

Diary of a Cicada
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I thought it was obvious. I mean, in any number of years we were bound to smile back upon sweet calamity and our soft attempts at innocence.

We were a slide in a microscope; a praying mantis huddled in an orchid, a fuzzy object closer than it appeared.

Two beautiful fools, pulsating, instinctive; alive.

Crazy Mexico

All those machine-gunned federales, golden playas, dog meat tacos, and colored pills to splash in forever.

We shared toast and eggs every morning and a glass of milk that Inez sweetly ordered in Spanish. I pushed every bite down through the rubble in my chest, my guts thrown into revolt by the compulsion of her eyes.

I didn't question this. I knew that I was meant to love once, and for one weekend only, only to perish on Monday.

Golden afternoons, on soft green grass, lying back to sink beneath the running wild sky; the clouds: gentle and huge, shifting, drifting, meandering around the globe again.

In fact, the same old clouds, in part, that my granddad must have dug, tipped his brown crown of thorns, and laughed to the dear sacred sky for the trip that it is.

"This morning," Inez confessed, "I came to understand details..."

"Details?" I asked.

"Details of myself and particular facts of this vague present."

We were high on tea, and she dozed warm by my side.

"And you said this morning, correct?"

"Yes, you were walking on the beach and I was alone on the porch, in an unusual state of lucid calm."

"Hmmm," I hummed.

"Your empty bottles were strewn about in a pattern of queer random logic..."

"Wait, I noticed them, too. Their disorder beamed with distant grace and they flickered with golden subtleties of dawn."

"But," she whispered, "From which, of her infinite and fantastic number of expressions, did she choose?"

“An elusive warmth,” I pondered, “a delicate scent of turf with hints of salt water, tepid lagoons, and sodden jungle trees.”

We were on the beach of some remote Mexican village, raw and full of dunes. The sun emerged from our backs and a light breeze ruffled the squat brown reeds, it cooled my barely sun burned skin.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

Inez, daydreaming, didn't respond.

The village seemed empty.

“Did some invisible monster devour us?” I asked, a little agitated and scared. “Are we Ahab in the belly of the whale?”

Inez, utterly stoned, shifted her posture, and with a deep sense of kindness, droopily engaged a lazy smile.

I continued, now a little more quiet, conspiratorially, “Is this where the industry of time manufactures fantastic mechanisms, doohickeys, gobbledygook's, only to eject them into the ether to distant epochs, doomed strange oblivions, then, eventually, futile resurrections which emerge as twisted figments of our own ravenous imagination?”

And, except for an extended family crowded in a little cement store that sold cool beers and fragrant pineapples, with a few ragged workers that joked quietly out front, everyone had abandoned the beat asphalt, save for a few scavenging mutts.

One dog looked at me, cocked its head to the side like the old vibraphone records dog. And even though every man and creature in the village was a mutt of some sort, this anomaly had the air of pedigree, an innate elegance.

Its coat was golden, thick, though not especially clean, but with a healthy sheen nonetheless. With even the slightest movement, the refined contours of its limbs tensed and rippled. Its balls hung formidably between his hind legs and they swung like stones in a leather sock as he strutted regally on the pock marked street.

I tossed a beer bottle high in the air. The animal fixed its sight upon it with precision and instinct as it twirled against the blue sky and hovered at the peak of its ascent, suspended weightless, then tumbled back down to the soft dirt of the road's shoulder.

As he darted over to investigate the object, a clunky bus, with rattle and growl, whipped by and kicked up a cloud of dust. I covered my eyes and coughed from the foul exhaust, then turned to see the dog swipe at the bottle with its paw. The bottle rolled over several times and when it came to a rest, I could clearly read the label, a Mexican brand, “Dos Equis.” The dog carried on with his aimless and regal wanderings.

Off to the side, a shy old fisherman lifted his arm and cast a line into the rushing tide. The rhythm of his craft was soft and calming. I never saw him reel in a catch, not even some seaweed, but I felt grateful, his mystical temperament added credibility to this strange sense of far off desolation.

Inez erected herself, snapped free from her cosmic reverie, licked her lips, “We must destroy any idea of love,” she announced.

She paused, then cried, “Our delusions have marginalized our intangible reality!”

“What?”

She glared at me. My eyes started to water, mostly from the breeze and sun, but also due to some crushing primordial enslavement.

Although I matched her glare, in a faint red I saw the flight and slaughter of ancient Africa. The moans of the universe, pregnant and about to explode, I’d seen this before, with my death ten thousand years ago.

She shouted, “Where are the riches! Present your golden scythe of truth! Blind? Fuck, how blind can you be? Poise yourself, boy! Crack the whip, lift the sea on your shoulders and poise yourself to eternity! Get up!”

“Inez,” I gasped.

“Shut up, man!”

She pounced on my chest, nails extended like a lynx, scratched my side, and drew blood.

“I’m on your bleeding flesh and where are you? Where’s my catechism? Where’s your sky? Give up that birth! Some non-being, boy! Fuck me some death! Rock me on that petit mort, I’m screaming ‘till morn!”

“Dreams and ghosts at the mercy of concrete joy!”

She slid into her spontaneous rhythm and although, at times, I feared for my safety, manslaughter due to her scary and apocalyptic fury, it was, ultimately, an act of blissful surrender, trust, and fertility. I felt a sense of deep assurance. Sure, she could very well maim me at any given moment, but I tasted, like a delicacy, her varying degrees of murder, surgery, and care.

Her mad words became the spell that transformed us into an amorphous animal. She whipped lithely about, opened her full, lush, inviting, Argentinean lips and screamed, “Aaaeehaaaaah!” Her imploring eyes blazed with some new code of inspiration; I smelled the raw fragrance of her skin while the sun radiated on our bodies and she moaned to the crash of the waves and wisp of the breeze.

I was she, her muse and tragic hunger. The vibrant, verdant species lifted from mythology to nourish with blood her insane vision and glory.

“In these days,” I stuttered, “How else can I put it? I’m choked for words...”

“Keep it ineffable!” she screamed. “Just stick with what’s ineffable!”

“It’s savage!” I cried.

She arched and gasped, collapsed on my chest and we heaved in unison. My heart felt softer and began to relax. I listened to the noise of the waves and they sounded real again. The fisherman calmly cast his line. I was relieved. Time was still empty, but kind, and the sand invited us to cradle and rock in her.

“Inez,” I whispered, “I’m unconscious with flowers. The thunderous roar of battle has disappeared. In my village, the children sport, the warriors feast, and the women laugh. Paradise cannot begin to describe the beauty I discovered.”

She stroked my hair.

“Just keep it ineffable...” she murmured, “Just keep it ineffable...”

We dozed off to sleep, lulled by the music of Mexican seagulls and the thick tones of tumbling waves, the fisherman’s line swimming somewhere inside.

Mexico

“It’s so glamorous,” she once said.

“Boy, it is glamorous,” I agreed.

“On a breath by breath basis,” she elaborated, “if you examine it in meticulous detail, in a scientific manner... at least in this exact given moment... now concentrate- with this current breath realize concretely and with freedom from the slightest, most vague sense of insecure doubt, that Mexico, a priori, is the one and only positive absolute. It is something personally prescribed to you from the infinite weird bag of shamanic weeds dolled out from the universe exclusively for your divine edification; smoke up!”

“Now listen here ma’am” I drawled out in my best southern accent, “I’m just a simple sort and don’t subscribe to voodoo, mojo...” I paused, cleared my throat, “now just don’t bother to remember me anything, that is nothing, I accept your word, unconditionally, the word of the sweet divine minister of luscious brown thighs, succulent communion, and the most dog gone pulpit of bar stools and tequila shots south of the Rio Grande.”

I slugged back a Cuervo to punctuate this decree.

“Savor these profanities!” she exclaimed. “Every last Fuck you, son of a bitch, and filthy love poem scrawled on cocktail napkins, grease rags, trash and such, it’s our truth, damnit, defecated, and that’s life, and that’s dream, and that’s destiny-”

She slammed her glass and spit on the bar. “Hey chico!” she raged, “Make it stiff, another one!”

The gentle dark skinned bartender, in a sincere sweat-stained shirt, dark eyes, scaly hands, religious mother, almost whimpered. He looked to me, imploringly, for assurance.

“El Diablo?” he asked. ”Loca?”

I calmly laid twenty pesos on the table and nodded, “La bebida”

He politely got to it.

How could we deny her? She had the mainline to the sky. And in spite of her limitless manias, paranoia’s, and other depraved delusions and theories of aliens, ghosts, cupids, TV personalities, etc., she dialed it in, deep down, and when all else failed, Mexico.

“It’s so glamorous,” she slurred, her voice trailing off somewhere far away in her frosty margarita.

And, well, I have to admit, most days it was. But, generic exaltation, glamour as she meant it, vacuous of any content or connection to consensus reality, left me with a dirty feeling.

“Suck it up!” she ordered sternly. “You’ve mistaken your highest potential for a crusty old itch.” Then, sensing my hurt and fragility, empathetically offered, “Both red and white wine help...”

It was around then that I began to figure out everything, nothing, and sheer unadulterated confusion. In other words, the shit had finally hit the fan. Why didn’t my perception, for one, or my surreal life, for another, have any coherent thread of continuity? All I seemed to have, and I assumed this was true of Inez, too, was a freaky monkey piping annoying chant in my head, spooky, indecipherable; I had to make music out of it somehow.

And so I asked my loving mother, the walking womb, with whom after all, in the depth of a marijuana high, I had privately hoped to develop an evolved level of communication anchored in our shared cosmic experience of my bloody mortal birth and consummated with the mind shattering inevitability of our galloping death.

I tried to explain the theory of the monkey chants and mind. It was after Thanksgiving dinner and as I started to share some of the new ideas I was cultivating while away at school, tears welled in her eyes; she stared at me imploringly,

"Have you been experimenting with LSD?"

“Just because she gave birth to you doesn’t make her your mother,” Inez said. “You know that. She originates from a different tribe. Her language is, for the most part, indecipherable to you, although you may think you understand it. But it’s an illusion without relevance; when she sees blue you are in fact seeing yellow. And only those born from the same invisible womb can experience true fluency with one another, resonance down to the most subtle frequency and vibration of your deepest memory, now that’s who your real family is.”

So, based on this advice, I at last ditched the university, subsequent metaphor for television, nine to five, the biggest cluster fuck of self-annihilation history has ever known, and I began to plan my very own personal Love Supreme and soul shakedown.

“First and foremost,” I gathered, “I must secure a base in the picturesque arena of my mind. The irascible infant, my revolution, demands, among other things, a daring and untested architecture to launch its ambitious campaign. This is a revival art house of the source! Dig that zeitgeist! And already, as announced, the horses eyes have been whipped, in this case, the whims and moody temperaments of countless manifestations of being.”

But, I realized, there was no sense in over calculating, nor underestimating, after all, the heir apparent, the Vegas neon, the beaches of Mexico. Revolution, I discovered, flourished best in an environment of love and decadent relaxation. All those dark rooms with dangling dim lights and daggers stabbed in maps, all wicked anachronisms, had finally emerged from their cocoons, gentle and floral. My mish-matched army of disenfranchised half memories and split personalities took to arms and resembled, most closely, certain iconic images of Hello Kitty and pink grenades painted in watercolor.

And with Inez, the deal was we'd screw and she'd help me pass class, Marxism, just for fun, which we did, and I got a C, and even though the professor entertained distorted suspicions of misconduct despite his normally queer and detached affect, by the end of the semester everyone was satisfied and we all got drunk on wine and celebrated the dignity of the worker.

But I mean, and I wish I could omit this; the low day occurred when, just back in town, I called her again. By this time she was living with her parents, trying to save money, hustling herself in a cheap club, strutting about in a skilled, suggestive, manner of corrupted grace. Her tight red skirt and shirt gripped her inviting body as she sipped beers and performed carnal acts for countless corpulent patrons.

God, after all we'd learned, I thought. How could she possibly allow anyone to commodify her eyes, infringe on her face, violate those breasts; the finest, most supple, holy breasts in the entire universe, and profane the immaculate milk we churned? Had she in fact, as prophesized, finally emerged as Mary Magdalene of the strip mall night?

I bought her a beer and she asked me to leave.

"Your nervous disposition ruins the ease and intent of my endeavors..."

However, politely, she requested that I rendezvous with her in exactly two hours and twenty-three minutes, which equaled, as fate would have it, precisely one AM.

"Baby," she whispered, "I've seen you grow tremendously in your own moderate masculine ways and of course you must acknowledge without hesitation that I, as precocious and rapid as ever, have, in the same amount of time, evolved five million years for every one day of yours, a blinding rate to be sure, into a priceless jewel- a rare, full, independent, flawless specimen of self empowered woman. See this blossom? Say, 'Venus!' and look how I've engaged the suffering and pleasure of man's desire, his face of destruction, I've quelled collapse and wars with a subtle toss of my braid."

She had the bouncer, a nice Italian guy with strong cologne, good smile, and thick black hair, show me the door. I tripped on the gravel and stumbled on a discarded cigarette box in the club's washed out parking lot.

The parking lot was the same as every other vapid parking lot across the dull and horrible horizon of my doomed generation. Mall parking lot, strip mall parking lot, convenience store parking lot, multi-level parking lot, painted in color codes parking lot, parking meter parking lot, and parking lot, the vast asphalt plains that had smothered to oblivion the scent and vitality of our soft and selfless providence.

The orange streetlights, little Chernobyl's, buzzed like toxic fireflies, braised my skin in radiation and blistered my brain with eleventh degree burns. They hovered over me like giant fireworks in celebration of war and pain, shaped like H-bomb jellyfish suspended in time. I tried to slip beneath the surface and hold my breath for safety, but my legs were entrenched, encased in concrete, my will, dynamite reduced to a cap gun, I heard it snap like chewing gum in a hallway far away.

"Tsunami!" I cried. "Tsunami!"

And as I walked out toward the intersection, with long steps, my hands in jean pockets, inhaling black smoke, I lost myself in the noxious and anonymous acrid death of suburban despair.

A small Japanese car, tricked out for racing, with a winded up toy engine, a coffee can muffler, screeched close by and then away, and as I waited on the gritty corner for the red light to change, I saw, once and for all, green everywhere.

Inez had scrawled her address on a cocktail napkin. The ink was smeared into a blotch and looked like a scary Rorschach. It was wrinkled and still felt sticky from where she wiped her lipstick off the rim of her pint glass and the corner was wet and ripped where she had splashed it with 7up.

“See how sweet I can be?” she whispered.

She crumpled the nasty napkin in my hand.

“Now, don’t forget, as I’ve told you before, we live in the illuminated age...”

I lifted it to my nose, “It smells like a dirty magazine.”

Her neighborhood was indistinct, quiet, and still. The eerie yards, conjoined twins, rustled with blotchy shadows that rippled like movements of blood beneath the thin skin of a fetus. A few arbitrary lights left on by paranoid homeowners and discouraged concubines, in a vain attempt to add value to their fragile façade of security, oddly illuminated the scene like a seventies Polaroid.

I wanted to coddle the trimmed hedges with my face, the soft of my cheek, they seemed so fake and desperate, beautiful like a Barbie Doll, the way the light rolled on them from vacant windows, washed in dark gold from the Brother’s Grim black forest.

And because I arrived early, still 12 minutes to one AM, and perfectly aware of how meticulous Inez was about matters of time, I waited beneath an oak tree with acorns that dangled opaque before the moon. The tree swayed slowly, in a deep old rhythm, and music emanated from ancient roots, wise grooves, in the pocket, heavy, soulful, as though a trumpeter, possessed, channeled free sounds from a disembodied sea. Acorns dropped like black raindrops and burrowed between grass blades, then vanished even deeper into the shrouded earth. I dislodged bits of soil and debris from beneath my fingernails. Clumps of dirt stuck to my shoes. “Where did that come from?” I wondered. I kicked the trunk of the tree. Dirt clumps crumbled into pebble boulders and landslide dust and danced off of the tree bark into the soil in syncopated graveyard cameo exits.

