in prison. Now he can come for you

she caught too long ago to remember, this is
not what she wanted, she is transparent now
in the mirror she does not recognize the sensual girl,
the coquettish waif gazing back,
this is false, she is no French art film director's idea
of innocence, of twenties kiddie porn, she doesn't
want this, she wants
out

*

On the writer's advice she tried

automatic writing:

IemptyI'memptyIemptyI'memptyIemptyemptyI'mempty IemptyI'mempty
I'm a sack of skin, of burning cloth, of bones.

Fuck you, say it.

Say, "Troy is a Torch!"

Tell Troy is a Torch. He wants to hear it, now. Tell Troy!

Wants to hear it , your mouth around it, silly little bitch.

I'm biting my lip singing my fire song, gonna snag ya,
bring ya to me.

Troy's matchsticks gonna make a pyre, gonna burn ya up
Jenny girly. Roast ya. Eat ya.

When Troy moves into your house, gets comfy, lives there
with you. Your blood floats in Troy's gasoline. together
like that.

FULL.

*

*Full. Full of it. Full of shit./ sucks this drift into the poem/the closer i come to
Lulu the more i want her/ the feminine subject i would be/ on the other
hand/in the other's hand/ the others: the callow cartoonist, the lecherous
writer, the arsonist ghost dreaming of possessing Lulu/ that's what it comes
down to, possession/ not that we'll succeed, but the wish...*

-- man this bitterness is wearing me down, where is

Liszt?

4

Before Moll let me go she filled the room with smoke
seven braziers worth.

Between four towers my priestess spoke:

Okay lover, she said, okay cherie. You want to go. Go.

This has happened before

Face your wraiths with your writer, perhaps

he can help you in a way I could not.

I doubt it.

He may bring you knowledge, he won't bring you joy.

hasn't this happened before

But if you wanted joy, you wouldn't be leaving.

Your fiery suitor waits for you

to seek in shadows where you felt his hot breath
before: return to impromptu,
there he is a phoenix. Disguise yourself
in tatters, in fetters, you take a taxi now
attend to pooling candlewax
beneath your fingernails
you'll find your torturer in conversations
of absence, in the writer's words and spaces
whose exclusivity you will feel as a sickening

*

*and if Lulu could speak beyond the language of another's desire:
beyond Molly the witch and her unnamed writer and Baal the cartoonist,
Troy and Liszt*

(she might ask)

who am I running from and who am I running to?

(she might not run)

*

*sitting against driftwood bricolage, or a chair
on a beach, the writer's romance
thinking Lulu, Jennifer, away
admitting what Molly feared-- the temptation to write Jennifer up
like a Christmas package for himself
She saw that and left, his flat, his story
saying I must away
there was a gift between them, probably
a trick of the writer's desire, the slip between wanting
wanting to be, opened a chasm*

*and his delicate dependence, traversing a rope bridge
between being and buying
set her off
in more than one direction
but one last hopefull jerk
off,*

he (i) could not resist:

*When Troy next fogged her bathroom mirror
She was all Monroe, a throaty growl
of Fuck me, arms flung wing wide,
and he was less dispelled
than dispersed, as he noticed the other ghost
the pianist of her desire
playing out the past
Liszt*

Liszt Disappears

When I disappeared. That was the big event of the season. Where Liszt went. What happened to Liszt. Here's a story. Liszt ran away to Toronto, hitched up with a counterfeiter and started hooking. I got that one from Kerri later and we were there together that night. Pretty fucked up. The night Liszt went away. Yule eve, the pagan Christmas according to Lulu. We spent the whole day watching John Hughes' bratpack flicks on Kerri's parents' Beta machine and choking bumwash (an inch from every open bottle in the Lawrence's liquor cabinet, topping up the dregs with water).

Ten o'clock, we take off. I, with Kerri, Tim and Lulu, and Kerri's older brother's friend, Christian, get into the Lawrence's car and drive down Oxford Street to Dalhousie University Student Union Building: the gods are on in thirty. I look out the windows at the holiday lights on the houses, barely visible through blowing snow, look into the back seat into Lulu's dead eyes. Pretend I'm not looking at her so she can't see me. She's far more pissed than any of us and I saw her crying earlier. I said, "What's up?" Of course I don't know why. She's so fucked up. About me. About Baal. About not knowing who to be fucked up about. She didn't hear me. Doesn't hear me. Thinking. Too cool Lulu, even when you're totally miserable, totally fucking terrified. I don't know why. The car inches along. The car slows at an intersection, and we all hold our breath, waiting for the light, wondering, will it start again? She didn't touch me. No one knows. Except Lulu. We're all sweating like crazy from the booze and the layers. To my left Kerri's holding the steering wheel stiff-armed as if she's trying to shove it and the car away, her eyes stretched wide open over her red Palestinian scarf, and in the mirror-- I'm not looking-- Lulu's shivering between Tim and Christian; she just has her

tan rancher coat on, Rod's broad brimmed hat. Remember the night we stole it. Went to the Bubble. That night went on for ever. No gloves even. Not watching her through the frost covered glass I watch lurching Edward Gorey characters in heavy dark coats making their way across snow bluffs, icy island in the middle of the road into pulsing fuzz of lights. We're paused. On pause. On the verge of slow motion plummet through cloud wall. There's a pall over us. Feels as if we could shatter at any moment, for no reason at all; we release our breath as one, the light goes green and we turn onto Coburg-- almost there, almost there-- and glide like *Wings of Desire* Angels in the library down the last few blocks .

I'm hungry. I miss you already. Lulu. Lulu. You've got your boy. I want to taste the tang of someone different, their sex and sweat, or at least someone grinning viscerously at me, lying: "I love you". Someone I could bite into. It's all the same. A little blood. Love. Noise. We get out. Somewhere inside that block of concrete and light, *Marquee De Sade* 's waiting to give us something: if not for free; then for some sweat and adoration. Melancholy, bruises and ten bucks at the door. Cheap at the price. Lulu. Hopefully we can score some 'cid inside. Inside system booms *Violent Femmes-- I held her in my arms and it wasn't you...* trudge through knee-high snow, rubbing my mitts over my nose to keep off frostbite, Kerri's breathing deeply between swigs of the last of the bumwash. We're not alone and I'm not looking at you. I mumble, "Lulu's pretty fucked up over Liszt but its your own fault, Lulu. You want too much."

Lead footed zombies we go up and into the SUB. Pause. Stunned by heat, peel off coats and scarves. I see your neck, your hands, your collarbone. Forget it. Take the stairs to the second floor where the action is. A skin's bomber jacket sleeve tufts up against my arm and I wonder if someone will

take me tonight. I hate you. Feel knotty, anxious at the same time. I rub the fog from my glasses with my ice encrusted scarf. Lulu watches, says, "Let's go," and grabbing hands with me, trying to make up to Liszt, our coats and scarves dragging off our arms like Batman's cape, we take off skipping across the foyer and up the stairs. I don't look to see if the others follow. Lulu's so beautiful. I look up at the low hanging flag of locked razor blades, dominating the entire stairwell, read the band's logo sprayed on in red, *EVISCERATE YOURSELF*, -- man those guys must be happy -- and levitate towards it. I have a Sunday Night Movie Of The Week dream sequence where I float in and through and all my skin is stripped off, in this curtain of blood, that runs cartoon-like, down the steps, only I have another skin underneath and I'm a beautiful eight year old boy, and I know without being told I'm the Anti-Christ, Damien. Kind of shakes me back into my now skin, the one Lulu doesn't want. I drop her hand, and she keeps going up. I'm not looking. I guess I'm staring at the razors because Kerri says behind me, "Hey Liszt, it's okay. They're only plastic dude."

Gaze into thronging black and take her hand and she doesn't even know anything. We shove through, jumping to the front of the coat check cue without even trying (gathering Lulu to us, she's talking to some boy). I want to explain to the boy who takes my coat about being Damien, but don't. I want to tell him about Lulu, about us, but I don't. I could kill her or the boy. He's a skin. What the fuck's she trying to prove? Everybody's here and I'm not looking at her; wonder where the band is. Fucking gods. Everybody's glazed over in the eyes 'cause we all know They-- *Marquee De Sade*, I mean-- are here, and we know They could step out of a wall or the dark at any moment and see us; right now They can hear us. Man I gotta be lucky tonight or I'm so screwed. Maybe I am. Found the money in mom's purse and she

didn't notice or say anything anyway. Lulu's still talkin' to that boy and suddenly I've had it. I know the music that's crankin' out of the McGuinness Room-- *Kick in the Eye*, my second to favorite Bauhaus tune to dance to, and so I kiss Lulu to interrupt her and, unexpectedly, Lulu starts laughing because she understands what I'm doing and I shove past that stupid skin. Gone. But then everybody else recognizes the song and so I'm swept in, barely have time to notice my stubs been ripped, my wrist stamped; start to thrash and what do you know, Vincent's face comes out of nowhere, I actually do that thing with two fingers to his eyes, and he's gone, just the word "Bitch!" drowning in Peter Murphy's passion in my pricked up ears. Like I need to hear from him now. One of my ears has a hole the shape of a tear drop where my salamander earring caught on some buddy's leather: Vince's before he was Vince. He shared his beer with me after I told him; I still have the earring. Can't believe I wanted to go out with the asshole. Oh Lulu. My head up, I glance at the crucifix on the stage: Christ has plasticwrap skin and his organs pulse orange and green inside; my spine arches and my hair's whipping back and forth, my hands digging through air and dark; eyes close, head cracks forward, legs rising, falling delicately beneath netting: Killing Joke song arises and I mouth: *Love like blood*; I'm there and I'm not; I'm in the country of Melnibone, where Elric the Albino Prince holds Chaos at bay only through the slow corruption of his own soul by his vampire blade, Stormbringer; I'm at a puppet show in a maize field outside of Mexico city and the moon is disappearing into this huge grey cloud and the Dance of the Dead weaves all around me; I'm sitting in a mist shrouded boat bound for Avalon stroking the lank hair of my sleeping brother-lover, I'm Jody Foster in *Hotel New Hampshire*, I'm with Lulu and her Mom on the Cabot Trail ... This is the limit and They haven't even come on yet; the gods are here and I'm feeling

desperate tonight; the song's winding down and I'm spinning on one foot slower, slower, stop. Thanks for the ballet, Ma. Red velvet and white-sallow gaslights come on stage, cast trembling luminous shadows against dry ice London fog. Too, the rumble of generators, arcane engines of destruction, materializing men with skulls for heads, men in opera capes, men with chainsaws: Kerri was right for once, far better to arrive now, when this begins, than plod through some lame ass local opening act you've seen a dozen times before. Ariel De Sade smiles, reveals his incisors over bloodless thin lips. I'm reeling in his vast cold gaze, it's like they say, his eyes are total black pits; the other four are just his wolf pack; and he's throwing stuff at us, skulls and shit, while he tells us what filth we are. Out of the machine grind: the wail of Georges' fender, Scorp's slow backbeat, Ariel's vitriol descending into a hallow keening. I'm leaning out of myself to him, my body's being warmed by those around me, but I'm getting icier by the second, he's sucking it out of me, all the heat with his look: it rushes through me, my spine arches, I'm getting wet. I'm going away. I can go to him, go to him: hands that know I'm leaving are lifting me to him, groping my tits, inside my thighs, the shadow dripping behind, they know he wants me and so they all want me. Except you. Where are you? I'm on-stage and he's smiling so wide his head is going to crack and fall open and let the darkness out. The crowd doesn't exist anymore, I'm looking for them, for you. Turning, De Sade says, "Forget everything you know. You've just walked over your own grave." I touch his leather hand, feel silvery cool all over. I might just be able to forget you up here. I doubt it. De Sade doesn't care, he just takes me.

(must we be) Tragic Lesbians?

funny the power of wishes all i wanted was to be pinpricked with shuriken to be pierced i knew somehow that's all it would take and light would gush be gleaned from my hundred different holes shafts that colour and cover and change everything around me around her i never knew how to act after that (night) and i'm always still in it i'll tell you i don't want to want to be like that again again all i asked for was her and i just asked for one night stupid the deals we make trapped as i am still either i act run to her caress her cheek, slip a finger through a hole in ragged worn cardigan pea soup yellow scratchy on breast like possession it doesn't go away i was possessed i am either i act without knowing how? or freeze cold blue body laying in the snow pressed down by stars i craved smothered by the smoke i blew snow angel bobby pinned except that night i wasn't paralyzed by not knowing that night the only night i just got (what i wanted, what i asked for) pricked open and kissed so perfectly that it was like the kiss of death who needs anything after that i did (even if it was just more of the same) i had to go away gone away to heaven or a band i shouldn't have wasted my wishes like that

(could i have kept her?)

Double Agent

Lawrence, our bassman, was the first to start in. "Feminist bitches!" to which there are assenting grunts from Dennis and Ben, hauling guitar and organ respectively.

"Fuck that, Lawrence! I'm a feminist bitch. Those were just kids." Thanks Annette, I think. She looks like she wants to tear a strip out of someone, but isn't sure who. Inside she's probably feeling guilty, which is how I'm feeling too. We actually decided to go for the vamp look, when we switched from doing punk tunes to ska. Thought it would be fun, campy. Now we've got sixteen-year-old Gloria Steinem wannabees calling us "sluts", "sellouts", and "pawns of the patriarchy". I'm not sure whether I should be embarrassed, amused or angry. The whole thing is absurd. I'm even wondering what we're doing playing all ages shows, for drinks, at a venue like the Dalhousie S.U.B..