I lit a cigarette, tilted my head, stared at the weird patterns of scattered clouds disintegrating in the sky like smoke signals stained in the upholstery of the galaxy, and let time wash me back forty years. Twenty years before my birth and twenty odd years before my death, a time before I had capitulated to temptation and surrender, when I was still free from the kind of gutter trash I’d become. Everything was civilized, nice, worked out on TV, decent, friendly. Life still operated with a can do attitude, a little elbow grease, a quick wink; the world surprised us, soup was warm, and those who crossed their fingers still believed they should.

I knocked on Inez’s door; she opened it a crack, confirmed it was I, her scheduled puppet, and instantly rushed out, materializing onto the front steps like the ghost of a coy

smile, as though the door and laugh had never been there. However, in that split second, I captured a glimpse of family portraits and the curtain behind. In a simple black frame, on a wooden table with a beige lamp, photographed somewhere, at some point, blurred in the back, a big family and, off to the side, Inez, who winced from the camera; shy and evanescent.

“Is that where your dark world of genius and revolution was birthed?” I asked.

“Just a second,” she said. She locked the door with a key that dangled from a silver necklace.

“And?” I asked.

“Hold on...”

She searched the ruffles of her pockets, discovered a tiny foil wrapper, pulled it apart like a delicate and nimble child with petals of a white rose plucked in secret, gazed upon it intently, as though reciting a silent prayer, then quickly, albeit with exactitude, threw it in her mouth, beamed with discovery, fumbled with her tongue, checked in her soft leather purse for reassurance, there was none, her nails caught the latch, then, without warning, instantaneously realigned her focus from the mystery of the night, the moon, her purse, our strange lives, and the surreal landscape that occupied the complicated topography of our helpless design. She spit the foil out and switched her attention to my face as though the moment was a precipice and the fate of the universe depended upon my soliloquy.

“Inez, I submit, but countless formalities, protocol, indecisions; that is, as usual, how must I defer to your spontaneous tradition? The silence abounds, what I’m trying to say, even in obscurity, with coughs and rasps, odd pauses, the steps of a mouse, not specifically, but generally, and, though without particular regard to immediacy, a moment too long, for the present, that is, the question persists, and persist it shall, where is, and after long last, what is, and just to clarify, where is, what is the machine?”

“Sublimate,” she mumbled.

“Sub-li-mate!” she screamed.

In a homicidal instant we were obliterated. Her howl, napalm, the collapsing night, the echo of her cry bounced back in razor blade waves, inaudible, except to me, a cryptic bloodletting. She was jack the ripper to my veil, the violent purgative to my lost and hallowed.

I shut my eyes. Her feral wail initiated a galaxy of inner light drownings. I was ore, a creature, an infant in a crucible, in a crib, incapable of any thoughts, just pure naked light-blast-infant amazement within her baptismal kiln.

A trickle of red bled from the corner of her puffy lips.

“Oh God...”

She relaxed and heaved, catching her breath.

I felt my eyes and I was touching the flesh of a grapefruit. They stung as though flooded with bleach and left there to float.

“What?” I laughed uneasily.

She paused, held her breath.

I rubbed my fingers over my temples, caught a glimpse of an old Chinese herbalist with incense nearby, comfortably chuckling.

Inez grimaced as though she had been sucker punched and doomed for demise like Houdini. Her nails clawed straight through her jeans and into the flesh of her thighs. Then, gradually, she retracted her nails, slowly dug through her purse, gleamed, excavated a cigarette, lit it, circled me, and leaned in close. I could smell her breath—cinnamon and Marlboro; I felt her pounding lungs, the chaos beneath placid skin.

She thrust her chest against mine, deeply inhaled her cigarette, suckled it soggy for milk, little puffs of smoke, a bull, a bold Wagnerian heroine, drugged and famished; then, punctuating every syllable with precision, decreed with wide monotone eyes, “just-keep-ing-it-in-ef-fa-ble-got-it?”

Good ol’ Inez. She grounded every moment. Never was the immediate ever sacrificed to empty gambles of the future.

“Just a second,” she said.

She half smiled and gave me an affirmative nod. She retrieved another key from the quicksand of her purse, unlocked the front door with a clunk, quickly opened it a slight crack, and slipped back in like a quarter in a slot machine.

I shut my eyes. I saw Inez and me swept away in a wild and giant Montana wind.

I was glad, but more confused than ever. What did I know about prophecies of the past, heaven, the Grand Canyon, DNA, Mozart, the legions of angels and infected gremlins in my head and libido?

I tried to be James Dean, leaned on the broad trunk of the oak tree, rolled up my sleeves, recited soliloquies, and wandered about planting magic beans.

“Some day,” I hoped, “I will climb this vine to heaven.”

“Now your man has returned,” my embrace will say. “Everything is alright and also forever.”

Inez returned as furtively as a lewd thought. She closed the door with phantom care, hardly making a sound, like the ace of hearts drawn from a mute deck.

I tried to recover. With my cigarette dangling, I startled her; everything was far too calculated, and I stood awkwardly and wasn’t even really strong enough to hold her or myself up properly and never had been. But instead, a whisper of an attempt, an eventuality, and another textbook case of why was hopelessly choreographed with no one in particular in mind.

Then, that night, nothing to do, strangely, and suddenly the vast, sterile visage of concrete, freshly laid avenues, evermore, voluminous in its degree of emptiness, where the mile wide black snakes expand more vacant, lost, synthetic, the rectilinear Mojave, the grid, the hallow late night store oozing with fluorescent, suicide, and snacks; all cavernous and aglow, gas stations, maniacs, billboards; suburban Gaza.

“Does it feel internal?” Inez queried.

“We must, without delay, halt the starvation of seconds, catapult atop the momentary kinetic shock, lush tidal waves of epiphany, annihilate all paradigms of inadequacy, multiply what is eternity, and sew new neon quilts of beauty and funk from this freak show barnyard hoe-down of our very own variety, a swampland Taj Mahal...”

My eyes broke free and took the shape of cloudy windows stained with soot. My torso collapsed with the density of granite and became masonry as my ribs stretched into rusty rebar. My legs terraced themselves, first into thin metal strips, then to concrete steps. In the meanwhile, Inez’s teeth dangled in the shape of roman numerals on thick orange doors while her hands tumbled and transformed into dank curtains soaked in black mildew for centuries.

We emerged dimly from strip mall purgatory; a beaten roadside motel that a couple of Dia de los Muertos marionettes sketched in dirt and willed into rooms. We drowned in the darkness, as though excavated from hell, and we, the motel, stood in ruin, an antiquity from some corrupt memory, a chemical plant, a radioactive test site, an arson’s charred chapel, and the only evolutionary adaptation of an accidental breed of man and cockroach.

A two-story roadside deal, the exterior pale and chipped, haunted with rumbles of motorcycles and an eternity of dope deals gone bad. The inner child, the essence, the raison d’etre, of that pallid edifice was, if nothing else, to make a sick announcement over the intercom, walkie-talkie, or loudspeaker; an amplified undertaker, a cancerous megaphone.

Hot air conditioner exhaust lingered heavy in the alley and I faintly heard the music of rough sex trickle out like free flying pellets of sweat. The choirs of craven lust hummed freaky melodies, trashy rhythms, and I felt a sense of criminality and ease reverberate from the darkest and most corrupt of my suppressed instincts.

Someone rang the lobby bell.

A minute passed, and it rang again.

From deep behind a lopsided desk, a door leading to another room slowly opened and a dark figure cautiously stumbled into a short hall, curiously scratched at the wall, and caressed it as though he had genitals in his hands and was trying to get his jollies through the wallpaper. He switched on the lobby light, wishing it were a candle or an oil lamp, and illuminated the cracked walls, the Formica panels, and a rug embedded with the ancient footprints of every derelict that ever survived their honeymoon of theft and addiction.

Momentarily, a bleary East Indian of 35, or so, lost ambitions of redemption, pudgy, ate Twix, stumbled out like a fat pigeon with a broken leg. He gripped a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon with such intent that his knuckles grew white around it as if it were a broken gearshift of a speeding MG about to crash.

Another Indian man trailed closely behind him like a time-delayed shadow, a greyhound passenger in a confused and reluctant urge to board. Both of them were very dark and shared similar brotherly features: caked and rustled black hair that stood erect

like an Asian rooster, deep brown skin that glistened with grease, teeth corroded like an old Detroit muffler, stained mouth from grazing fields of Dahl and smoking galaxies of cigarettes, punch drunk on moonshine and PBR.

They spilled over with odd gleeful grins- grim circus clowns in their final, awful, decline.

“How much for a room?” I asked.

The words were caught in my throat, they sounded scratchy like they were made of shells, wax, and wire.

The first Indian, moderately heavier than the other, hints of sumo, pink shirt, wide circles of sweat beneath dense armpits, chuckled. I could smell rancid alcohol, all of it cheap, bought by the gallon, processed through the decaying factory of his body and emanating in plumes from his dripping pores. The entire odor was formidable, pungent, somewhat inhuman, a Mac truck of rotten eggs, with direct hints of, unmistakably, Velveeta cheese.

He slowly drew open a drawer from behind the registration desk. He didn't, not even for an instant, break his gaze with mine. His hands did all the work, shuffling and shaking in the black clutter. His distant brown eyes, cloudy and high, shook with anxious tremors of fear and I braced myself for the worst, the imminent possibility that, in a mere matter of seconds, I would be at the shit end of a .45 magnum.

“Dig,” I said.

My paranoia clawed in deep, clutched me by the balls and I felt my blood turn blue, turquoise, and then to lavender.

“Jesus man, Jesus.”

In the meantime, the second Indian yanked the knob of an old manual TV propped up on top of a folding chair in the corner. He grunted as he fiddled with it, banged it with his fist, cranked the channels, they clicked, and numbers popped up: 2,3,4,5,6...

“Channel Six!” Inez yelled.

At that very moment, gliding across the airwaves, through our heads and bodies, broadcast signals starved and fixated upon nothing else besides magnets, relentless and obsessed, fixated upon conceptions of greatness, only to get sucked up and absorbed by this dilapidated old machine. A sexual experience for the protons, you know, yanked in through that broken vulva of an antenna and begging to strip tease and copulate for us in any manner possible: local news hour, sitcom, soap opera, advertisement with smiling blond, police drama, cartoons; all undeterred by any and all performance anxiety, discoloration, or scratchy interference.

The Indian's hands emerged slowly from the dark drawer with a stack of registration cards. His eyes were still fixed on mine, they jittered slightly, a spooky stare off. He shuffled the cards, a green deck, as though we had all arrived wearing cowboy hats and spurs, sat at a wooden table, lit a cigar, slugged a whiskey, and shoved in stack of chips for a poker match with ill stakes: a finger, an ear, any and all appendages, spleen. Texas hold 'em of the anatomy.

The other man, his creepy doppelganger, earnestly rubbed his greasy hands at lightening speed, fast enough to make a high-pitched buzz, and panted with anticipation before the TV.

“Round ‘em up, hmmm, Round ‘em up...” he muttered.

“Let’s Rock!” Inez yelled.

Her face turned crimson. She growled, exposing her feral fangs, I dove out of the way; she leaped over me, like a cheetah, and landed in the card dealer’s acrid face, her hiss dripping over him. With a fierce swipe of her arm, she swiftly grabbed the beer from his hand, growled, and swigged the rest of it back in one fatal gulp.

The room was still. The Indian didn’t dare to move. Inez had him by the collar of his shirt, a death grip. Fire raged from her eyes and breached the barricades of his penitent soul. The tables had clearly turned; he was broken.

Then, as though nothing had happened, the other Indian bent the antenna of the TV, bent down to the screen, and bent his face into a scream as a black and white picture emerged. We all surrendered to the flashing god- an old episode of Mr. Ed, the Indian’s left hand glued to the antenna to maintain a signal. The sounds of the show, western twang, hovered in the room like Ford 350 exhaust trapped in a garage, hints of gasoline.

My fingertips turned blue, my lips were cold; my head felt weightless as though I had just inhaled twenty-five helium balloons.

“I’m in the lobby, where are all the happy people?” I wondered out loud.

Through the depths of the Indian’s dark skin, a molasses emerged. His tongue dangled out of his mouth and dripped with blueberry syrup and looked as though it could be a sweet, chewy, delicacy if prepared with a little powdered sugar.

“My God, in a matter of moments we will all asphyxiate and die like suicidal housewives!”

“Inez!”

I tried to yell at her telepathically. We’d practiced telepathic conversations countless times before, always high, never actually succeeding.

“Inez,” I telepathically implored,

“It’s as though we have stumbled into a Jim Jones massacre in its final gruesome culmination and when the cops and Local News Team get here to discover us, bloated and pale, we’ll be wearing clean white sneakers and have chilling grins on our face!”

“What’d you say!?” she snapped.

I inched back, first toward the door for a speedy get away, then, upon a change of impulse, crept behind the desk, shifting and knocking, and pulled a registration card from the Indian’s deck, like a Tarot from a gypsy, and laid it out to contemplate my fate.

The illustration was impressive, full of fine detail. A winged and horned devil, the hoofs of a goat, on a black pedestal, that hovered before an inverted pentagram. And bound to chains like two beasts were Inez and I, naked and lustful, glistening with oil.

Inez roared at the Goat God, "Die Scum!!!"

In a flash she resumed her murderous grip on the Indian's neck. He gasped, strained, fought to open the iron vise of her hands, a futile attempt in face of Inez's insurmountable strength and bloodthirsty psychotic rage.

The other man, calmly, and for the first time, broke his attention from the TV. His eyes were wide and glassy from hours of bad sitcoms and melodramas; face was long, full of coarse goat hair, and his ears dangled sharply like a hoofed beast.

"Feelings are nothing to fear, nothing to be ashamed of, or even to avoid."

I gestured with panic at Inez and the Indian, still locked in a death match,

"You say that is nothing to avoid?!"

The Goat-god changed the channel on the TV and turned the metal and glass box in my direction. He mimicked my gesture and chuckled,

"Take another look."

Within the TV I stood at the foot of an enormous black mountain where the Goat God ruled. At his hooves, Inez, I, and an enticing collection of teenagers fornicated in a galley of insatiable sex- oral, anal, group, full of drugs, surrounded by fine food, exotic pets, gold, flickering candles, luscious scents, chocolates, spirits, exquisite wine in crystal decanters.

I felt reassured; it was a comforting scene.

"But what about the chains?"

"Those?"

The TV screen shifted to a close up of us, the love makers. In spite of the glorious vision of decadence, in truth we all grimaced and suffered unspeakable horrors of medieval collars, torture racks, and hacking afflictions.

"You're free."

The Goat-god gestured upward, toward the peak of the mountain.

"Inez!" I yelled, "We've mistaken the Goat-god. He is not a creature of evil, but of great power, the lowest and the highest, both of beast and god!"

For some reason, this tickled the suffocating Indian. Through wheezes of gasps and gurgles, he escalated from a wispy chuckle to an all out, full scale, maniacal rooster call roar of laughter.

It proved to be a shrewd reaction. Inez's dominance teetered. She loosened her grip and retreated.

Her voice trembled and she asked no one in particular, "What's the matter with these people?"

She stepped outside, cigarette in hand, lit it with a match, drew in deep, blew a cloud of smoke before her, kneeled on the asphalt, and genuflected to the skyline. Visions of

Agnes shimmered in headlights and cigarette smoke. Somewhere the rumble of a Dodge Hemi, tires burning; St Joan popped the clutch.

In the meantime, the TV addicted brother was back to normal, hypnotized by the flickering box. He bobbed a paper carton with a red oriental palace printed on it- Chinese take-out, bad chow-mien. He spilled some of its weird juice on his plain tee shirt. It made an oily, orange stain, and caked a little bit; he rubbed it in deeper and then smelled the length of his finger, slowly, from knuckle to the wee bit tip, investigating the aroma of every oriental nuance.

The smell didn't seem to impress him either way and, within a moment, he forgot all about the stain and slinked down closer to the television. He farted. He twisted the knob to a celebrity gossip program; channel nine. The host of the program had a very clean smile and a nice wave to his hair.

The Indian's eyes drooped and glazed over, he nodded in fits and spurts with loud rueful moans. I could hear a diet beverage commercial leak out from his memory of last night, another imprint of his gaze.

The man behind the desk had calmed to a moderate chuckle. He seemed relaxed now that Inez was gone and, at this point, the slightest second in time was reason enough for him to erupt into seizures of hysterical laughter. He showed his big yellow teeth and smiled- his gums spread apart like old steamed clams.

He handed me a worn disposable pen. It had the phone number of a dry cleaning service, A One Dry Cleaning, engraved on it.

"Odd area code," I thought.

The ink had long gone dry and I dug in hard with the pen to engrave my signature onto the registration card. He noticed this, laughed, scrounged in his mystery drawer, and quickly excavated a worn down crayon, madder rose. As he handed it to me, he gently, yet deliberately, brushed the top of my hand with his scaly fingers.

"Hey!" I said.

He chuckled with glee and examined a plywood board mounted on the wall between him and the Indian watching TV, full of keys dangling from bent nails. Each key was attached to an irregularly shaped piece of brown plastic with a number whiteout-painted on it; it looked like a Pakistani game of bingo.

His eyes shifted and crossed, paused; he was clearly experiencing some kind of inner deliberation with who knows how many members of the committee. He lifted his arm, changed his mind, dropped it, and finally, in a quick swipe, grabbed key number five.

He held up his can of Pabst Blue Ribbon, with a sense of victory, as though he had just marched through the Arc de Triumph, emperor, and was about to make a gallant speech,

"I invite you," he paused, "to drink with us...We are room number six."

Inez returned to the lobby from her cigarette to witness this odd gesture. She glared at him with suspicion, sized him up, and deciphered his aura and energetic vibration.

"How about another room-" she demanded.

He stood, awkwardly erect, watched her, his big grin fell crooked to the side, the left side, and in a repeat attempt, he lifted up a second can of PBR to match the first.

"Sorry," he breathed hastily.

"What about number eleven?" I asked.

"Closed for renovation," he quickly glanced to the diagonal corner of the room.

"A temporary closure."

The frequency of his voice ascended to a hysterical screeching pitch, as though her were channeling ear-destroying subway wheels skidding into grand central station.

Then, in an instant, though too late, an after thought, he coughed out a dull, sick chuckle.

"What's in your throat?" I asked.

Sweat-sock-pungent ooze seeped from his skin and congealed into tight little drops, like balls of mercury covering his face.

Inez studied the plywood board that dangled with every number in the hotel.

"Room eight!" Inez shouted.

"That is our honeymoon suite, complete with mini bar and remote controlled TV." His words flew out with hints of cottage cheese, a bit of foam bubbling at the corners of his lips.

He paused, ruminated on this, poised himself, wiped his face, and then, as if remembering his dear mother's eyes, indulged in the pride of his premier offering.

"We'll take it!" Inez ordered.

"Oh, I'm very, very sorry ma'am, but as you can see, your friend has already signed the registration card."

He trembled in little shock waves like a terrified Chihuahua cornered by a sewer rat.

"And furthermore," he accelerated, stuttered, "what you might like to know m'm'm'm'ma'am is that the honeymoon suite is over thrice the price of room number five."

"Liar!" Inez screamed.

He paused.

"You're a fucking bitch," Inez said.

The Indian, to his credit, despite this verbal assault, maintained his crooked half smile, half dumb expression, as though he were a nightmare wax museum Gandhi. Everyone paused for what felt like a year, a wiry strand of saliva bridged his gray, beefy lips and I wanted to pluck it like a guitar and hear the horrible sound it would make.

“Okay m’ma’am, now I am trying to be helpful here, m’ma’am, it is late and you wanted a room, but still you are not happy. What would make you happy? Do you want to start over again? Would you like to complete another registration card and now I can tear this one in half?”

Nobody uttered a word. He swigged from his beer. The TV droned on.

I put an end to the stalemate.

“Five is fine,” I announced.

And then, inspired by the ring of it, like a radio announcer, I suddenly chimed in again,

“Five is fine!”

Inez snarled. She lit another cigarette.

Room five stank with the sweat, cum, and smoke of a million streetwalkers’ tricks within every fiber of its interior; itchy rug, greasy wallpaper, stained bed sheets. The yellow bedspread, riddled with cigarette holes, had the quality of a polyester colander. The drapes had faded into an awkward and psychedelic pattern due to uneven exposure to the sun; they rippled in the stale breeze from a big tin air conditioner beneath them, the drape bottom frayed like straw; thin and tattered- hardly a lace veil to our tragedy and obsolescence.

There was a general hum of insect buzzing, like crickets on a hot night, as though this dead end motel was nothing more than a trash heap burrow, a bug-juice dwelling for all of us, its occupants: biting flies, wasps, cockroaches, ticks, beetles, fleas, maggots, amoebas. Every one of us had our own prey, our own desire, our own poison, our own trap, our own bait, our own impending demise. We were seen, stepped on, and smashed into the sidewalk, leaving nothing more than a blotch, a stink bug, a disgusting afterthought, or we scurried into the cracks, dark, unfeeling, elusive scatter shadows to enemies of existence.

Maybe I was a mud-wasp in my mud nest feeding on paralyzed caterpillars left sealed inside by mother. Perhaps Inez roamed motel floors at night feeding on scraps of decaying matter and killing creatures with her jaws, retreating to her smooth-walled burrow by day- leaf litter over the entrance to conceal it.

“How about I open the door?” I asked.

Inez didn’t reply. She mechanically flicked on and off the bedside lamp. Her rhythm was steady. She glared into an ashtray with swirling, hypnotic eyes; illuminated, dull; illuminated, dull, etc.

“I see you’ve discovered something of interest, I’ll investigate the possibilities over here.”

Fun. Thanks to our primitive neurology, we didn’t care; had no hope, and none of this ultimately had any noticeable effect on our desires, tactics, or reproductive methods and obligations. In fact it offered a colorful sort of fetish to our daily lives; the fetish of survival in the face of a concerted affront to our existence. We were heroes and rebels glazed in goo and junk, and got to get drunk dependably like the orbits of the planets.

I unlatched the chain lock and wiped off the knob with a rough towel from the bathroom and pushed open the door to let in some fresh air, if you could call it that. It's hard to believe there was anything fresh whatsoever in that cocktail of tires, diesel, debris, and soot.

There was a general industrial murmur, as though we were hatched in a giant ventilation duct.

"Is that a paint factory?" I wondered.

Puffy cloud steam plumed from aluminum cartoon chimneys in the near distance. They bellowed and breathed, infused with hints of orange hue of city glow.

I was trying to gauge Inez's attitude. This was nothing new; I needed to constantly assess into her disposition. I was like an astronaut to a rocket's temperature; alert to critical signs of pressure, thrust, vaporization density of fuel. One false move and KaBoom!

She had slipped out of her clothes and was lounging nude on top of the bed covers. Well, that was a good sign.

Out of curiosity, I stepped further out onto the cement balcony to attain a more detailed survey of the urban decay.

I cupped my hands over my mouth and talked into my walkie-talkie.

"Only a few renegade cars on the street, some halting, others surging; and from a distance, in a grim sort of way, from my vantage point, the twinkling lights inspire a sense of beauty and despair, a familiar awe like a slumbering memory of a monster."

"Have you lost your mind cadet?!"

"Unexpectedly, the moon is out in the orange haze of the sky, as though fires are made of flowers, the heat has temporarily subsided and smoldered to a red cherry ember and the tattered flag of the conquered land still flutters atop a citadel in flames."

As far as I could tell, all rooms in the motel were black empty except for ours and room number six- two rooms in a row. I casually peered in the window of number six and as soon as I did the curtain abruptly swung shut and rippled gently like a drop of cyanide in soup. I shifted angles and bent along the rail that hanged over the parking lot and upon quick, yet fastidious, inspection of room number six, I vaguely, though with certainty, made out the silhouette of the chuckling Indian, the one from the registration desk in the lobby, his shape carved out between the flickering blue light of the TV and the feint pallid yellow glow of the parking lot.

"Do we have any whiskey left?" I wondered.

"What time is it? Is there a morning? Will there be a tomorrow? What today?"

I gagged at the thought of those two greased Indians panting, excessively lubricated, exploring each other's crevices and caverns, watching dragnet, splashing fluids on the wall. Cocks squirming, twitching, bedraggled and moaning, 18 cocks, licking, with gel, with berets on, lipstick on their nipples, skewed smiles.

I wanted to watch them, covertly, through the eyes of the Mona Lisa that hung conspicuously in our room. Would Inez enjoy it? Or, at the very least, if they were naked with erections, our ears pinned against the wall, would the abrasive sound of their piston strokes screech loud enough to break glass; would their ejaculation signify a cosmic celebration of our every cry, moan, and youthful gasp of fertile music?

I ambled back into the room.

“Do we have any whiskey?”

“What are you doing?” Inez asked.

“Who? Me? Just investigating your friend the Mona Lisa, nothing out of the ordinary, so far; but, since you asked, have you taken a second to query yourself some basic and primary questions relevant to this particular occasion?”

“Of course,” Inez sipped straight whiskey from a tumbler, “You think I’m an amateur?”

I ran my hand along the fabric of the smiling masterpiece; it soiled my fingers with grime as though I were massaging the top of an old refrigerator.

“God no.” I said, “But let’s just imagine, for kicks, why not, that what if by some odd twist of fate, or by some easily explicable circumstance, these two strange and vacant Indians next door, the odd ones from the lobby, though fruity as they appear, are in reality sophisticated, ingenious, and celebrated international art thieves? Most wanted criminals by Scotland Yard, the ISI, FBI, Inspector Clouseau, and dozens of other crime hunting tribunals?”

“It crossed my mind,” Inez replied.

“And furthermore, what if these same two Indians are not just common geniuses, but two of the most talented burglars and actors of all time, the veritable Shakespeares of their field?”

“Continue,” Inez said.

I cleared my throat, like inspector Holmes, “Ah hem, yes, and what if they have, in fact, managed to infiltrate the Louvre under cloak of night, anesthetize the guard, inject him with amnesia inducing serum, slip each other the tongue, slide the Mona Lisa from her comfortable state of affairs and seamlessly switch her with a counterfeit of the actual original Mona Lisa? Then, casually enter the post office like two simple bakers, fill out the appropriate forms with street number, name, city, state, and zip code, all spelled correctly, and then mail the first Mona Lisa to a pre-determined location. And now, in this current epoch, posed as nothing more than two cretins and homosexuals, they bide their time watching TV and engage in sodomy until the moment of truth, when finally, at the perfect instant, they can wipe themselves clean and liquidate their bounty. Inez, can you believe it? All this time, thousands of tourists duped, and in an act of devious inspiration they have robbed and stashed one of the world’s most beloved masterpieces, the Mona Lisa, perhaps the greatest heist of all time!”

I waited.

Inez yawned.

“Where is it? Where is it stashed? Where else? Damn! Well?”

Inez lazily examined her fingernails and when one looked dull, she breathed heavily onto it and buffed the crimson polish with a corner of the pillow sheet.

“Listen, you’re looking at it! Shit yeah, right here! Right here in our ugly, disgusting, germ infected little room number five!”

"I like it here," she said.

And then, without losing an inch of focus on her nails, “but baby, I'm not on the pill anymore."

"Huh?"

"Also, I've been meaning to tell you that I've got a brand new boyfriend and you have no idea the magic we share; how truly, cosmically, and wholly dedicated we are to each other. We were born for us. Romeo and Juliet are like vague, disheveled acquaintances in comparison."

She seemed more relaxed now and curled over and started to examine the polish on her toenails. Her shoulders reminded me of warm pears in the fall. Her hair tumbled down the slope of her back like a slow motion clay waterfall.

"Hold on a minute," I said.

I strolled over to the TV, did a quick turn for effect, like Sammy Davis Jr., yanked on the little knob, and began clicking through the channels. It was a manual TV, a lot like the satanic one the Indians had in the lobby. I liked it. Every time you switched stations you could feel the click of the knob. It gave a little release, and then settled. It was very physical as though you were the ringleader and had shoved the next act onto stage. Pictures emerged quickly in off key color tones and you could adjust the tint with creative effect. The image wavered in weird hypnotic patterns as though it were actually exhaling photons. I tried to figure out if this device that I probed and touched and intimately held and felt had cognizance, was alive, and wanted to get to know me better.

I settled in on an old childhood favorite of mine, good ol' channel three. It never failed. I used to watch the thick electronic snow blow around forever like a Christmas souvenir in an infinite Detroit blizzard.

“Isn't it incredible Inez?”

“Here is a perfect portrayal of the inexplicable chaos and confounding soup that is everything. Channel three, a zillion black dots smashed up against a zillion white dots, and then the next instant, a new black dot has become the white dot itself, becomes void, then recycled and reinvented into new arrangements of other dots, alternative new strings of black dots, revolutionary clumps of white dots, mobs of circus dots, interracial orgies of all colors of dots, a traffic jam and toll free long distance call of dots, etc!”

“And just when you begin to figure out exactly what the dots mean, and you are shrewd enough to calculate with mathematical precision the pattern they make; when all the skyscrapers, plants, fire hydrants, moon, newspaper stands, crustaceans, and drive through fast food restaurants start to make sense in an easily explicable soundbite; and with a sense of profound eternity you've figured it all out, and when you're finally

feeling happy again, butter your toast for breakfast; the god damn universe races in, light speed NASCAR, with a brand new twist and crazy calliope of new fucking dots and sets you back twenty years to where you began or earlier and ultimately will end, only to begin again, this time as a duplicate original of a wee little zygote nymph dot without the slightest concept of dot or any other dot, nor what the hell you've just finished and what you're about to get yourself back into. Dot!"

Inez slowly stood up and walked toward her purse sitting on the dresser. It was incredible to behold her skin; my heart broke in the sincerity of its simple honesty- the way it washed up and down her tender body. Her tan possessed the same copper illuminations of an Arizona sunset, and relayed a similar sense of existential calm.

But my point was not complete. I collected myself, turned up the volume of channel three, the harsh electronic blizzard, and let it rip between us as she calmly ruffled through her purse and retrieved a nail clipper.

"Listen to that! The universe, WoW!"

Then she resumed her place on the bed and started her meticulous daily manicure and pedicure, clipping bits of nail and cuticle onto the carpet, completely and totally disinterested in even the vaguest notion of chaos, time, or the big bang.

"And then!" I cried.

She lit a cigarette, drew from it deeply, ashed on the carpet, and then re-focused on her nails.

"You touch the greasy handle and the idea that you're going to twist it pops into your head. From where? From who? Is it your plan? Is it your pain? Or simply the bestial impulse you inherited from your lizard ancestors? And so you somehow engage all these invisible twitches in your arm that you hope to never see, but don't want to betray, either. These neglected muscles that you've ignored everyday since you discovered whiskey and marijuana, except to bring that bottle or roach to your insatiable fixations. And yet, as a result of some kind of biological agreement, thanks to your ruthless and murderous caveman grandparents, precursors, cannibals, you're able to complete this quotidian and mundane task of turning that dumb little TV knob the same way you always have for your whole life."