In the changing room Annette says, "Lighten up, Kelly. They were probably drunk, or tripping." Annette kicks off her pumps and walks over to me, slips an arm around my waist.

"They were het anyway."

"Maybe," she says, smiling tiredly.

"Or thought they were," I qualify.

"Yeah. I thought I saw a baby dyke among them."

"Oh?" I'm not really listening. "Annette," I say, suddenly wanting reassurance, or at least solidarity, "Do you feel like trash?"

Her expression goes sour. Then, she laughs. "Well, I sure look like trash."

That's supposed to be a joke, but looking in the mirror, I'm not so sure. You could say we're doing an ironic take off of piano bar chanteuse kitsch, complete with feathered boas. Say Josephine Baker and Marilyn Monroe. Or you could say we look like a couple of bimbos. Obviously someone thought so. Annette pecks me on the cheek, "There, there. I still think we look dishy." And she hauls my blonde wig off.

I cock an eyebrow at her. "We look like a couple of drag queens. This whole thing was your idea. Do I detect some sort of corporate sellout plot?"

She grins back. "Yeah. I happen to know the audience is just peppered with company scouts."

"You mean..."

"Yes."

Significant pause. "We could be the next..."

"Blondie..."

"Go-Gos..."

"Bananarama!!"

"Wow!" We both breathe, vacuously, only to be interrupted by a burst of my smoker's jag.

Then she says, "God, I feel dated."

I start to strip and change: Love & Rockets t-shirt, black jeans, Docs, my leather, spiky short brown hair-- me, looking back at me in the mirror. Except for the vamp makeup and painted nails-- we left the remover at Annette's place and I can't be bothered to scrub my face right now. So now I look like Vogue's idea of punk. Truly, it's very tragic. I need a drink. Annette has already gone off in search of booze: she just doffed her wig, this scary bouffant thing, and slipped into a pair of Oxfords, backstage, Tom, our roadie, says, she and the guys are out on the floor schmoozing with Kevin Fearless.

I take a deep breath, still tense about those girls, and head out into the crowd, aiming for the bar. It would be nice if I were shitfaced on freebies before Bliss takes the stage. That way I can cut out. On my way to the bar I notice members of our fan club headed in the same direction. Most of them look much straighter than me, and as expected, much younger: private schoolgirls in their boyfriends' black sweaters. Of course we arrive at the bar at precisely the same time. I'm trying to come up with something witty and cutting to say to them, and simultaneously, to catch either Vince's or Butch's eye so I can get my scotch and get my ass out of there. Out of the corner of my eye I notice one of the girls staring at me. Firing up to blast her nasty, I turn to the girl...

And stop dead. She's just far too cute. Maybe sixteen, with really, really big brown eyes, shaved head, nose ring, and coke bottle glasses, and dimples. She reminds me of someone. While I'm being speechless at her, she says, "Excuse me. I just noticed your t-shirt. It's great. I ju t love Maggie and Hopi. Where did you get it?" And she beams at me like the cat's meow.

"Uh. Thanks. Comic shop in Montreal. But you can probably send away for one." I managed to get that much out, suffering from dry mouth syndrome. I can hardly tell this girl what I'm thinking, that she is just too adorable for words. It occurs to me she actually looks a lot like Hopi.

Butch rescues me. "Hey, Liszt girl, what can I get you? Double Agent was great by the way. Set could've been longer though."

Ha, funny. Butch is one of maybe half a dozen people I know still calls me that. "Thanks boyo, I know. I'll take a double scotch on the rocks." Well, the jig, as they say, is up. I turn back to the beautiful baby dyke.

She's regarding me with some considerable confusion. "You're..."

"...one of the women you and your friends were calling a slut." My mouth just got the better of my libido. "A pawn of the patriarchy, and if I recall, a sellout. You know, I've always thought wimminbashing sucked as feminist practice. You?" I extend my hand with a tough look on my face. "Kelly O'Connor. Liszt to my very nearest and dearest friends. Pleased to meet you." I feel better now. Though this poor girl looks crushed. Talk about bashing. Her friends are watching us now with a mixture of reserve, trepidation and hostility.

She takes my hand though and gives a wan smile. "Abigail Bride. You look different. Better. Liszt." This last is said with a sort of polite deliberateness. She's no soft touch, this girl.

Butch returns with my scotch. "What do you drink, Abigail?" I ask. Nonplused. "Keith's."

"You got that Butch?" He nods and goes to fetch it. I turn to her. "I think so. This is how I normally dress after all. On stage, that was costuming. But I still think wimminbashing is bad feminism, and judging people's politics by their wardrobes is kind of a cheap shot."

Abigail appears to mull this pearl over and I light up a cigarette. I offer her one and she declines. So pristine, so virginal. Hmmmm. Suddenly I get it. Jennifer. Lulu. She looks just like Lulu. Like Lulu did, that is. Not that Lulu ever had the guts to shave off her precious curls. Her beer arrives and she attempts to pay for it. I explain that band members don't pay for their beer.

She blushes. To stop myself from kissing her-- she's so cute-- I ask her if she wants to come and meet the rest of the band. Bad move.

She confers with her cronies. And there are some raised eyebrows, but in a minute they're giggling so we must've been forgiven our un-PC behavior.

When Abigail comes back to me she's got a nervous smile on her face. "Do you mind if my friends tag along?"

"Of course not," I say, grinning maniacally. What have I done?

There are seven of them including Abigail: Christian, Laura, Elizabeth, Jenny, Nadine, and Jennifer. All except Jennifer, and Abigail are Convent girls. Abigail was kicked out of Sacred Heart when she shaved her head two months ago. Jennifer, the hippie in the crowd, is a friend from her new high school, Queen Elizabeth's.

As we make our way to where Annette and the boys are hanging I wonder what it is I think I'm up to. Do I just want to prove a point to this girl? The last thing I feel like doing is arguing feminism. I've had those arguments in too many classes. Oh give it up, I tell myself, you know exactly what you want to do. You want to take this sweet young thing home, or to the nearest dark corner, and initiate her into the joys of deviant sex. But why? She's cute. So? Not good enough. This night is feeling very Deja Voodoo, if you do know what I mean. Don't think about it. She's cute. It's enough. But now you're saddled with her six giggling, if terribly earnest, chaperones. I glance at Abigail again. She beams at me again. I was never that young and trusting. Not even-- I must be projecting. I'm suddenly arrested by the completely paranoid notion that she can sense purple rays of projection emitting from the back of my head.

Annette catches my eye as we draw close. She notes my entourage, of course. Then she sees Abigail and licks her lips. Lewd bitch. Mouths the words, "Jail bait". I want to smack her upside the head.