I paused, gulped, tagged the scrimmage line, feverishly resumed,

"And then what do we have? Huh? Tell me that. What do we have? Is this what it all leads to? T.V. Knob? No response? Then do allow me to offer some illumination on the subject at hand."

I waved both my fists in the air, shadow boxed, hopped up and down over an invisible jump rope.

I screamed,

"A perfectly coherent episode of 'All in the Family!' Damn it! That's what we have! Oh shit, I love Archie Bunker, I do! But, what the fuck?! Take a closer look- there's no Archie Bunker, not even a refreshing artificially flavored lime soda with staggering amounts of caffeine. Nada! Nothing in that adorable little soft drink can in

that sappy commercial with all those weird alien kids splashing in the water at some Styrofoam pebble beach on a Hollywood set.”

Inez leaned over the bathroom sink, in close to the bathroom mirror, her neck at a grotesque angle, and plucked her eyebrows in the stark fluorescent light. I groaned, exasperated, louder,

“All we’ve got, honey, all we’ve got is nothing more than a useless conglomeration of a billion of these damn aforementioned little dots. Remember them? The same, yet different dots that we previously observed, saw, and marveled at on channel three. The identical, isocentric, but contrasting dots on channel four, new and improved perverted dots smashing up against each other on channel five, dots fondling their children guiltlessly on channel 6, molesting and bumping up behind one another like a bunch of homos with radical erections on channel 7!”

“Can’t you see? Inez, it’s the perfect portrait of chaos. Baby, what do we find? Huh? What do we find? Family fucking entertainment!”

“Change the channel baby, I hate that show, my dad watches it when he can’t sleep and I come home drunk and he calls me a slut.”

“How about channel nine?” I asked.

“Sure.”

A swamp creature, drenched in ocean cud and disgusting clumps of black seaweed rose from a spooky lagoon. A girl, an adorable blond in a sweet bikini, searching for her boyfriend, screamed in terror, but couldn’t run- paralyzed by fright. She thrust her arms up to protect her face. The swamp monster devoured her with ease, his slimy tentacles enveloping her lovely body. Then, it began to digest her with potent flesh melting enzymes.

“Oh, how cool, I love this,” I said.

Inez lay on the bed naked and ignored me.

I stepped outside again into the vulnerable violence, the ghetto-still, looked around, internalized the false order, walked down the stairs to the car, unlocked it and grabbed a pack of cigarettes from beneath my seat.

This was nothing unusual. Inez could be so damn flighty.

I knew it; she was talking about Ernesto, her long-lost love. I did the math once, as an experiment, to piece together the timeline of her lovers, casual encounters, play things, and one night stands based on her frequent rants and periodic confessions. For a girl of twenty she was incredibly accomplished and, as far as I know, unrivaled in the sheer number and frequency of her sexual conquests. It was impressive. It was something to aspire to, I always told myself.

She confessed once that I was her 83. She said that as soon as she reached 100, then she would settle down and embody the world’s most perfect and devoted concubine for whoever that may be, man, animal, or woman. She claimed that number 100 is a mystery, even to her. Even the number 100, itself, has a mystical quality. But, for

whoever 100 may be, she has sworn to gladly and faultlessly fulfill all of her womanly tasks- laundry, cooking, fucking, vacuuming, the whole sears catalog of duties.

“Can I be number 100?” I asked.

“It’s impossible,” she replied, “you’re number 81 and always will be, that can never change.”

And, as far as I could calculate, Ernesto held the dubious honor of conquistador of her immaculate innocence, numero uno. It did something to her head; she wasn’t but ten years old, though she faithfully maintains that she initiated the encounter.

We talked about it once.

“Baby, don’t be jealous,” she said, “It was rapture. I doubt in a million years that you could ever elevate me to a place half as blissful as the heaven Ernesto and I inhabited that night.”

“Is there any beer around here?” I asked.

I smoked my cigarette by the car and tried to shake that hostile memory out of my head. I thought if I concentrated hard enough on the glowing cherry of the cigarette, it would turn into a spacecraft and we’d all fly away and be saved.

“The earth is our spacecraft,” I thought, “and you’re as saved as you’ll ever be.”

Ugh. This was not adequate self-deception. I flicked the butt and went back to the room. I could hear the Indians chuckling next door.

Inez was still naked on the bed.

The B movie was still flickering on the TV.

And so that night, the two of us got freaky while a couple of perverted Indians got freaky, and the soundtrack was grunts, moans, chuckles, and bad late night programming.

And dear God, yes, how lonely a feeling, to be with Inez and experience undeniably, how very noticeably, first hand, how loose she’d become. I sank again, summoned my worst; exploited my vulnerability, subconscious sensitivity, and especially, my desperation for love. There were fantastic orgasms, Krishna raised an eyebrow, and I discovered right then, that night, without a doubt, 5:08 am, that Inez was in fact Quan Yin, the seventeenth incarnation, the Buddha herself.

“Hallelujah!”

That was the last night before we hit the road to Mexico.

And one month earlier, luckily, I had completely totaled my prior vehicle; an inadequate and grimly banal death trap- an absurdly mind shatteringly unsuitable spacecraft for those salad days of born-again resurrections and quivering copulations.

At that time, I was entangled in a flailing and incredibly amateur insurance scam; I left my keys on the dashboard, on the seat, in the ignition- car running; windows open, door open, window and door open; praying, chanting, visualizing while staring into the flame of a candle, nag champa incense burning, I built an altar with predella, kneeled until I cried, flagellated myself to welts in honor of the street hood savior- I had dreams

of him with a stocking over his face, halo over his head, and crowbar in his hand- I worshipped him.

But none of these pagan rituals succeeded, so I considered sacrificing a chicken, even ripping its beating heart out like an Aztec priest and placing its thumping bloodiness on the hood ornament of the car. And then, unexpectedly, I temporarily captured the imagination of an outer fringe Mexican affiliate, over beers and tequila one night, to the tune of fifty percent of the profit.

“All you have to do,” I said, “is make the car disappear.”

“No problemo,” he said.

But this Cholo didn't live up to the talk and never materialized the promised chop shop and, either was all hubris, or simply lost interest in favor of a new, more lucrative, enterprise involving cocaine and coyote trafficking of illegal immigrants over the border.

The music compelled me. It innocently sang,

“Faster, the pedal man...”

And I obeyed and jammed my foot so hard on the accelerator that I thought it would smash through the floorboard onto the road. A yellow sign suggested a speed of 50 miles per hour on the off ramp; it flew by in a blur, I easily doubled it. I cranked the steering wheel but the tires didn't respond- the asphalt became butter, howled, and abandoned me as the car careened into the cement guardrail, a great smoking trail of rubber leading from the entrance of the off ramp to the drastic turn and subsequent annihilation of my vehicle.

The driver's side metal screamed with agony as its flesh tore off first from the fender, then the door, and then the rear bumper did cartwheels on its own; a crunching abrupt stop of smoke and engine steam. And even more, an angelic affiliate, the bodhisattva of my gang at the time, riding shotgun, too; on his twentieth birthday, and for the first time, saw his life flash before his eyes.

My head flung to the left, though luckily the window was open and my skull only slammed against gentle air. He bruised his arm. No one knew his birthday. He later said,

“It was then...”

That took care of that. Things were good. The new car was good, Inez was good; she had a few bucks; we were blessed, I picked up some good luck potion at the Santa Ria shop, some devil be gone, two Jesus candles, some mother Mary potpourri aerosol air freshener and demon repellent; there was dope in Mexico, our life was scripture, we fucked like rabbits, and all apprehensions were excommunicated and given the hand.

Inez settled perfectly in the passenger's seat as though it were an extension of herself, a beanbag, and a waterbed all wrapped in one. There was never a starlet born who had a thing on her, nor her scarf, nor her glasses, nor her grace. She delicately slugged back a tall bottle of red wine. I lit a cigarette, pulled the top down, unbuckled my belt, started the car, slid into gear, and hummed to the highway. I smiled as the wind rippled Inez's loose skirt just enough for it to inch up her thigh to her panties.

"Everything is, and is as such..."

She laughed at my Confucius accent.

“Yes, baby, Yes!”

“Grab the Wheel!” I yelled.

She skillfully leaned over and took the steering wheel with both hands; even switched lanes to maneuver around a languid Toyota. I rotated to the back seat and opened my bag. I excavated through clumps of clothes, books, bruja oils, candles, crayons, good luck charms, etc, and finally exhumed a Super 8 film camera.

It was my new prize possession; I had recently acquired it for a few bucks at a flea market from a large and commanding African American woman. In a rich alto voice she exclaimed, “Don’t get in any trouble with ’dat!!!”

“What else?!” I yelled.

She was pleased.

And Inez was busy filming the perfection of the cloverleaf overpass, full of traffic and despair, confusion and outrage, and we barreled through the wasteland of industrial nowhere on our way to our aforementioned bliss.

“The tires! Get a shot of the tires! An artistic angle!”

With the top down, the traffic and air slammed into our ears like hurricanes of calamity and crash. You had to scream everything in that car. A ’69 Karmann Ghia, convertible, jet black, a plastic Jesus glued to the dash; and except for a few electrical shorts, she ran like a dream. We didn’t exactly break any speed records, sure. But that was never the point. We were in the journey, and we were in it with devotion and style.

Inez sang, Paul Newman style,

“I don't care if it rains or freezes

'Long as I got my plastic Jesus

Riding on the dashboard of my car...

Through my trials and tribulations

And my travels through the nations

With my plastic Jesus I'll go far...”

I sang,

“I don't care if the night is scary

As long as I got the Virgin Mary

Sittin' legs spread right here next to me...

She don't slip and she don't slide

'Cause her ass is magnetized

Sittin' legs spread right here next to me...

The car rattled on the highway, like all hell breaking loose with mortar and machine gun fire. And when a big rig flew by you'd swear in God's name, pray for all humanity, that the sky, though crashing upon you, would still afford discretion and spare the Eors, Pooh Bears, and Jiminy Crickets of the world. But, nevertheless, it was healthy for the spirit to confront your own demise with every passing Diesel 390.

It kept things real, as they say, and reaffirmed our whole motivation behind this mad dash sprint, last ditch effort, and kamikaze swan dive crash course. We were going to die, Inez insisted, as everybody knows, and the highway refused to deny us this fundamental truth. I respected that.

Inez laid it out:

"The highway, to the dismay of our antagonists, enables us to pursue what the commercial industrial complex would deem as subversive a-social behavior."

"We'll steal our gas! The status quo must not profit from our revolution! Think of it, the highway, one of its own, a thoroughfare of commerce and capitalist greed; the highway is saving us, she is an accomplice to the revolution!"

"Film the steering wheel!" I shouted. "Focus on the speedometer!"

"Too precious, I'm drinking my wine!"

"I need a taste!"

Inez swigged back some and handed the bottle to me. I drank a gulp and swerved.

"Not bad!"

"Burgundy!" She yelled.

"Hand me the camera!" I yelled.

I leaned back in my seat and pulled the trigger on the camera.

"What the hell, it's not working!"

"Hit it!"

I banged the camera against the dashboard, carefully, not to damage the vinyl.

"Really honey, this car would be perfect if it weren't for its few minor, yet glaring, dents and imperfections!"

She cranked up the radio, all A.M. The outer space frequency squelch glued all the different stations together. It faded in and out like an opium high; call-in radio personalities, sports broadcasts, Evangelists, soul savers, mad scientists, conspiracy theorists, and then, finally, a fuzzy, yet rollicking, mariachi station.

"Oh man, the trumpets! Fantastic! These satin and sequined fuckers really know how to play! No radio city bullshit here! Oh they must be mad with music in some inalienable slum Nogales ghetto garage; everyone is drunk and happy on Mescal, smoking tea like packs of lucky strikes, cooking hot pepper meat crackling grease onions and burning bacon to the immeasurable glee of their teenage honeys!"

After a few bumps against the dashboard, right next to Jesus, the camera kicked in again and as I squeezed the trigger, a Rambo of art-house cinema, I rattled off a hundred machine gun fire frames like Armageddon raining down. I felt the gears vibrate from the precise depths of the mechanisms to the imperfect flesh of my arm.

“Eat burning led, Charlie!”

“The napalm is in your mind!” Inez screamed.

“Take inventory! All these machines, Inez! Our automotive machine, our camera machine, our social machine, our war machine, our patriarch machine, our human machine, our thinking machine! It all comes apart! Nuts and bolts! Rivets! Dig the blueprint for all of it! Thread the needle, atomic particles, stitch a quilt and then you get anything that ever was in textile time or universe!”

“And then?!” Inez yelled.

“Sew another!”

I took a swig of the burgundy and handed the bottle back to her. We were fine now and felt tingled high-tailed and I sank deep into the road and was one. The burgundy tasted nice, though it was a little young, and I was thinking clearly for the first time in weeks. Although I could hardly piece together how we’d gotten to this point, I was happy to lay all questions aside and surrender to fate. Inez was dreamy and drank from the bottle and we both felt a sense of victory that we had managed to escape, at least for now, the ugly and subterranean suburban machinations of our lives.

“How much money do you have?” Inez yelled. “It’s covered.” She looked pleased.

Earlier that day, I had packed my bags and then burgled a mean girl I used to bang. She was living with her best friend at the time (a true crazy girl who was engaged to marry her cousin) and they were off high on dope somewhere congregating with the art deco demons that haunt the streets of Hollywood on any given day. I jumped on the hood of a pick up truck and scaled a wall into her Venice Beach window.

I knew where she stashed her dough, third drawer down in a chipped dresser. On a regulation dull night of drinks at the Colorado Bar among insidious warlords and warlocks playing pool, jamming quarters in the juke box, dealing amphetamines in the bathroom, conspiring car radio thefts, counting cigarettes in a booth; she, loose tongued and tipsy as usual, inadvertently uttered to me about some unearthed savings bonds, a gift from her grandparents years ago, good God fearing Catholics, and now deceased without a heaven. I swiped, with equity and fairness, half the loot, briefly pondered why she hadn’t already spent the bounty herself, and cashed them in, 300 bones in the barrio, at a sketchy check cashing stand outside of which a leather faced woman in soiled pink robe and slippers held out a fast food cup, rough street beaten hands like an iron-vice around paper coated in wax, “Got any extra, honey?” Oh, former angel, Hollywood vampire, guiltless casualty, where is your agent?

The road crept on and Inez passed out. I turned down the radio. I liked listening to the details of the road. It had its own language. Signs for Mexican insurance started to spring up along the highway. We were getting very close. I filmed one of those signs and panned upward to the sky.

“His choice to film in Super 8: what a sincere form of cinematic expression- raw, angelic, honest in its scratchy simplicity,” I imitated the rave reviews of my imaginary critics in my craven and hallowed mind.

Only much later would it be discovered that my film masterpiece, my breakthrough iconoclastic debut, the directors cut of the new revolution, afterwards, was overexposed, nothing more than ghost images projected at unnatural, spectral speeds.

It felt appropriate, somehow. The film was as cloudy as the memory. Though the initiation and action was concrete, I think, as solid as a brick wall, the conclusion, all the same, was ambiguous; like trying to capture water with a net. Where did it all go? And like a phantom itch from Van Gough’s ear, the film painted with foggy strokes a nebulous and ephemeral memory.

So, ultimately, what I learned from the film was this: It's not important that I was in Mexico, but rather that I went. Not that I was alive, but that I lived. And you could never put a finger on it, so why bother?

And then, of course, Inez.

Inez was a machine, I was a machine, the dope and hope of our last ditch Hail-Mary was a machine. And after a lifetime of absorbing television machine, film machine, computer machine, university machine, society machine, police machine, emotion machine, fate machine... it was our turn to take it all in, chew it up, and shit it out.

Nevertheless, though the film was blank, I managed somehow to document, at least for a moment, the folly of misdirected love, gypsy adventure, hazy underground bar; and, pinned against a red vinyl booth, a sixteen-year-old girl for hire.

I filmed the ocean, the sand, and at one point, the tragedy of every longhaired Indian in blue van apprehended with a trunk full of cocaine. Who kindly smiled like a prophet to his bonded people; thrust against the asphalt by Romans, blood dripped from his chin, a stigmata for believers.

The DEA agent (his violent hound snapped insanely at the air) rushed to me and growled,

"I'm going to smash that camera in your face!"

Oh, Indian Man, where art thou children in the cold night?

Sewer poison, sprigs of rotting flesh, festered decay, toxic goons, thugs in alley shadow, on corners, in wait, parasites, man shits in street, the park, the grocery store; hookers, disease, instinct, hipsters, consciousness best described by the visual dilapidation of Hiroshima, Bombay, and the Salton Sea.

Ten-year-old girl, sunken face, a history of theft, sells shit stale chicle for a nickel a pack, was born, angel, future saint. Well, and me? Another scum among ravenous shame, a rat with a lizard brain, and a debilitated compassion of half-human expectation; laugh out loud or puke it out, smoke it in or snort it up, rail on full speed and maybe nowhere.

A dark faced grim cowboy, a caballero, with grandes cajones, a wrangler of the street, spurs dangling, rounding up doggies of the slum, in a slick ten-gallon hat, bellowed,

"taxi, taxi...Taxi!"

(Coarse throat growl)

He goes the long way, extra slow, pot holed street, past shops with strange and colorful vestments, down murderous corridors, deadly tenements, cranks up the heat, the greasy vinyl seat, rapist eyes in rear view mirror, slithers the car to park among burned out cinder block bunkers and monumental heaps of debris.

He spiraled his body, leaned one arm against the long bench seat, big lips and oily face dripped, leaned in close, "Pussy, you want pussy...?"

So musical, he says, "Pussy."

"Pussy! Pussy!"

The mantra of gurus, geniuses, Babajis, purveyors of rotten box, pimps, entrepreneurs; and usually a scam from the start, ten dollar cover, then kick back tip, then four dollar beer plus another tip, then a broken seat, hangovers like tidal waves and monsoons to come, then to watch a desperate Magdalene throw her body against bricks, against stairwells, against eternities, against panoramas of bloodshot eyes and mugs of sex fiend licking his chops saying, "Gee, don't it look goooooood?"

Fresh faced American boys, on the La Crosse team, business major, huddled in booths like masons, a table full of beers, some with baseball caps, some handsome, some weasel like, droopy eyed, some cavalier, some overcome with guilt, some helpless and possessed by the narcotic glisten of raw cunt.

Too stoned on tequila and pills to realize what the hell it all means and then a woman, with an air of kindness, as though intent on friendship, nice, sits down, unzips pants and grabs cock, strokes expertly until a vigorous vanilla custard mess- "Money! You did that voluntarily!" (Sinister switchblade bouncer approaches the table to settle the score...)

That night, a bold young man paid twenty dollars to eat a cunt right there on stage. A scruffy girl, on hormones, nearby whispered,

"Look at her pleasure..."

A college boy was shocked.

"Imagine the kind of scabs that he'll wake up with in the morning."

He seemed genuinely concerned.

"As for me," he continued, "I'm headed straight for black out city, no questions asked."

He had a happy midwestern face, flushed, innocent, wouldn't hurt a fly, and with a sardonic smile he slammed back another beer.

He waived his finger wildly like a cowboy and yelled,

“Giddy up! Giddy up!”

Submerged in confusion, more Xanax and booze, comatose in a distant blur bar filled with lecherous species, self indulgent and desperate to be the insane and shadowy figure of myth in that dark corner; the sun has risen and, somewhere, it is bright, playful, and clean beneath the sky.

A trick wiped the powder beneath her nose. Voodoo Chile’ is on the radio. “I stand up next to a mountain, knock it down with the edge of my hand.” Her hands are frail like twigs, her eyes scan the room with depravation and her face seems unconcerned as a fat slob slams her from behind like a jackhammer.

"Oye, oye!"

He grappled her loose ass, beaten to jelly by a thousand wholesale fucks. He climaxed sloppily all over her. A crew of amigos situated morosely in the booth nearby congratulated him with meager claps and a drink of their beer.

“Orale-“

“Alright-“

This genuine vision from the hazy back of Chuty's house of beer one suicide trip; alcohol induced and every pill; another horrific waltz to a Schuman blackout. Later on I pieced together tiny bits of memory like an intricate and surreal puzzle. A parlor game, my version of an exquisite corpse, I like to call, “My game with death.” It’s a five thousand-piece puzzle with most pieces missing and the rest jammed together with rubber cement and chewing gum.

The last caption of the cinematic narrative storyboard: “Blue faced and cold in Pedro’s taco shop urinal with face in puke; finally sure why boy is placed on earth.”

Only much later I found out, to my surprise, that a close acquaintance of mine shared a room that night with the same cocaine whore after I had passed out from too many pills.

“It was an awful and gratuitous hate fuck,” he said, “revenge against my ex girlfriend, it was terrible, a low moment. I’ve rarely been so drunk in my life, and you’ve seen me drink, tequila that’s how I could do it. I don’t remember my last shot, except that she passed out. And I don’t know where the demons came from, and I don’t, and I’m ashamed to tell you this, but we’re old pals, and maybe you can help me to understand the unconscious pathology of that black moment, and find old Moses redemption in there somehow. I hope you don’t think less of me, it’s all like a bad dream, see, you were there...”

“Oh, She didn’t stop you?”

“God no, she was out cold, unconscious. But the next day I saw her on the boulevard and she was walking with a terrible swagger.”

“My God...”

Heavy back alley black, dim ethereal figures dance in tin house windows, where paranormal canciones echo out faintly, with a muted din, but distinct, tragic off key flamenco lament from ghosts of matadors. After the whorehouse, the farmacia, strip bar,

the unholy reel of Tijuana spinning, the gutter, the smoke and poison; the reflection of me born from nowhere on crumbling walls lit by a single yellow bulb.

Rats scurried like genius tightrope walkers on street cables, weightless on the slack line, which swayed from side to side like a haunted hammock in the still night; tilted telephone poles, wires of imaginary angles, impossible calls and secret transmissions in a lethal new language made up by phantoms and holocaust angels.

The black soot of the street, made of black tar, strands of hair, despair, stains on my pants and arm flesh; I wondered what I had brushed against, if anything, I felt grateful for my shoes and feared the wicked coarse pavement, starved dogs scavenged through rank garbage.

I am naïve prey to a series of improbable turns, neural connections, and quantum conspiracies; an odd engineer with a pistol to his ear inspired by De Sade and Mr. Hyde. The design shares nothing in common with sanity, nor good taste for that matter, simply an intent on disorienting and cornering a hapless, dizzy victim, myself for instance. The street is a strand from the web of a tarantula. Or even like secret corridors behind a bookcase, labyrinth alleyways, Moroccan pursuit.

On the streets alone, wandering for a strip joint, wandering for a marijuana joint, wandering for a miracle, wandering for an epiphany, wandering for a glass of horchata, wandering for a pill, for a mother, for a history, for a simple palace; wandering for a justification, wandering for an explanation, wandering for wonder, for humanity, wandering for the starving, for the gluttonous and doomed. Wandering for a juke joint filled with saints and sluts, sweat and women, woman identifiers, objectified and oppressed, modern ghetto variations of sacred Persian belly dances.

“I can feel your eyes hit my face...”

I wandered and met a hip looking kid named Roberto. A good looking kid, combed hair, tres flores, he said,

“You want pussy, senior...”

As high as I was and out of my head, a space explorer on the remote cliffs of Planet X, dodging ray-beams blasted by door shadow aliens- sudden visions of Bug’s Bunny protecting the earth from Marvin the Martian, cartoons I’d watch as a clean boy with bright eyes on Saturday mornings, Elmer Fudd and the such, Pepe Le Peu, how could I object?

Roberto pulled me up and down rickety wicked corridors as though I were a red wagon stolen from a neighbor’s lawn, its wheel bent and rattled during getaway, now moves with a squeak, some kid crying, and then staircases, shady characters, head ducks, unlikely turns, leering looks, skeleton dogs, live wires, oily puddles, barbed walls, and then finally the dilapidated front, where a man in sunglasses invited me in for free, but immediately charged me six dollar for a strange tasting cola.

“Bait and switch,” I thought.

There was a stage in the front and it branched out into a short catwalk surrounded by rickety tables. There was a brass pole anchored in the end of the stage and my seat was just to the side of it. The room was very empty except for a table in the corner where a

few of the reluctant dancers sat and chatted in quick and indecipherable Spanish, an Indian dialect. And, even as high as I was, I felt awkward to be the only audience of this uninspired wayward bomb of a production.

My head felt like a hot air balloon on a great oriental adventure piloted by an eccentric baron. I could feel the heat of the landscapes and pungent aromas of the exotic fields as we soared over them weightless in the wind.

I lost consciousness in short fits that felt like an eternity, only to return to the room in a drastic and lucid state.

“These hookers aren’t bad looking,” I thought, “Why is this place so damn empty?”

Then the hard wood table felt like a creamy cotton pillow.

Suddenly, dance music blared throughout the room from two cheap and trebly speakers at the back of the stage. A buxom dancer, in her thirties, in black underwear and bra, strutted out with a bit of a drunk swagger. But nevertheless she possessed natural talent as a dancer and relatively good rhythm, had strong Indian heritage to her sculptured Mayan face, and her movements were vaguely reminiscent of a weary burlesque dancer I once admired.

Nevertheless, as I was still the only client present, being the only man there, in site at least, I felt embarrassed and ashamed and shy. I just wanted to say to her, “You are so beautiful and holy and we’d be so much better off if we ran to the modest mountains together and started a gentle family of bronze mud faced cherubs. And I would fix wagons and bring home milk and maize every night and we’d make love like honey beneath the thatch of our own tender serenity.”

She hooked the pole around her arm and did a quick and acrobatic spin. The music mellowed slightly and she unhooked her bra slowly, came up close to me, turned around so her ass was up against my face, and shook it a little sleepily. She was losing energy. She then teasingly lumbered back to the pole.

“For Christ sake,” I thought, “I need to tip this woman, her parents are worried, her daughter is crying, and the puppy needs a shot; she deserves all my money, no question.”

But I was tranquilized beyond precedence and blasted to the point of no return. I was a salamander, my lizard coherence comparable to an amoeba and what the hell happened to Roberto?

She tossed her black bra onto my head. In spite of the fog in my brain I tried to appear turned on and grateful and held it up to my nose like I’d seen other men do in various strip clubs and whore houses in Nuevo Laredos, Piedras Negras, some other Juarez. I deferred to their testosterone protocol and arrogant authority.

But it was too awkward, inauthentic; I lacked conviction and simply felt dirty, like an old troll with a finger up his butt. I disheartenedly threw the bra back on stage and it hovered for a second like a butterfly and I sipped my Mexican cola uneasily and wished the world would end.

My only comfort and joy, my only prayer for deliverance, was more pills. They would surely remedy this situation and I slyly felt in my pocket for the blister pack of

Valium I had scored earlier. It was there, my indefatigable ace in the hole, and I felt an immediate rush of Pavlovian relief.

I must've slipped into another moment of brief unconsciousness because the next thing I knew the black lace pantied dancer was suddenly on the other side of the stage.

And, besides that, something was squirming between my legs, though as high as I was, I couldn't quite be sure, but from somewhere I felt the dulled sense of sexual excitement pulse faintly and dimly, distantly, as far away as a Colorado, a vanishing point, and a mountain top.

I hardly heard it call, though I recognized its soft voice, and I looked down between my legs to investigate- a petite hand with red polished nails was rubbing my cock vigorously through my jeans.

Interested, I deliberately followed the path of this hand, took note of the lack of definition of the wrist, a scar on the forearm, black arm hairs, a soft dark shoulder, a weary and thick neck and into the eager Indian face of a strange woman.

There were husks and pestles in her eyes, miles of wheat and corn, a glitter of sunlight from pristine lakes, and oceans of water balanced in clay basins on head.

She seemed a little less nice than the exhausted dancer. Her breath reeked of greed. Her skin appeared overripe and bitter, though she looked like she could've been fun at a picnic some afternoon years ago. Her eyes weren't particularly sharp, though they betrayed volumes, and in spite of her industriousness she rubbed my cock with a small, but noticeable, hint of complacency. Yet she compliantly persevered and even though I struggled to comprehend my most rudimentary concerns and whereabouts, not to mention the actions of her robotic hand beneath the table in the center of the club, I experienced a radical, yet fleeting epiphany. It dealt with the arrangement and geometric link of these cheap wooden tables in relationship to chairs in outer space. They spelled out a message of beautiful and ineffable poetry.

"Stonehenge," I said.

"You want fuck me now?" She asked.

Flying on Xanax and valium both, my eyes as heavy as two Chinese steam liners filled with ingredients: blender, television, stroller, bicycle, tool set, walking aid, paper towel rack, sandwich maker, telephone, microwave; and my vision like a San Francisco fog, soupy and dense, hints of salt, seal, and fisherman shack, I could barely focus on her face. She had two eyes, then six, then fly eyes. The music came in waves from far away and dripped in my ears like little raindrops of juice that filled up until I was completely submerged and undersea.

"Hell Yeah," came from a strange voice in my head, though I was conscious that my lips hadn't moved to articulate any words.

My lips were plastered together in a rubber smile, like a spooky Howdy Doody, I barely understood what she'd said, though somehow I knew what she was driving at. And really, I couldn't even grasp at that moment what language was at all, as if every word were something alien that got caught on flypaper of symbols. The words sank slowly into a tar pit and in the far off future their bones get discovered, excavated, and are

pieced back together in a grand museum for weird voyeurs with no recollection of the present.

But really, I was quite interested in her proposal. It came back and forth in my mind like a dark boomerang as the thought echoed in a canyon wind through the innermost contours of my doped up mental vista.

However, due to the length of time it took me to process this contemplation, in spite of my keen, though distant, interest, while words were caught in a terrific gridlock on a blocked interstate to my mouth, I maintained a blank and lifeless expression on my face.

And so, even a hooker can cry. And surely she'd been to church as a girl where the priest wailed in Spanish with threats of hellfire and damnation while Jesus in all his bowed head sorrow and love bled on the crucifix, white and fit as a Calvin Klein model.

My cock was as limp as fruit leather in the sun. I couldn't even apologize. I was far too gone and though I had a vague sense that this dangling piece of flesh belonged to an intimate part of my anatomy, it really could have been anyone else's besides mine.

My response was molded in plastic as she rubbed between my legs more vigorously; complete radio silence in my sex, in my brain, everywhere. There was absolutely no nerve signal, impulse, or passenger pigeon even remotely in the atmosphere. It was a miracle of modern science.

The hooker, though frustrated, was getting a good workout by this time, beads of sweat drizzled down her inner arm. Then, suddenly, she halted and seemed to have a radical and abrupt shift of paradigm. She became frightened as though I were a queer, or the devil, or a eunuch, and as if her hand were hostage and cuffed to a train track, the 4:10 southbound, about to get severed bloodily from the soft cuff crab claw of her wrist. She recoiled with bitterness and disgust.

Her inviting expression turned ragged and venomous and those painted lips, once shaped in an inviting smile, a welcome room, a bon bon, gripped together like a noose as she spit out curses and Spanish prayers in her quick mezzo-alto voice. She thrust herself away from the table. Her chair rocked heavily, my soda teetered and nearly fell, and she darted away like a phantom minx shrouded in black.