She's still in drag and her short black hair is slicked back-- looks like she's been dancing. Hopefully none of Abigail's friends are rude enough, or stupid enough, to say something to her in person. The boys are still in their lounge lizard sleazoid suits. Three sets of eyes light up with surprise and not a little prurient interest as they take in the girls.

Annette notices, and again, inevitably, comments. This time out loud. "Whoa boys. They're all illegal, I'm sure. Ask Kelly."

I shoot her a look. Thanks ever so much sweetie. "Annette, Lawrence, Dennis, Ben-- this is Abigail and --" Her friends have already closed up into a circle and started gabbing amongst themselves. I shrug, "... and her friends."

"Please to meet you, Abby." Annette says.

"Abigail." My girl corrects her. "Hi."

The boys grunt their hellos, and Lawrence asks Abigail what her friends' names are-- I think he has his eye on one or more of them-- which precipitates another full round of introductions. Throughout which he smiles and eases himself over between the girls making pleased to meet you noises. Abigail and I take seats next to Annette and I'm about to ask her when Bliss comes on, when Dennis, who is looking pissy, asks, "So which of you, exactly, called my friends sellouts and sluts?"

For a moment the noise of the McGuiness room crowd washes over the hush of our table. We're all speechless and then just as suddenly we're all speaking at once.

As I'm telling Dennis not to be such an asshole, Annette surprises me by saying, "I must confess some interest in the answer to that question myself."

Lawrence is saying something about costing us the second half of our set and Laura says, "Uh guys, maybe we should go." Several of the girls

second that thought and start milling about, conspicuously avoiding looking at me or Abigail. I can't say as I blame them.

I turn to Abigail expecting accusation in those beautiful brown eyes of hers, but her expression is neutral. She shrugs and starts to get up. "That sucks," she breathes, just loud enough for me to hear.

So I shrug back, feeling helpless.

One of the girls, Jennifer is looking less embarrassed than annoyed at the way things are going. In a pained voice she suggests "Guys, why don't you just find some chairs and sit down?" Adding as she turns back to Annette and I, "If you don't mind?"

"Of course not," I say. Annette nods that it's okay with her.

Then taking on a business like tone of voice, Jennifer asks, "So what's with the big Cosmo makeover? I used to think Double Agent was a pretty rockin' band."

It could be worse, I think, opening my mouth and unsure of what I'm going to say: I could be having this conversation with a sixteen year old guy.

Well, it gets pretty heated and I'm not sure if Jennifer and co. ever really get it. But some of them do make remarks about feeling obliged to present themselves a certain way as feminists. I think Annette and I power trip on them a little bit-- neither of us actually says, "when I was your age..." but we come close enough to it. Which seems ludicrous: they're all sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old, I'm only twenty-four, Annette's twenty-six. We're all part of the same generation, we're all women, and we all call ourselves feminists.

Unsurprisingly, the boys drift off pretty quickly, and after a while, so do some of Abigail's friends. Go figure. Some people have better things to do at a gig. By the time Bliss comes on we're about to lose Annette and it's just

Laura, Abigail, Jennifer and myself. Jennifer is doing most of the talking and I'm starting to feel restless.

I decide to go for the brash and unsubtle approach, "Abigail," I ask, "Have you ever had a girlfriend?"

Her face shows surprise if only for an instant, and she glances towards Jennifer to see if she heard. She gives no sign of having done so. Interesting.

"Uh h' n," she practically whispers, "One, but that was a while ago."

Well, you couldn't ask for more than that— even if she is obviously lying. I wonder what Jennifer will do. Abigail was probably her first girlfriend. If I'm reading the signs properly.

"Let's get out of here," I say, brushing her wrist with my hand. I stand up. Now she has to decide what she's doing.

"Ah. Can Jennifer and Laura come?" It's clear enough she wants to come with me, but she's waffling on showing it.

I give her my shark's grin. "I only have room for one passenger on my bike."

Her eyes, if this is possible, get wider. "What sort of bike is it?" The others are paying attention now. Jennifer doesn't look happy.

"Honda 500. I'm going to get my bag," I volunteer. "It's backstage." I give Abigail a "be brave" smile. As I head off she is starting to struggle into a pea-yellow sweater and a red plaid lumber jacket. I avoid looking Jennifer in the face. She's a nice girl but she's also Abigail's responsibility. Behind me, I can hear her asking Abigail, "What's up?"

Working my way through the crowd I'm feeling a little sorry for her, also for Abigail. This can't be much fun for either of them. Thinking of the guarded expression I saw on Abigail's face, I feel a bit like a creep. Or I have a

premonition of feeling that way. After I have my way with her. On second thought I'll probably feel pretty good then, too. Guilt is for Catholics.

When I get back to the table, Abigail seems to be addressing the whole gaggle of girl-friends. She looks stressed, poor dear.

"Liszt and me are going over to her place." There's some crowing until they catch sight of me. Abigail hasn't noticed. To Jennifer she asks, "You'll be okay?"

She doesn't much look like she'll be okay.

"Goodnight all. Nice to meet you. I'm sure I'll see you around soon." I breeze in, sliding a leather clad arm around Abigail's waist. If Jennifer starts crying we'll never get out of here.

Abigail looks up at me surprised.

To pointed stares, we exit.

We're silent going down the stairs to the main foyer. While we're standing at the glass doors, looking out into the blowing snow, unballing gloves and scarves, and zipping jackets up that last inch, Abigail asks, "Did you get a chance to say goodnight to your friends?"

I flash her a smile. "I'll see them tomorrow, or the day after."

"I'm not sure I should be going with you." Now she's avoiding my eyes.

I let that sit between us for a second before replying. "You and Jennifer are seeing one another." Then I sigh. I can't help it. This wasn't supposed to be big sister night. If Annette were around she would remind me at this point that there is a very good reason I am the youngest lover, male or female, she has ever had. Something to do with her superior intelligence.

"Look, you don't have to come home with me, but I want you to. It's okay if you don't want to. I won't hate you if you go back up to Jennifer.

Though I will be annoyed. Because I think you want to come with me. Your decision." It's my responsible speech, which I have prepared for precisely this sort of situation. Then I cheat. I kiss her slowly, just pressing my lips up against hers, and then drawing away slowly enough to let my breath linger on her cheek. "What do you say?"

"Okay," she chirps and crushes into my arms. What can I say? Works every time.

"Well, we've got a bit of a walk in front of us."

"You parked far from here?"

Now it's my turn to blush. "I, uh, left my bike at home."

Her look is incredulous. "But you said..."

"Look at that snow. I sure wouldn't want to ride a bike in that. Besides I've had a fair bit to drink. Take a cab?"

"You're very bad." She's smiling as she says that, and we push out the doors into the night.

In Her Coffin, Beauty Sleeps

Near sleep but not in it I dreamt I was Prospero and I could make you love me just by writing it in my book.

Spring 1994

I awake with words in my mouth and the tug of that dream insufficient to stop up my meanness or fear. "You been up long?"