Now the dancer on stage was winding down. She witnessed the whole debacle from her privileged and funky vantage point. Though her allegiance necessarily stood with her fellow prostitute, the sisterhood, this sweet Indian girl knew the score; I liked her. She gave me a sympathetic smile, remembered past highs, delicately retrieved her bra, and then made her way to the table to sip on a drink while the other hookers glared and defamed me.

I was left alone and rejected. Rejected by a prostitute.

"My God, what a sardonic curse" I reveled in my alienation.

I rattled the ice in my glass. "Mexican ice," I thought. "This could be bad."

There I was, sitting dumbly at the table, numb, a mannequin, with no sense of anything, at a complete loss of forward and backward, completely oblivious of sideways; nullified of any logic or reason.

But, luckily, and sure enough, within a minute, a wiry young Mexican came on like the ghost of Cortez still in search of his golden flock. He wore tan, well-tailored slacks, and a light shirt, the top buttons loose enough to expose a few budding chest hairs. He maintained a sense of easy confidence and in spite of his slick appearance; did not reek with pungent stench of con.

He swooped in behind my ear and whispered, "Hey mary jane, hee, hee, hee..."

His voice was reassuring, smooth like scotch on a blustery day; something about it gave you hope, something that makes you believe, something that saves you from desolation and rigor mortis, the open arms of a woman who loves you. His voice felt like velvet; plush; clean as fresh snow, assuring as a cat's purr. And, perhaps more than anything else, he was an ally and shield, protection from the snickering glare of these hateful hookers, who, I could tell, were degenerating to new awful levels of malicious insults, plots, and cut downs.

Somehow this strange Buddha cat, bouncing on his cool paws, had been privy to the game all along, keen to my telltale doped up off center swagger and disaffected body posture astutely observed from some off-kilter invisible corner.

My mind was still feeble and vacant like a Sunday meeting of altruists; empty halls, except for saints and souls, apparitions, hovering about fiending for a haunt. And so, without a doubt, it was one of those rascally sinning lost souls who again, simply for kicks, nothing better to do, playfully yanked my lips together from somewhere else, initiated order from the subtle chaos of sound, and this time,

"Junk."

Which was a clever maneuver by the apparition, especially considering how already high, outer orbit, gone, like the absolute beginning, raw time, or atom I was; but there was nothing to fear at this point since all common sense was hopelessly disabled, not even a wheelchair, or crutches. As usual, it was time to let the chips fall as they may, and to wave a crisp white flag to the gentle auspices of the dour Tijuana streets.

Thrust back into the delirious narcotic calle, choking vertigo, the language is an African Congo click cLick cliCk klik cliketetat. The same sour calle where only two months prior I had been jumped on account of a lapse of judgment, and, even more so, on account of a tag along wanna' be hipster stray mutt.

This wanna' be, in fact, came from a high privileged triple story house background and, before he falsely shed his polo and khakis, belonged to prep clubs and tennis clubs and, young professionals clubs of eastern seaboard America. But somehow, to my dismay, due to an oversight on the part of my inner circle of geniuses and fearless allies, he had managed to temporarily infiltrate the tribe and ingratiate himself to a few integral and key members of our gang.

Nevertheless, on a routine caustic night excursion to tingles, trepidations, and convulsions, I planned a momentary slip away from the usual crew of anarchists, angels, and female Anais Nin affiliates exalted by the blur of high joys, sacred outbursts, and whispers of the mind. So, excusing myself graciously, as was a custom courtesy of our dignified gang, I slithered through the thick and eager crowd of equally young and

optimistic angels, all drunk already and openly hip to a quick summit of kundalini as I skillfully exited the bar.

Once outside, I whizzed past a fat man with round eyes, sweat stained collared shirt, the back soaked in the shape of a road kill frog, his bacon cart sizzled and buzzed like a hurricane beehive and he cooked up pungent mystery meat for a forlorn lot of downtrodden-faced laborers in a dead end alley.

So intent on scoring a modest taste of H for later, I bypassed normal security measures and so was rewarded with a severe shock- the aforementioned infiltrating preppy weasel wanna' be-

“Hey! I’m right here!”

“Where’d you come from?”

“Thought I’d get some fresh air with you.”

“Out here?”

“Yeah.”

“There’s no fresh air, get back in the bar.”

“Why?”

I didn’t bother to explain to him what the nuance of mental frequency, lightness of step, vibrations of Eb minor, F# major, the intersection of reality and projections of reptiles. I couldn’t; it was like trying to reason with a mosquito intent on its own buzzing, blood thirst, talent to annoy; hence, for the same reason, feasible fabrications were hopelessly lost. He lacked imagination for anything besides the most mundane opportunity for attention and knew nothing of our gang’s subterranean habits, our well-guarded secrets, for obvious reasons of decorum and legality. He just hung around senselessly and thought we got drunk and talked eternity and girls and came by and everything was like an afternoon game of cricket. We were accustomed to this misconception from the requisite sellouts, but until this careless oversight, had managed to insulate ourselves from all information leaks and, with immaculate consistency, direct infiltration. He didn’t get it; the whole scene was as illusory as life, nothing more than smoke and mirrors for our desperate quest toward holy redemption.

And though we were hooked on dope, slaves to our own machinery, he was as an addict of the grey flannel American archetype. Big hero in suit mobilizes, molests his neighbor, gets dependable job, only to emerge unconsciously as an awful perpetrator, directly or indirectly, of the pillage of human spirit.

Whereas the whims of his greed become God; a savage tempest Ares of insatiable gluttony and sloth: automobiles, fashion, gizmos, high tech toys, magazines, interior design, mail order gifts, luxury items and plastic trinkets; to say nothing of the enslavement of starving saviors.

A termite inside of the twisted beams of warped culture, revered as the prime model of prosperity in bizarre rituals. While, in the eyes of the universe, he is merely an artifice, a façade, a microdot, a house of cards on a windy day; where is our mother goddess of temperance and truth? What could be more miserable than a shallow man,

ignorant of the sky, so fragile as to inflict death based upon fear of discovery? Then, only to settle for an ephemeral self so easily commoditized with paper currency?

And life is gone in an instant!

Inez, wearing a startling string bikini and reclined on a chaise lounge, clearly explained to me one afternoon,

“Baby, it’s all right here.”

Still, but back then, and at that time, we were only beginning to grasp these overt concerns, and were in fact, in many less obvious ways, just as guilty as all the rest. However, we had hope, and we were partially on our way to self-liberation from the hate, disease, and radical greed of our childhood playmates.

In fact, if nothing more, we were emerging Jeffersons and revolutionaries for the redemption of America’s lost soul. We campaigned, door to door, for future red dollar bills that say 50 expressions of love, glee \$’s.

Suffice to say, the gang and I were an exotic novelty for this weasel from his lifeless and conventional doom.

“Wait here.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’ll be back in a minute.”

I disappeared into the black curtain of this adobe and tin can stage. A cornucopia of hoodlums and junkies hovered about the steps of a cinderblock house. It had bars for windows like thick china ink that crossed against a warm glow, a naked glow, a savior glow from a soft yellow bulb. I wondered if it was like grandma glow, if they were cooking carrots with honey inside a kitchen of chocolate chip cookie goodness.

The hoods scuffed the dirt and pebbles with their worn shoes on the ground and pissed against the concrete wall of the shanty house. They grumbled in cigarette torn voices as their urine trickled snakily down the wall in meager stained waterfalls.

Hovering about, their eyes darted to stabbings, to soiled bodies, to toy trucks on Christmas; they drank beers and got high on scabby Mexican weed. Their pungent odors of sweat, ammonia, and smoke slapped me with uncalled for sensory brutality. Their hostile mosaic of leers declared self conceived, murder earned, and junk ingested positions of underworld prominence.

Fortunately, up until that night, the reviews regarding these low grade dealers and of their goods had been sterling. Though they doled out low-quality H, it was no secret, the prices were reasonable, and their service was relatively dependable. I, hitherto, had established a professional relationship- impersonal, relatively civilized, courteous, and consequently, predictable and secure.

A stocky guy with a lazy eye, stoic, in a tight wife beater, stood guard as usual outside an iron fortified door. He was the gatekeeper, junk guardian, and belfry; and as always, indifferent to my arrival. There were no smiles or pleasantries. This, as we all

knew, was a junkie hospice- inevitably one of the last illustrious stops on the unpaved, unmarked, ungodly express lane to our final mortal destination.

Nobody walked down this alleyway with a spring in their step or a twinkle in their eye. There was no glad-handing or I'll see you soon; only standard awful ways to exit this squirming snake pit of despair, either at the hands of one of these lethal creatures, or at the tip of a lethal spike of junk.

I gave the stocky guy ten bucks that he handed to another guy through a slot in the door and we all stood around nervously like a bunch of whacked out eighth graders at a post-apocalyptic school party, high on drugs and armed with switchblades in a bleak dancehall horror of hell.

"Who are these guys?" The weasel whispered in my ear.

"Oh God."

"What?"

"Get out of here."

"Why?"

He must have wandered up while I handed the money off. The snakes and junkies paused from their beers and smoke, tightened up, and assessed the tender prey that, by some lethal mishap, had just arrived. He was their ticket to a fat fix, the shiny Christmas present wrapped up with a red bow and holly that they'd itched, prayed, hoped, and dreamed of all night.

In the narrow blades of light cast from the kitchen, I noticed them look at each other deliberately; nod their heads toward the two of us. Their eyes twinkled with excitement for the first time in memory. One of them slowly, yet intentionally, circled around behind us and blocked our exit from the alley to the street.

The door opened a crack and the second guy handed the big guy the goods and he handed them to me. These guys weren't part of the ugly business taking shape around us.

Got three points for ten, as usual; never liked to get more than that. I figured one for tonight, one for tomorrow, and the third one for a special occasion. It seemed like a safe amount, moderate enough to keep any monkeys from crawling on my back and digging their creepy nails in. It suited me just fine considering my modest means and needs. I stuffed them into my sock.

Bam!

One of the bastards landed a cheap shot to my neck. It was little more than a glancing blow but I was thrown off balance as my foot slipped on some loose gravel and I crashed on the filthy, piss-covered ground. Nevertheless, I recovered quickly; much more quickly than the asshole anticipated, and from my fallen position I landed a rapid and lucky sidekick to his knee. I felt his knee buckle with a satisfying crack beneath the impact of my foot.

"Get away from me!" The weasel squealed.

I turned to see him struggling; two of the hoods had ganged up on him. Before I could get up, one guy had the weasel's arms locked behind his back; the other guy unloaded a mean punch to his face. I leaped up and gave the puncher a hard push; he stumbled, off balance, and slammed against the piss-covered wall.

The weasel, in the meantime, his nose streaming with blood, managed to squirm loose from the other hood. Nevertheless, the hood had clenched him just long enough to rip off the weasel's gleaming wristwatch before he fully broke loose.

"Go!" I yelled.

In a mind blear second we beat back to the avenue, back through the regular and ordinary corpses, the taco cart man, his patrons; none surprised to see us sprint by in sweat and terror.

Within a minute, heaving for breath, we landed back at Oscar's- a dive bar I discovered on one of my previous and numerous pill excursions and adopted as a main outpost and safe haven.

We caught our breath, safe inside the sanctuary of the bar, and assessed our injuries. This was a neutral zone. These Mexicans were our apathetic allies- bleary eyed and bombed out from years of depression and defeat; a lamented beer perpetually planted in front of them; undressing it if they could, gazing at it from a thousand miles away with vacant eyes.

I felt a sting on my elbow. I held it up to the feeble red light of the bar and saw I had a scrape; bits of gravel, drops of blood springing up, a flap of dead flesh. As I held up my arm, I could feel stiffness in my shoulder; I rotated it a few times; not bad, given the circumstances.

I checked my sock, the stashed Shangri-La; sure enough there were still the three points of H safely tucked against my ankle.

"Shit! My face!" the weasel wailed.

He ran his hand over his nose and looked in horror at the blood smear on his palm. His polo shirt, once perfect for a round of tennis at the country club; was scuffed with dirt and blood.

His eyes trembled with terror; his hands shook with childlike panic and fright. I took a close look at his face. He was fine.

"Relax," I said, "It's just a bloody nose. You got lucky. Get in the bathroom and clean yourself up. If anyone asks, tell them you got in a fight with your drunk frat brothers over a gay joke and it was all a big misunderstanding and now you're all best friends again."

"My watch! Do you have any idea how much that watch cost?!"

"Fuck you."

I sat down at the bar and ordered a beer. He went to the bathroom in a rush and I got my beer and paid the bartender. I could hear him behind me but didn't turn around to see him leave. Neither did any of the other patrons.

I enjoyed my beer very much that night and felt fortunate to have gotten off so easy. It really could've been much worse. And best of all, luckily, that was the last time I ever saw that worthless bastard of a weasel.

"Inez, wake up." I whispered into her ear. I loved the way she smelled at night, like raw earth in a meadow. She was asleep and tossed gently as though in a soft dream.

"HmMMMM?" She mumbled.

"I'm back"

"How was it?"

"Fine, I had a fine time."

"Good," she mumbled and turned over to fall back asleep. I took off my clothes and crawled beneath the covers. Bits of moonlight licked the wall, the wind rustled outside a little, and I spooned against her warm body and felt happy.

From the corner of my eye, I could see our reflection in the tarnished mirror on the ceiling. Inez loved that mirror, a big source of entertainment for her. And I studied that mirror, full of shadows, shafts of wayward light, and lumps of shapes, like a life sized painted portrait of us in our personal Tate.

And a strange masterpiece, indeed, from the mind of some schizophrenic artist; in the dim light we appeared as a curious lump of goodness; a blessed mound of blanket, skin touching, and long hair draped over a forever pillow on a perfect night.

I hummed.

The first time Inez and I did H together, she had done it occasionally long before me, was one warm night in the blur of our scattered memories. We were both suicidal over our first contemplations of art and death and to compensate we threw back cheap tequila and popped pills while absently gazing at the sea with no sense of understanding.

I was in a horrible state of despair; unable to unearth any meaning, any truth, never minding that the view of the Pacific was tremendous and the fresh fragrance of hills washed over me with a sense of erotic redemption.

And, of course, back then I was still so eager to impress her, as usual, and to prove that I was formidable, worthy, though I hardly tried and wasn't. Nevertheless, I did manage to play to perfection the wasted hopeless self-destructive bleak and waif-like artist that was very fashionable and attractive to a few of the fringe subcultures of freaked out women at the time.

She played it cool, indifferent, which was her style and duty; but invisibly she was subconsciously turned on by this alcoholic sandbox frenzy of foreplay. She demonstrated so in her slight yet encouraging body language, showed the soft of her wrist, indulged and participated fully in this transparent and twisted courting ritual like always, since she'd been beaten down and slapped silly by her old man.

I wouldn't stumble. The ocean grimaced. I wouldn't blow it. If she wanted, I would knock the shit out of her.

Our climatic near final performance!

Terrifying suspense! Death defying high wire act over crocodile pit! Mysterioso side show star! The Octopus Sisters, and they juggle!

“It doesn’t mean a fucking thing,” I mumbled.

We were in poor form.

“Baby, it’s useless, let’s throw ourselves from the cliffs in a final performance of dignity and glory, Hari Kari style, the world won’t crucify us anymore.”

We locked mouths in an awful, dripping, and decadent kiss; rubbed our lips and entwined our tongues all over with knots of slobber. We were like slobber animals and had never been so pornographically self-indulgent in our lives; and quickly, without denial, we looked back upon that night with a strange sense of disconnection, humiliation, and shame.

Inez later said,

“Honey, it was a terrible act of blind ignorance. Don’t be so hard on yourself. Don’t be hard on me. Unbeknownst to us we were slaves, animals, amateur thespians re-enacting every stereotype imbedded and fed to us throughout our unconscious lives of socialization. You realize TV and the media are responsible for this act of perversion? Do you realize that TV and the media are more responsible for your upbringing than your own mother? Send your television a mother’s day card next May. Don’t be sad, but we were so driven by a bleak and weary black conception of alienated romance that we hovered in oblivion rather than cherish the pleasure of the sea and the raw delicacy of our kiss. Someone in Hollywood is making a million dollars to drive us all to insanity and death, to inspire mobs of teenagers to fling themselves off a cliff. They don’t mind. And they’ve attempted to kill me. Thank God we’re awake. You know better now, right?”

“What about the drugs?”

“The drugs! What’s the matter with you? The one and only saving grace in your life from the world’s most brutal acts of terrorism and assault on your spirit and they are the first you persecute? Ugh, spare me the putrid reaction formation! There’s nothing to absolve! The drugs are innocent. Can you see that? There was no negligence on their part. They just amplified and clarified the detail normally invisible to you like a radio microscope on this awful predicament of fascist socialization that you’re flailing in. In fact, if anything, we owe the drugs our deepest expressions of gratitude. They are the lifeguards of our souls. What do you suggest?”

“I’d be willing to build my drugs an alter in the center of this shit caked, rat infested apartment, complete with candles, candies, incense, and devotional prayers extracted from portions of poetry books and songs written for harmonium. I’d also be willing to dedicate at least one day a week in service to the pantheon of black market dope that we partake in with unshakeable devotion.”

“Yes,” ordained Inez.

But, on that night, we were still lost in the collective American narcosis, the hitherto undiagnosed pathology of normalcy that governed our actions and thought processes in our own particular and oblivious subconscious.

“Honey, we’ve come this far,” I struggled for the words through the haze of my intoxication, “How about some H like we’ve always talked about and end it all.”

Inez’s eyes, heavy beneath the gravity of her high, lit up like the thinnest sliver of a bright crescent moon. And because her eyelids hung so low, she tilted her chin up and looked at me, like two fireflies peering up from deep inside an infinite bell jar.

“Baby, for once you couldn’t be more right, it’s the perfect conclusion at this time, at this desperate stage in the narrative, this doomed chess match. We’ll go down in a giant conflagration, a spectacular blaze of glory far more tragic and dramatic than any space shuttle explosion in the sky. We’ll make history as the greatest lovers of all time and live on in the myths of those akin to Pele, for those on the Hawaiian Islands, and of those akin to Atlas, for all familiar with the Greeks.”

“When?”

“Now.”

We gazed into each other as statically as two bronze statues; Henry Moore.

“Let’s do it.”

“Yes.”

But the pills and booze left us paralyzed, immobilized, a couple of Novocain angels cemented in place into a sidewalk to nowhere. The drugs severed our thoughts, spirits, neurons, and intentions into disconnected fragments, an alarming pattern of perceptions like seventies wallpaper. We could see every idea, and every after thought, its consideration, and every subsequent action and the resulting contemplation and the way it exploded hence impact the world in accordance with the universe and chaos theory but for now, every last micro snippet was mutually exclusive. The will to connect any one of them seemed God like, impossible, and irrelevant.

In the meantime, fog began to mist in around us and we leaned into each other for warmth and assurance. We watched the big Pacific sky with all its hollow sounds and mysterious speakeasies rumbling to us in its unfathomable language. The black and treacherous waters swirled like midnight Niagras with personal pockets of death suggestively calling us forth, magnetic Siren’s melodies, to emulate the swan, leap forth, and dive in. Hands held; we’d soar weightless through the sky with wings, velvet feathers, for eternity.

Furthermore, the air, rich and ionized from the froth of the rabid waves, took us away even further, all natural laughing gas, and I began to feel an itch of Neptune, my legs merged into one and swelled up into the scaly, slimy, thick, grotesque tail of a mermaid.

These thoughts evolved to blackness; we passed out in each other’s arms and by the time I returned to consciousness the sun was painting it’s first and foremost soft strokes of blond and blue rays onto the fabric of the dawn. In spite of the majesty, my body gurgled like a cesspool of toxic waste. The pills and whiskey left me with a mean effect, a terrible morning after; I always paid in spades with pain for any earthly pleasures or calm I enjoyed on high interest credit courtesy of last night’s tab.

My mouth felt aspirated, like I was chewing on a cotton rag unearthed from Mojave dirt. The inside of my lips had a tingly metallic feeling and it tasted rotten like a rattlesnake crawled in there, curled up, and died.

I checked to make sure Inez was still breathing.

She was.

A fit, middle-aged man, touches of gray at his temples, in crisp new active wear and his shaggy dog with tongue drooping out, briskly jogged by. He noticed Inez and me, seemed unconcerned, unthreatened, no knife murderers here, no man rapists, and the dog bounced up for a second, sniffed my legs, my mermaid tail, with a wink and a big smile, and darted off quickly to resume its morning joy.

“Dog; man’s best friend,” I thought, “unconditional love bought and owned.”

The top of the sun was just starting to bubble up and burn through the horizon and high up you could still see some of the night’s glittering stars.

I had been meaning to ask Inez, “Why do bubbles go up, not down?”

The stars shimmied in place one last time before the big prudish sun, the mother bubble, hustled them out. It couldn’t be much past 5:00 in the morning, probably not too late to catch the last of the dope dealers if we hurried.

“Inez, wake up.”

I shook her gently.

“Oh,” she groaned.

Her face sunk. She was in no shape to lead a dawn patrol hunt for heroin. We would have to wait.

“Come on baby,” I said, “I’ll drive us home.”

At that time, because Inez had just been cut off from her parent’s lucrative financial support due to her very loud recent public renunciation of Christ at her cousin’s first communion, she temporarily worked weekday afternoons at Aardvarks, a trendy overpriced thrift store.

One of her numerous former lovers managed the store and quickly gave her the job in hopes of another easy lay.

“This is the Warsaw ghetto for every last trust fund Atari playing loser in the city,” she confessed.

And sure enough, when I dropped in to say hello, on any given occasion, the place was over run by a bunch of conceited, self indulgent, awful, tight jeaned hipsters who casually commented,

“I’ve already got one, but way better.”

These guys were irreconcilably lost, past the expiration date, suckers with intentionally mat print thoughts, kept awake at night snorting coke, eating ice cream, watching TV- baggy eyes with eyeliner, punk rock; acted like phony millionaires, drank martinis, artificial rebels of nothing more than themselves.

However, ironically, most of the girls within the scene were unbearably delicious, an adorable feast of doe eyes, red lips, and pale flesh. And in spite of their material addictions, general ignorance, and oblivion to the plight of themselves or anyone besides their dysfunctional inner child or inner circle of maladjusted friends, they smiled nicely and were rosy cheeked and tender; numerous blonds in the scene, wonderful. They snapped up and modeled various raggedy clothes with rehearsed levels of indifference, arrogance, and calculated disdain.

“That looks nice.” I said to one.

“Humph!” She stomped off.

“Oh,” I thought.

So Inez dutifully hung rags for minimum wage and I, love struck, irrevocably drunk on her immaculate brilliance, style, and droopy disaffected sway, submitted wholly.

“Inez, what jacket should I get for tonight?”

“You’re pathetic.”

“I know; it’s futility.”

“So long as you know.”

I followed her to the coat rack clustered with men’s jackets. Some of them smelled like smoke, others like mothballs, some made of velvet, some with holes, some with stains, some with faded labels; I wondered who had worn the red one, who in India with nimble fingers had sewn this paisley one.

She suggested a fine brown corduroy jacket with yellow stitching and pockets on the front. I tried it on.

“Baby, my God, you actually look fine. This jacket- did you see how we were drawn to it; immediately in a strange magnetic manner and how it fits so well, no tailoring necessary; perhaps it belonged to a long lost uncle, unborn son, or wandering doppelganger. Truly, and in spite of your unimpressive physique, your overly brooding disposition, it evokes a certain dignity and authority, some admirable quality in you that hither to this precise moment has spent unknown eons of time buried, decayed, atrophied in a dripping cellar from within. This is surely a sign from the spirits of tailors past, present, and future that you are the rightful heir and proper successor for the honor of this garment. Here, wear it with pride, it belongs to you; walk out with ownership.”

She pulled a scissors from her back pocket and quickly cut a big yellow tag off the jacket and pushed me in the direction of the door.

“Go on.”

I walked past the cash register, through the doors, and to the home free outside without looking back, free and clean; and how noble a feeling to be outdoors, the mayhem of the day scrambling everywhere and no eyes on you or shouts for your arrest.

Inside a convenience store I caught a glimpse of a stack of porn magazines piled up on a wooden rack, a big titted black mama on one cover; I beheld the amazing shelves of colorful snacks and beverages, limitless candy choices, peanuts, gum, souvenirs.

I bought a pack of cigarettes, American Spirits, blue pack, exited the store, lit a cigarette, lingered, and admired myself in the dim reflection of a liquor store window.

Depending on how I focused my eyes, I could see either myself standing tall in the spring of my life, or countless cases of Milwaukee's Best stacked on display for sale.

Nice, a warm jacket for the snow-less winter, when rain and gloom and fog haze loom over brick storefronts like old corner coin shops, Cheap Charlie's stationary and beauty care, or Cliff's pawn shop anyway, and on many occasions I've sold personal effects and treasures for nothing to pay the rent, made phone calls out front, and that shop has been held up at gunpoint more times than an old west stage coach- Jessie James fugitives, Billy the Kid runaways, Robert Stroud mental patients gone AWOL.

I waited for Inez across the street with my new jacket, sat on the dusty curb, smoked another cigarette, hunched in the gutter, said to no one in particular,

“God, did you see it? It's incredible. It has gone in and never coming out...”

Once, I patronized Aardvarks on my own accord. This time bought a tie, a striped one, for a bachelor's party, a shotgun wedding where I took progressive 35 millimeter photos, in black and white, featuring tomatoes; a good time with smoke, and drink, and advanced post modern sophisticated vibe.

The girl behind the counter at the cash register shrugged her shoulders and uncomfortably said, “I heard Inez moved to San Francisco...”

But that was another life and still as for that day, incredibly, Inez made it to work on time by early afternoon. She threw back five aspirins, put on big white-framed sunglasses, drank a thick brew of mud coffee, and walked out the door without a complaint, a word, or even so much as a mutter regarding pounding of head elucidations.

She was a rare combination of self entitled princess and workhorse; a volatile combination, like a wild stallion, yet strangely emblematic of some kind of prophetic brilliance and strength. Wow.

I prayed for death; I prayed five hundred thousand ‘Hail Mary's’ and ‘Our Father's;’ I hosanna cursed the sunlight that impaled me through the cracks in the blinds,

“Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee, have mercy upon me o’ of toxic veins, blinded gaze, and cum rage.”

The phone rang across the room and sent pain ripples through my brain. That phone may as well have been in China and I stared at it from across the Pacific.

As it rang, it looked like a trembling monster, a Frankenstein brought to life to inflict suffering upon me, and I internally debated in countless ways how I could obliterate it; if I could, in a million years, crawl over there and unleash upon it; bludgeoned, shotgun, ripped apart by teeth. Any number of phone deaths seemed appropriate and felt gratifying to contemplate. I pulled the covers over my head and groaned. Never, not in a million years.

The answering machine beeped. It was Inez.

“Asshole, I’ve got it lined up. Pick me up at precisely 10:05 pm outside this shithole farce of a retail outlet and we’ll get it done.”

I took some blues, sank in the ether, lay back, and begged for mercy.

“Goodnight moon...”

It was dark by the time I woke up. My room was as stuffy and stale as the air inside a pair of dirty gym socks left in a high school locker for the summer.

I tugged on my window. It was jammed as usual. But after a few deliberate jerks it let loose and abruptly slid up. I lost my balance and banged my thigh against the window ledge.

Opening the window didn’t provide much relief. It was a heavy, stagnant, and soup hot night, the hottest in memory. The neighbor’s gardenia bush was in full bloom and thick plumes of its sexual perfume wafted into my room. I was aloft in clouds of ambrosia.

“Nectar of the Goddess,” I thought.

I threw my jeans on, grabbed twenty bucks from my underwear drawer, jumped in the car and drove to Aardvarks. Traffic was light, I ran a stop sign for fun, made an illegal u-turn, and arrived punctually, as instructed.

Inez coolly waited on the corner; the streetlights glanced off her face with light blows: yellow, red, and green. She was so damn timeless, like Audrey Hepburn, and I can’t believe she hadn’t made the cover of Life Magazine yet.

I screeched up in front of her, jumped out, whistled, opened the passenger door, she jumped in. I safely closed the door, fixed my hair, darted around the front, dug the headlights that washed over my jeans, slid over on top of the hood for effect, and then seamlessly opened my door, glided back in the driver’s seat, cranked the car in gear, and hit the gas.

“Isn’t it great Inez?” I searched the dial for some decent oldies, “It’s as if we’re in Georgia where the air is as thick as molasses and we can pluck peaches from the trees and make love beneath their yearning branches. Listen to me hummmmmmm!”

“Turn here...”

I wheeled the car around the corner, cut off a pedestrian bum with shopping cart stacked full of blankets and weighed down with a city of salvaged bottles. He cursed,

“Son of a Beeeach!!!”

But, truly, it was a well executed and regulation safe crazy maneuver and quite guileful considering Inez’s last second bullet point instruction while she squinted upwards through the windshield to decipher and read the hidden codes of street signs. I felt like a great hero of the Monaco cliff side raceway night in the midst of a life like game of Pole Position. I found an oldies station, Roy Orbison and his angelic falsetto.

“...I can't help it, I can't help it, if I cry

I remember that you said goodbye

It's too bad that all these things
Can only happen in my dreams
Only in dreams
In beautiful dreams..."

"Isn't it tremendous, Inez?"

"Turn left!"

I screeched and executed it; another expert bonus point Spy Hunter maneuver. Three and a half to four more hairpin turns later she yelled,

"That's it! This is it! Stop! Park!"

She pointed at a dim space in front of a spooky, unlit, wig shop. I calmly rolled us in.

"What's with all the freaky hairstyles and faceless mannequin heads?"

I knew this street. We were downtown. There was nothing exotic about this, no sense of Bangkok, except for the fact that most of the businesses were all closed and eerily dark. All the frenetic madness of the day between delivering packages and rushing to meetings and "nice to meet you," and "done and done" and feeling up the long luscious thighs of sweet, young, strawberry hair, secretary beneath the desk.

It was all on temporary hiatus, like birds gone with wings hunched in trees; another nine hours before it repeated itself exactly, precisely, except for certain non-specific, superficial, and token details, all over again.

This is the daytime playground for the home team of the American dream; doing its part to forge the great way of life promoted in magazines and their collective mainstream fantasies. All the while the world and lovers of the world become collateral damage, suffer, and cry out, plot acts of quite revolution and cataclysmic non-violence.

Still, the monolithic fools have all forsaken their primate truths; fallen by self-inflicted wounds, condemned to cubicle prison, mind obliteration, soul execution, and violent death by identical means in the mistaken name of civilization.

Nevertheless, and I suggested this to Inez, I thought we should model sports jerseys with logos of different firms and corporations with our favorite CEO's name and salary plastered on the back.

"I'd rather wear a shirt with an owl, panda bear, or horse," she gently replied.

It was quiet around there, even for a weeknight, and it surprised me that Inez didn't elect for a more threatening street, alley, or neighborhood; somewhere with more daring filth and thrill.

"We can get the H here? Isn't it rather safe?"

"Baby, that's right. This is downtown where the heaviest drugs and corruptions of the world transpire. The white color façade is nothing more than a thin veneer to the giant production of hate fucks, extreme perversion, kinky positions, back stabs, and the hardest, raunchiest drugs in the city.