Her hand bats at my face as she turns, like a kiss, away, that says without saying "shut up".

And so Jennifer spoons to Ricky and instead of spooning to her I flail up and down, tugged by my limbs and the stupidity of jealousy and a night almost without sleep or sex. Uncertainly, I have cause: these two were meant for one another, and should toss off their boyfriends, and possibly me, the better to pleasure themselves. But then, it could be the awkward tension I bring is not entirely unwelcome. Maybe I make it safe. At least, they could get rid of me, if they wanted to. And Jennifer did say on the metro, low enough so only I heard, "Come home with me"

The clock says 7:48. Jennifer and I have a meeting to make for 10:00. Our respective apartments to visit in between. Our neglected lovers. Slipping out of bed and the room, I envy Ricky her sleep but know I'd be crushed if the two of them were heading off without me. This is the crux, the core of all that anxiety I put onto the woman's body. The body I needed like a guarantee of desire. The memory of those days hallows me. Harrows me. The fear of being left behind by women.

In the shower I'm wondering why I've never been with two before. I'm so desperate and happy now I feel I could do anything. I love them and even unsure of their feelings for me, I'm ready to drop all other loyalties. Even to myself. I was ready last night when Jennifer gasped "hey"-- my hand cupping one breast already settled for sleep and Ricky's tongue against her lips. Suddenly, I felt I'd made a mistake. I said I was sorry, I said "I can go now, if you want." They didn't say "yes" or "no". Jennifer wanted to talk, she said so-- and we tried. But I'm not sure what we said-- I know they came first for one another, but if they want me at all, if I'm making a fool of myself, what, I don't know about that.

I step back into the bedroom, hug and kiss through Jennifer's auburn black hair with my wet face and she crinkles eyes at me. "What time is it?"

"Eight", I lie, wanting her out of bed so I can curl up to Ricky, feel the insides of her thighs and calves meeting at the joint of my knees. Ricky and I used to sleep together, just sleep, in an uncomplicated way, spooned like this. Now I'm not sure what we're doing. Stupid, she's sleeping.

At the dinner I'm going to tonight, giddy on coffee and sleeplessness, we'll talk about the latest of a slew of thrillers in which a woman will try to kill a member of a couple and replace her so she can have the dead woman's happiness. Eric will say, "None of these women have ego boundaries?" Is that my problem: no ego boundaries?

I'm not terribly reliable am I? Can't even stay in the right moment, tense. *Days go by pulling you endlessly into the future.* Yeah, well, been there, done that. So time's all mixed up, what's important is what's between Jennifer and Ricky and me. Or...

What isn't between us. Which is now apparent. Now being later. I went to the party determined to tell them I was in love with both of them. Feeling reckless and stupid I guess. Good thing I didn't bring chocolate or flowers. Jennifer made clear I was welcome to the couch as we drove out her last drunken guests. Of course all evening I knew I was out. She had a deliberateness about the way she proffered each cheek for a chaste peck. Ricky too. Bodies need boundaries-- it's something we talked about only two nights before-- only then I was rubbing Jennifer's feet, inside hers, and agreeing she needed to make clear to Thomas that he was transgressing with his willful little kisses zeroing closer and closer to her mouth. At the time I asked if I was presuming too much. She and Ricky laughed like it was a ridiculous idea, or maybe because I'd made explicit what they only wanted hinted. I don't know. The other possibility, the one I'm terrified of, is that I've done all this, with some combination of hesitation and presumption, ruined what was just fine before.

What was just fine before? Could be this whole mess was just my mistaking what I wanted for what was happening, and their being too embarrassed to tell me. Sweet.

Last night on the couch I heard them laughing in bed. That was two weeks ago, the day everything crashed. I left Jennifer's with Ricky, made an apology that was more of an attack and kicked myself against the pavement and parked cars all the way home. Where I discovered my funding for grad school was going to be cut. Felt the world dropping away beneath me. I was falling again. Flash of my days at the clinic. Maybe I'd been falling all along.

*

Summer 1992

Looking about, Colleen can only think : *It is an apartment made of slumbering lovers' bodies and tangled white sheets. The heat has made us all like lovers.* But that thought is quickly purged in the slow hiss of the fans, pale bars of light striping the apartment, extra acidity of lime and gin and drying spit in her mouth. The hum of dead speakers downstairs like a generator. Plantation Mont Royal.

And of course, except for the Irish couple who appropriated her bed and room, none of the dozen bodies tangled in white linen and august heat (the worst in over a decade) belong to lovers. She discriminates: *the scene is sensual rather than sexual. But then, what, objectively, are the bodies of lovers. It's not like we have nets stretched out to catch our intentions, or the intentions of others, any more than tears loosed in air could be so gathered.*

Still half dreaming, she wanders into the kitchen, fills her glass with cooling tap water. Shrugs the shrug of one who doesn't know who her guests are, of one who thinks herself awake, only because of the heat, her thirst. One thing she knows, that boy she wants, Joshua, sleeping with Ricky on the futon in the computer room, he's to be watched. If Ricky is doing what she thinks with him, she doesn't know what she's got herself into, cause Joshua is a real case. The others have the familiar feel of old friends, and in a way they are, other college radio hacks she's talked to on the phone and through e-mail: conference buddies in town for NCRC '92. Of course that's why the boy is here too, but he's also crazy, nuts, or a druggie and far too confident of his own beauty in that deadly stupid way. God, how she wants him.

*

Last time I was this messed up I was in analysis...

Winter 1993

"What do you want now?"

I've already told you, over and again. I want to be a cockslut. I mean, a girl. I want to give head to all my old friends or cut them off. I mean, I want them inside me like a real woman. I want big tits and ass, a fat, not too fat, ass and legs to die for and a thin waist and long lustrous black hair and killer cheekbones, big blue eyes and lips that pout; stunning, beautiful, sexy, glamorous, I want to be Madonna. Fiercer. Oh yeah, I want a cunt. Maybe with teeth.

He didn't say that, though he imagined himself doing so and had to work momentarily to repress even the smallest smile. Instead, he pursed lips (too thin), twined a strand of hair (mousy brown, the purple manic panic dye all but washed out) around one parched finger tip, kept his eyes focused on the thin bars of afternoon light, the thin strips of downtown allowed in through the slats of office blind.

The last time he checked the wall clock it was three thirty. He heard a bus passing, moving up Cote des Neiges against the lower hum of auto traffic. He thought, inanely, of the green plaid of school girls, being kept after classes in detention. Grey grass and grey snow covered the hill the hospital perched on. The eyes of his analyst, the senior psychiatrist at the General, were on him now, impatient, though the peremptory throat clearing would not come for another few moments. He, the patient, might, after all, be thinking of something important. Will spring ever come?

Histrionics are probably okay. He hasn't had a breakdown, in session, in weeks.

"I want my daddy and mommy to accept me for who I am, a girl, who's just been born in the wrong body..." Tears begin to well in his little girl eyes. He hopes they'll put him on the hormones soon.

Afterwards the analyst says, "I think next week we'll have you in Group.

And once you were in Group?

Fall 1993

He'd just been talking about Inga. Their bloodpact in highschool. Her infatuation with androgynous New Wavers. How she'd help him with make up and call him "girl". Quitting the hospital he saw her and ran down hill after the retreating figure. It was anonymous enough-- there are legions of girls with the same curve of neck, cock of head, falling shaft of wheatblonde hair, the same predilection for oversized, tentlike purple sweaters, Indian cotton skirts, barefeet on pavement. But he had been speaking of her and then he saw her, so he ran, even though she was supposed to be in Holland.

She stopped into Depanneur Leonne and he followed her through the aisles of roses and potted plants trying to glimpse the side of her face, some kind of proof: he had half expected her to quit her resemblance to his old lover once he was close, but so far she did not. He was elated at the thought that she had come here without him knowing, had lived beside him for some indeterminate time while he remained ignorant of her. The thought excited him because it suggested the undoing of his certain knowledge even if in only the most mundane way. I thought she was at x, but in reality she was

here, in y with me. In y with me-- perhaps they would become lovers again. Perhaps she had come here to see him and was awaiting the proper time to call. All this passed while he followed her past daffodils, roses, cacti to the rear of the shop. She opened a refrigerator door, removed a tin of vanilla ice-cream from the freezer, closed the door and turned.

"Joshua? Hi."

"Oh, Jenn. It's you." His shock was greater even than if it had been Inga. Just the other day, in his playwrighting workshop, he had remarked upon Jenn's deep physical resemblance to Inga, so it should come as no surprise that he mistake one for the other on the street. What was remarkable was that it had not occurred to him before that it might be Jenn he was following. However, that thought, though it did occur to him, was not what preoccupied him through his brief, pleasant, exchange with Jenn. Instead he found himself circling round the conviction that *Jenn and Inga precisely resemble one another, in face, form, voice and manner and the only thing distinguishing them from one another is, in fact, space, and consequently, history.* Both were born and bred in Halifax, they had both been part of the same punk scene, they may even have met at some point. When Jenn discovered he was from Halifax she had insisted she had met him, though she couldn't recall the circumstances. Neither could he. But then he might have seen her many times and mistaken her for Inga. He also thought *if two people can be the same person, why can't three? Perhaps I can also be what Jenn and Inga are.*

*

Fall 1993

It's getting colder every day. Soon we'll need to plastic the windows. Colleen and I are sitting at the kitchen table waiting for the kettle to boil, staring out the window into the neighbors' apartment. I'm wearing her black dress, the big one, the one that fits me. Colleen put my hair into a French braid and then coiled it on top of my head.

"Maybe they'll have sex on the table again tonight." I say, to break the tension.

She laughs, to humor me I think. Been doing that a lot lately. Guess she's regretting trying to rescue me. They always do. Then she asks a stupid question, only it's not stupid, even though she knows the answer and doesn't want to hear it, it's just scripted, inevitable. "Are you looking forward to going?" She means, am I looking forward to going to the crossdressers' support group meeting. As I said, she knows the answer. The answer is no. But she had to ask. It's not her fault. She's being kind.

The kettle is boiling. She gets up to pour the water into the tea pot and get us tea cups. I watch her with something akin to hate. Which expression I take pains to conceal, as I also feel a terrible dependence on her. I'm terrified she'll leave me. I so much need her to leave me.

I can't stop thinking of Lulu-- Jenn, that is. I'm crazy about her far worse than I ever was about Inga. Funny, with all the shit she's going through, all this transie angst just feels like so much bullshit.

Colleen's looking at me like she needs an answer.

"No, it will be horrible," I say. I'm about to rant. Give her the usual litany, liturgy. "I told you about the last one. It was awful. They're all decrepit, aging pigs, the hormones make them huge and all their cosmetic surgery is

caving in. They have faces like rock slides. And they're old and dress badly, and so moralistic. They all insist that what the shrink says must be true. I mean, they'll titter, making fun of this little thing or that, but mostly they sit around h'mming and hawing about how it's their responsibility to fit into society as respectable women. Fucking hypocrites! I can't bear to think I'm the same thing they are-- that loneliness and emptiness and ugliness all together at once makes me want to vomit. I hate them. I have to be different. But they all must have thought that. Thought: I am the one, the Sleeping Beauty who will awaken from her long slumber with the kiss of the surgeon's knife. It's unbearable to me that they all must have thought that at one point or another."

Actually, I say this only gradually, after numerous gentle prompts and cups of Earl Grey tea poured from the dinosaur tea pot. Then I really get into it. Several times I am on the verge of crying. Afterwards it is too late to make the meeting. Colleen is exhausted. So I take off her clothing and make up and we embrace, go to bed. The next morning I have to wake her to remove the braid from my crown so I can go to work. Where I can call Jenn.

*

Winter 1994

Jennifer knows Ricky! Yesterday in Impromptu Café she confided to me that she wanted to try sex with a girl and that there was this girl in her shiatsu class that she had a crush on. Just then I saw Ricky coming up the stairs. I hadn't spoken to her in months. We both called out to her at the same time. From the way Jenn looked at me after that I know she has to be the one. Lulu to Liszt or what?

Writing/Winter

Could you draw a portrait of a life by assembling a lifetime's worth of erotic dreams and fantasies? Autopornography, if it were your own? I wrote down a dream I had a few days ago: it makes me nervous: it did even as I was hauling the sheets off and scrambling across the room to the computer, though that could have been concern that the dream would be lost or simply vague fear of the impending hangover.

In the dream I am seduced by a beautiful woman, in fact a man, who is an old friend, transformed into the shape of a woman by a Vampire. That is, she is now a Vampire, this guy, my best friend from high school, Mick, and she makes me beautiful and dark and blood thirsty, as she is. I'm ecstatic and horrified at the same time.

I remember that line from Baudelaire: "Come to me, lovely Cat. I'm amorous./ Come draw in your claws for me." and wonder if deep down he knew he was that cat, in imagining it he became it in a way Jeanne Duvall, who was probably indifferent or annoyed or flattered, never could. Hers was just the body, he put it on. Probably he didn't know. I also think of the character G.S.'s reproof to her analyst, in *Heroine*, "Anybody who has been a sympathizer of the surrealist movement can tell you how to read manifest dream content.... But what's the latent content? What I want to know is who that third bird is?" I guess I'm concerned that writing the dream, which has come out as pornographic fantasy-- I just couldn't resist dwelling on the eroticism of the subject/object split, which is completely the wrong thing according to all the fashionable analysts-- leaves it open to the imperatives of narrative which may foreclose on the possibilities of that latent dream content. (How is that different from any writing out of the real?)

Anyway, now I'm thinking it's going to be the final section of the story I'm writing. Unless that's too much after the Galaxina piece. Galaxina is the name I've settled on for my transie alter ego. She's mad-- totally out of control. Perhaps this whole thing is driven by a logic of excess, each narrative being more out of control than the preceding-- subjects/ selves spiraling out away from the discarded core, the body as wrecked guarantor of continuity and memory. But then there are so many bodies mirroring one another, even that seems out of reach. Whose body is whose? I felt like that on the metro, reading Duras' *The Lover* and looking up to see that face. This Chinese girl staring at me, almost aggressively. You've got to understand, at first, I didn't know which of us more excessively begged the orientalist question. Fragment of that experience:

Her lips opened a kiss-- begged, the question was lost-- so like aphasia we couldn't speak-- gliding backwards east west, one finger on the page like her slit, clit-- I was wondering if I'd fallen through the mirrorshades I'd snatched from the trash-- this Beijinger in Montreal-- this orientalist fantasy-- I'd seen her in Maximes' de Paris de Beijing but it was nothing-- now we were cultural photo negatives of each other-- I didn't have a body, I was nobody, just this whole metro car scene, just slant silver starred cadre cap and big black Red Army trench, one gloved hand gliding over Duras' face and the other steadying me against the downcast too long lashes of this Beijing Ren Clubland-- her concentration that of one accustomed to the dry ice come on & mouthing dancetune lyrics in the dark-- flicking tongue bristling against moist thick lips-- and just too cool, too hot in auburn tinted Louise Brooks bob, red velvet babydoll and Fluevog slingbacks-- we have matching mauve moptops-- it goes on for ever, for three metro stops, it's an epiphany of surfaces, flouted artifice of identity-- lips don't touch-- mine drawn thinner

than usual-- bone jaw sawing, teeth clicking in uneven glide-- hers brought into that pregnant pendulous 'oh' stills its jittery dance-- "You're going" breathed silent across the car-- it's every cliché of seduction-- it's nothing-- the batting lashes of excess against chromed lenses-- a kiss, on the metro.

It was a very intense scene to have with a stranger. Filmic. Reminded me of the old days with Inga. Foreshadows the bizarre love triangle a few weeks from now with Ricky and Jennifer. Only that's more obviously textual in character, the three of us being writers.

*

Spring 1994

when there are three

if i called you "darling" you would know all words are laden
what's next? you might ask, roses?
well, i'm in the grip of something you won't like
& i might call you (and you
as a prelude to stealing you away
the delusion i could call (that you must answer
must be symptomatic
of what? my rapture in proximity?
my lack of ego boundaries?
the other night
we three (i thought we were three
the perfect revolutionary couple
poised for radical intervention, engaged art and hot sex
well, my mistake, and thank you (and you
for your protests
because i was caught up in my own narrative, careening towards your thighs,
your lips & yours,
white tusks shining
like knights on white chargers off to slay sexism,
you know, though progressive non-possessive, wet and wild,
truly liberatory
my dispute with penetration
could hardly be called chivalrous (or honest)

after all after the demo, you're to love me, need me, fuck me,
right?

& if this poem doesn't do it, nothing will)
nothing will,

and anyway what's
one more cock

or less (unless)
donning these fake names in crimson
casting seduction as sedition
like Cixous' seamed stockings

i manage to beg, ask, force-- the question?
who is writing in the feminine on whose body
whose cheesy equation of the feminine
with desire

is giving, getting
off here

and *who* slips
this is between you and who and me, just the three of us
who will trace, task, turn whose bodies for whose pleasure?
who's dumping who?

or equally,
who says we can't make a home of pain for us all?
who says,

ain't that romantic?
you and you, ever practical:
we've had enough of mutilation from our enemies, thanks,
don't really need it from our friends

why don't you go
ironically venerate Madonna
or masturbate in theory
rather be painting a girl friend's toenails or my bathroom door,
editing a zine or my self
but, yours in struggle
us (you (& you))
and i say
wait, wait! does this mean we can't even do genderfuck sometime
wax our legs or
nostalgic
don birkenstock drag
with linked arms so earnestly
handsome
march into the future?)
okay who's pushing now--
you two take it
you have your love,
i'm stuck, stupid in dustmotes
in the fever of light, in this
unfinished poem lodged in my spine, shivering and wanting you & you
to efface myself
to say
the poem wants
to emerge in a body of love
to be dispersed

*

Eric refuses to keep a journal. He says, *Never write what you care about*. He says, *Writing reifies the emotions*. Eric says lots of smart things. Last week he told me I was completely without ego boundaries. Right now, they're in bed without me, so I guess I'm reifying despair. Nobody ever said it would be easy. Writing, that is.

Spring 1994

Of course Jennifer and Ricky aren't really their names. Any more than Lulu and Liszt are *their* names. Not only is everything I write about them true, everything I write about them becomes true. Next week I'm going to Halifax with my lover, if she's still my lover. If Ricky can handle it. Otherwise I'm going to Halifax with my former lover, whom I will still love. Just now, on the phone, she asked me awkwardly how I would be with her, in Halifax, if she is not my lover. What do you think I said? Do you think I told the truth? When I started writing this Halifax was a place of memory. Now it is the place of the future. Jennifer. Lulu. I'm going home with Lulu. I don't even remember knowing her in Halifax. At least I didn't. I remember what I've written. She says we hung out. Went to gigs together. Did one another's make up. So how did I make her up? That's what I want to know.

*

desire for transformation deferred

i'm transformed in your looks

& yours

fall on me & one another,

the girl of my dreams i can never be

*i can kiss as she kisses you & you
me it's the back and forth that gets you off
gets to me
just now
you two collapsed in my bed
can't cross that threshold
so who put this hole in me?*

★

Galaxina

On stage at the Pyramid. Her body arching towards heaven and the lighting booth. Rising from the earth, the stage, the six inch red rhinestone stilettos. Her bare arms tremble, tendril into ten daggerpoints the colour of lipstick the colour of six inch rhinestone stilettos. Galaxina.

She is a true girl now, a big boned girl, not born, but well made. Her skin is black like tattoo. What song does she sing as her flesh is cut? The snip of scissors shag her hair. Toe nail shavings swept and saved for rites we don't need to know about. Her flesh cut and tucked, tits and ass emerge from whole cloth, cheekbones are sculpted with collagen: she can't sing, she hums tunes from old musicals, she lipsyncs. Karaoke. Her nails are nailed on pink like bows and ribbons on the twelve year old's party dress. She has altered her voice to a breathiness that's strained: her models are Alice and Monroe. She is the true blonde dyed glamour girl. If only she didn't have to wear this corset for her figure but suffering is beautiful they say and she is beautiful so she is suffering.

Around her the familiar opening bars of Madonna's *Vogue*. Strikes a pose. Lights strobe. Tinsel curtains begin to rise. She smiles, knows herself fiercer than Madonna, realer. A real woman. Knows how to please.

*

dream writing the dream

In the dream I'm in a club, plush and crimson and gold, a bordello affair. There is black light strobing, flickering off tinsel everywhere. I think of the Madonna of *Deeper and Deeper*. I'm moving through a crowd. Stop to flirt with a blonde dreadlocked bike courier I've flirted with before. Tattooed Rollins clone, selfstyled whitey Rude Boy, gives me a shove, calls me a pretentious fuck, walks past. I'm in Goth, all black, with bondage boots, black puffy shirt, make up, hair long and pink. He can tell I'm going to write this down and that's why he's so angry.

Shadows fall away to sitting on smooth stone steps on the corner of St. Laurent and Cuthbert watching the sun come up, the sky so many shades of ocean, washed in people returning from afterhours parties, writing this down, the same Rude Boy walks by. Me cool and able to think for the first time since the heat wave started.

I'm feeling all hot and bothered, keep seeing myself in mirrors mounted along the length of the bar, keep feeling lust stirred vaguely by women out of focus around me. On the dance floor, trying to thrash to the new Nine Inch Nails, I'm too slow, feel nauseous. Others too. It's the Vampires among us, we all feel them though we don't know who, they could be, anywhere, we see

crows in the cables along the ceiling, among the lights and speakers wings flutter. Our wards are useless.

I'm missing someone, and the music is making me cry-- Natalie whom I've almost forgotten about when I'm awake, her voice chafes me, I'm sitting under a disco ball. This is a still, a photo.

A girl comes towards me. I know her. I'm following from the eyes, feel trepidation. Such bountiful falls of black hair, deep sunk eyes, full red lips, Irish skin, hour glass figure. She's wearing docs, fishnets and a pink velvet babydoll. I want to kiss her. Wonder how I know her. She's Mick from highschool. Changed. I'm pulling my shirt off. She's pulling her panties off. She hasn't said anything, gathers my hair in her hands. I'm sucking her cock, smooth and hairless and thick. My face is crushed between her legs. She's a vampire.

St. Laurent ocean blues give way to whorls of grey , white above red brick pediments. Waiting for you. Always, Jennifer, my love

Lifts me and kisses me. I feel her tongue slide in, her teeth in my mouth. Layers like a shark, sucking blood out of me. Her tongue shooting into me.

I'm changed. She steps back. Makes a mirror. I'm vague, shimmering in and out like a ghost, or in a transporter tube: girlish, my hair still pink but long, wild, my face younger, fourteen, fifteen years old, fresh, very Kate Moss. I'm dressed differently: denim short shorts, roman slave sandals, cut off *Temple*

of Love T-shirt, skulls and butterflies on my toenails and fingernails. I know I'm dead. Suddenly, alone.

★

Jennifer on the moon

Lifting the papers off the desk this is what she reads. (She?

It's early morning. Two people sit at the kitchen table; candlelit, instead of faces they wear masks like full moons. Between the man in the moon and the woman there is bottle of Stolchinaya vodka and two empty glasses. There is also a deck of cards. These moons have bright eyes, thick dark brows, taut lips and broken noses. His hair is clipped short, bleached. Her hair disappears in the dark. He is her senior by several years but both faces are unlined, ageless -- they could be twins. If they loved one another you could call them lovers. They live alone except for their livestock in a farmhouse on the side of Mont Blanc, or their idea of Mont Blanc, on the Moon, or their idea of the Moon.

Having finished dinner and seven games of cards, wearily they postpone the time to bed.

She knows the feel of the words, of this moment, before she begins. "Joshua, do you love me?" Her voice is strained, tired of all the other questions. This is a nightmare she rides every night.

"I'd like a drink. Do you want a drink?"

She gives a slight nod and he refills both glasses. He stretches, sighs, recites, though he persists in not recognizing this as recital.

"Why don't I tell you a bedtime story. A fairy tale to give soothing dreams. There is the tale of the wolf children who roamed the piers of the strange harbour, or the one about the sisters who, pursued by a fire djinn each night, climbed a great tree to find the hermaphrodite seer or --"

"I don't feel like a story. Please don't go on." She knows he will but cannot resist objecting, though her words are less a protest than the echo of one. "I asked if you love me."

She has a premonition that some time soon he will hear her question and say something terrible. But this time his expression is bland and her energy flags. She can see him telling his story but resists listening, lest she be pulled back in. She does not know how many times she lived this night before the distance arose inside her, her initially flickering fore knowledge slowly growing into an awareness of entrapment. Nor can she tell how many nights passed before she found herself capable of more than a paralyzed despair. Even so, change does not come easily to these people of the moon.

Though she can not hear him, the man in the moon is saying. "The seer had its own designs on the girls--"

Watching him sit speaking to no one fills her with bitterness. Who were they before they came to this? She is sure her memories are false. She wants to leave. Thinks perhaps tonight I can escape this. I can go to my own room to think, away from him. This is not the first time she has thought that thought, part of her knows, and wonders if she can push her way through. Change comes slowly to the moon.

As she stumbles from the room, the man frowns at the woman sitting across from him. He is having a premonition and wonders if she is listening.

She is standing in the doorway of this room. It was her own room once, when they were children, before they were the man in the moon and the woman. She does not know why they didn't do something about it when she became his wife. She remembers them talking of making it a study for her so she could write. Perhaps. Now she has come back to her childhood after a fashion. The room is almost unchanged. Her bed with its canopy of spiderwebs, the coral dresser and night table, none have one speck more of dust upon them than when she became the moon's bride.

Only one thing has changed. At her desk the stool is pulled out. The quill rests not in the inkwell but lays across a sheet of vellum on which she has been writing.

As she moves across the room to the desk following the path of her eyes with cautious fingers this is what she is thinking. "I am here. This room is real. I remember this. " And. "All of this is illusion like the room downstairs. Who --?" She stops, seeing the quill and paper. "I need to write this down to understand"

And so she has been, these last few nights, through quill and ink and some lingering sense of sanctuary in this child's bedroom. Tonight she will write more. Perhaps understand how she can vary the script of past days and why it seems easier away from her husband. She shakes thinking of the first night she stood here poised to start writing when suddenly she found herself in the man's cold arms in the master bedroom. There was only one horrible moment of knowing she was trapped before she was immersed in ancient bridal thought. "Has it been this way since we married?" The second night she thinks she wrote a few sentences.

Last night she made it to the end of the last paragraph. She?

I look around this room. Did I really live here. I wonder how much time I have, how many times I have been, thinking, moving before the weight of the story catches me up, and returns me to him. Joshua. A writer, I think. Who is he, and why can't he see what is going on? Why do I blame him? For sure the moon has always been this way.