And don't be surprised. All kinds of miracles and corruptions happen anywhere in the universe on an anytime basis. And while we're on the subject, what do you think?"

"About what?"

"How did you like the mischievous prank of me purposely disorienting you? Tossing you senselessly around like a ball of twine between the mittens of a kitten. Back and forth, threading various forsaken spins, twists, rights and lefts, roundabouts, donuts, three point turns, just to get us no further than simply 8 blocks from our original point of departure? We could have walked! What does that tell you about yourself and the universe?"

"It's all scribbled down in chicken scratches by the indecipherable scribe of perfect inscriptions."

"Yes!"

She casually walked up to a guy lingering by a mailbox. He had a wild head of hair, nappy and dirty, and his eyes sunk deep into their sockets of his skull like a radical anorexic or holocaust victim.

"Career junky," I thought.

His oily skin glistened like a glow in the dark mask saturated with the urban blaze of headlights, crimson neon, traffic lights, and the soft radiance of a street lamp nearby.

Another burnt out old hippie, arrived years ago on bus or by hitchhike, by motorcycle pawned for necessities, by forged check; expected great mythical joys and found street bruises, dark realities, archangels, bad dope; a good old boy from Alabama or Tennessee, stubborn, persistent, in denial, still in search of some long forgotten hippy dream though now filtered through a weird and cloudy sort of junk haze, ooze in the mind; corrupted.

"You carrying?" I asked.

"You carrying?" He mimicked me in a nasally, smoke wrecked voice, and then cackled the famous stoned hippy cackle, "Hee, Hee."

"What do we get for twenty?" Inez cut in.

"Depends on what I give you," He philosophically replied, "Maybe I'll give you nothing for twenty."

"Interesting deal," I said.

"Maybe I'll give you a hundred for twenty," he cocked his head to the side in that streetwise wise guy gesture meant to intimidate and impress, "Depends on what I give you, don't it?"

"Not really," Inez said.

"Are you a cop?" He smirked.

The oldest one in the book, why do they always have to ask that; like they've seen too many Miami Vice episodes and think that they're some kind of big time important kingpin of a lethal drug cartel and prostitution racket that supplies all of the dope and sex

to every metropolis on every coast on the planet; the feds claw at themselves every second, endlessly, fiendishly itching for a chance to make this bust and take him out.

Is it simply some sort of formality, a requirement written into the general genial codes of useless hippie runaway lore; every dope dealer on the street, from trees to snow, once a woeful protégé, mentored by some runaway or another, some hippie, sometimes ex con, sometimes craggy old junky sucking candies on their last toothpick legs of demise.

And still you hear the same old, recycled, senseless conversations on any given basis in the soup kitchen lines at the church or waiting for oatmeal, at the social services, or at the post office general delivery while anticipating forever a welfare check,

“Ain’t no joke, you get a bag of chips and some chicken and it’ll last you all week, brother, provided you don’t walk too much and sweat it all out, walk around, and worry about your checks, all that worrying costs you energy, wasting all your energy like that.”

“See, I’ve got a disability and an incapability of performing duties; the crazy impossible mystery duties required of those like myself already pre-qualified to receive general assistance; crazy sons of bitches have me waiting in line from five a.m. to closing time; us motherfuckers all trapped for hours on end, a number to be called, staring at that damn number sign with red electronic numbers with beat down trodden eyes; men staring at their shoes, one after another, and then the lady scold me for not having my identification which I couldn’t pick up from the DMV because I have no money and because of my disability. And now my pills are gone, my blood pressure medicines has run out, my blood pressure is high, my serotonin is low, I need to take the bus to general to speak with doctors there which will take all afternoon, and I have yet to move one inch in this god damn line.”

And these bottom tier purveyors of junk, at some miscellaneous point, probably erroneously, amongst ramblings and dope induced rants, all collectively absorb this idea that if you ask an undercover cop if he is in fact a cop, then he is legally bound and compelled to say so. Never mind that it’s the policeman’s word against the word of some junk fiend in a court room overflowing with mired faces and already, by design, cards stacked against you for countless reasons; supposedly, under such specific circumstances, with the right attorney and adequate payouts, this type of arrest would technically be nullified and dismissed due to legal issues of entrapment.

Or, once arrested, the court appointed public defender, Benedict Arnold style, well versed in shallow legalese, deliberately neglects blatant grounds for acquittal, another accomplice in the insurgency against justices fastidiously scribed on yellow parchment with feather fountain pen, long ago years away in candle lit think tanks of log.

Possibly, of course, the system is a thinly veiled Nazi eugenics machine designed to sweep up the whacked out, the scum, the subversive, the losers, the poets, the niggers, the geniuses, the beaners, the saviors, the bitches, the lovers, the prophets, the pimps, the philosophers, the trash, and every other disenfranchised alienated lost soul and hopeful authentic angel saint dissident of bow down compliant society into various penitentiaries and euphemistically named torture chambers.

“No man, it couldn’t be further from the case. I hate cops,” I said.

“Me too,” Inez chimed in.

“Me, too,” He said.

“Well, it looks like we’re all in agreement,” I said.

He grinned with decayed teeth and his jaundiced eyes shined, though obscured as if through smog haze, sudden swath of diesel exhaust. He appeared satisfied, full of junky pride, at having fulfilled this tiny and tacky bit of formality; but make no bones, was secretly giddy about the impending twenty dollars.

He could feel his fingers tingle and was ready to proceed with the main event, the transaction of kicks wrapped in bits of plastic.

He looked both ways, ostensibly for cops, most likely for dramatic flair; he had a Macbethian style to his drug deal, hunched his shoulders, gave hints of Shakespeare, profound subtext, and shiftily uncovered a tobacco tin from his breast pocket.

The tin was an old Bull Durham tin, an artifact from prickly bygone passages of time. Carried along boxcar treks, campfire sleeps; home to herbs, trinkets, Indian arrowheads, psychedelic sundry. It was as nearly as decayed as his teeth, dented, chipped, and looked like it had been dredged up from sludge of undersea eons ago.

“I’m feeling generous; you can have four points for twenty.”

Inez scoffed, “Don’t even try it. Ten points for twenty would be a rip off with this impotent Mexican schwag you’re peddling, let alone four.”

“Au contraire, my sweet sister,” he confided, “This delicacy comes straight from Nepal.”

“Prove it,” Inez insisted.

He rubbed an Om tattoo on his wrist, gave a suspicious glance around the streets, down nearby alley, inside paranoia’s; and then opened the ancient tin with grimy, bony hands. I felt emphatic, like a kid in the presence of a great magician; keen with enthusiasm and curiosity of the secret concealed inside the great and mysterious Felix-the-Cat box.

The inside of the tin looked golden beneath the ambient street light and was loosely packed with about twenty pellets of some kind of dark goop tightly wrapped in thin plastic bits ripped from a grocery bag fluttering in the wind and caught in the gutter one afternoon; a plastic bag caught his eye, he leaped up to chase it, seized it with scary fingers, and crumpled it in his pocket for later use.

“Bullshit, this is the same old Mexican brown everyone else is pawning. We’ll be lucky if it doesn’t kill us. There’s more glass in it than a beer bottle. Six points for twenty or we walk.”

He hesitated, feigned disdain, “I have to survive too, you know.”

“Save the drama for your mama.”

Always negotiations; negotiations for goods, for prayers, for trades, for heavenly credits, for self esteem, for health, for affection; we were three kids on the playground of Chutes and Ladders in a Candyland of abundance, a pitiful congregation. He should just

soap the prices in on a wig shop window, set up a creaky stool and TV tray, hours midnight to 4 am, all sales final, no returns.

Off to the corner, out of sight, in one tiny pie slice of free sprawling America, we stood a shame to our parents, a shame to our country, heroes to ourselves; three child-pure angels bartered heroin like sticks of chewing gum for marbles.

I gazed up at the dizzying perspective of a monolithic building of commerce (symbol of prosperity) and wondered what we looked like from the tippy-top tip of the edge. A flag pole solemnly jutted out flagless and sullenly skyward; a gargoyle crawled out like an iguana and perched himself in his gnarled and reptilian way, legs hunched up to his bony chest, eyes sparkling, dark, beady, secretly observing us at a terror-fall below.

We were a cluster of three fleas on the crossroads concrete grid and black asphalt; embellished by a late night car, easing downtown, its oddly suspicious motions and stops smoothed by the altitude and distance.

Street lamps lined the avenues like glamour Broadway light bulbs that border a star's backstage mirror. She gazes at herself with adoration, thick makeup caked in layers on her hidden and lost face.

I was the gargoyle; wind whipped my leather skin and flapped through my steely nostrils, rushed in my ears in hisses and whistles, I registered small details like heart pulse, shuffle in step, squeak in voice.

The city twinkled from soft lights of warm, well adorned, apartments and resonated in the same ethereal sense as listening to the sea through the opening of a shell.

Apartments where couples embodied happiness and make love, drink wine while listening to the radio, write prose and letters to far away saintly affiliates sequestered in converted basement bedrooms.

Bars with late night, softer, mellower music, and drunken sullen eyes meet with lonely sad face eyes and subsequent communion in a mass of broken promises, leavened bread, sighing and crying, prie-dieu sore knees and wide mouth, awkward hymns, entangles in clumsy scripture.

I could see the end of the wide-open land up there with all its dark grim mystery, its wickedness, its lamb like softness. And the moon washes over mesas and plains; over everything revealing the precise blueprint to all of sorrowful eternity; splashing silver slaps that spill across lakes and slide off the edge of mountain swoops of the world crashing like waterfall into the swirling and unknowing void; a torrential river of mercury silver buoyant moonlight crashing into its own Iguazu, emptying into eternity and the tide pulling me in with resolute gravity to its source.

On top of the building, gravel crunched beneath my light gargoyle steps as I eagerly and shiftily shuffled from one vantage point to the next, always pull my legs in tight; climbing past exhaust vents, giant whooshes of fan blades, radio antenna with blinking red beacon on its tip, and water tower Greenpoint silhouettes to discover the most remarkable and poignant earth eternity view.

“Oh my, yes, angular and urban, Hopper would be delighted, but let's try over there and see if we can manage a fully panoramic experience of the limitless essence of city,

sea, and the distant mountains off to the foreboding east in all their grim Donner party perils, and ominous granite majesty.”

Settling on one vista, one concrete ledge, a watchtower gargoyle with frog-like bony arms gripping scaly legs; perched impossibly close to the dizzying edge and contemplating deep and sorrowful existential self confessions in the safety of high altitude anonymity; then blow a kiss forever with no world, no tomorrow, no last Tuesday, just peaceful bone chilling serenity.

“I’ll give you five points, but that’s it,” the dealer said.

“Fine, you kike, we’ll take it,” Inez disgruntling agreed and handed him the twenty.

“Kabbalah,” he said.

He careful folded the bill and placed it deep in his front pocket, gingerly counted five balls of the black goop with his sepulcher fingertips, and dropped them, one at a time in Inez’s soft palm.

“One, two, three, four, five,” He slowly and fastidiously counted.

She let the points spill in her hand like ball bearings; then gripped them tight.

“So I take the Eucharist.”

“Body of Christ,” the junky chimed in.

The junky awkwardly stood there, I laughed uneasily.

“Get out of here!” Inez screamed at the junky.

The junky smiled graciously, “a pleasure,” gave a slight affirmative nod of his head, turned, and shuffled away down the sidewalk.

I was glad to be done with that nasty business.

“Now what?”

Inez bent down, lifted up my jean leg, and shoved the points deep into my sock.

“Huh?”

“It’s the best place baby, guaranteed. Just no hopscotch like I know you do until we get the shit home.”

Time dissolved.

The drive home all vague, except for a brief vision of white light between lanes melding into the front fender, the convergence of a million drifting roads into a point of singularity, new quantum phenomena; cars, fresh off the assembly line full of statistics without fate, without faces, the living widgets, the bit roles, the background extras; who, like those in the grocery store, seen once, intersect, meet at the frozen food, green beans, carrots, brussel sprouts, brush past, smell of perfume, disappear.

Then the filthy flophouse, a ghetto of white trash neglect, stains on the ceiling, more synthetic furniture; cushioned wet bar, another run down artifact of the previous generation of renters, tended by me, with elegance, on occasion. I mix a mean martini with pizzazz and a signature flash of style.

In this cheap slum apartment, post epoch swingers orgy collective, we finally did it, for good. We started by crushing pills of Valium and aligned the tiny blue powder hills into precise rails on the stained wood of my scavenged coffee table, found long ago abandoned on a numb sidewalk.

Inez turned on the stereo, flipped across the stations; Rap, R&B, dance, Klezmer, Wurlitzer, Calypso, and then settled on some classic Jazz.

I hunched over the lines with an appropriated fast food striped straw jammed in my nostril and snorted loudly.

“Quiet man, have some decorum, some class, you sound like a barnyard swine, a fiend.”

I was radically relaxed, high, and easily ignored the nasty ornaments of her vast and formidable core of criticism.

She joined in, bowed down low, hunched over the blue zebra striped table, and took her share, delicately placing the fragmented soda straw to her famous nose and inhaled elegantly, head bowed back, eyelids drooped like old Eor eyes, and sunk deep into the cloud of the soft couch.

“Magic Castles,” she said.

A moment later, in slow movements, no particular rush, cautious yet bumpy use of appendages, she unfurled a small bag from her shirt pocket, a little cellophane bag that comes on a pack of cigarettes, a surprise excavation, and I could see telltale hints of green.

She pulled out a pack of Zig-Zags, the orange pack, laid out two papers that sat on the table like little v-shaped receptacles of glee, and crumpled up chunks of syrupy herb into small, tea leaf sized bits that she gingerly sprinkled into the papers.

I felt as though I were in the presence of an ancient master, the Sen No Rikyu of a formal green ganja tea ceremony. She then took a cigarette and rolled it between her fingers until little drips of tobacco fell on top of the tiny green mounds like clusters of crumbly November leaves. All of this in reverent silence and I felt like a sheepish apprentice, reticent, mental scribe to my personal Rumi.

Inez concentrated, focused, somehow sullen and martyred, a great and profound artisan of saintly peace. She ripped a small rectangle from the pack of Zig-Zags and fashioned an expert filter that she placed in the tip of the creation.

She picked it up gracefully and rubbed it between her thumbs and forefingers and incredibly, like a great magician, a swift slight of hand, the form had taken shape. She licked the edge with the tender pink tip of her tongue, sealed it, and the masterpiece was done.

An Amsterdam style joint, long and conical, the tobacco introduced to provide a spicy flavor and smooth quality, and then finished off with the homemade filter, to give it sturdy form and eliminate the nuisance of roach.

All of this, of course, dates back to the carefree epoch of abundance; of monumental stockpiles of fresh herb I inherited courtesy of a low-key small time heist in the northern hills.

Inez heard about a guerilla hippy crop, no hells angel violent booby traps or gun wielding guards, just blind hippy Karmic faith to protect precious plants, and also crystals dangled on nearby branches infused with moon power and Wiccan spells to ward off invaders; and in the few days preceding harvest, we hiked into the majestic garden paradise and with quiet coordination, clipped, carefully selected, and helped ourselves to a mouse sized share of glorious bounty.

Nothing greedy, just a modest sample to fill our humble paper sacks with stocky stalks of pungent, skanky reeking skunk, and its potent ooze percolating up in translucent drops stuck to my fingers like pine sap.

A mountain for us and in relation to the giant quantities of overflowing blessed profusion, a grain of sand pittance; and we undressed and ran through it like butterflies in Spring, letting the thick leaves and potent buds slap and spank our raw bodices.

Then, in safety and innocence of other hill, to lie upon backs beneath sun on soft blanket in brown grass, make tender nature love, and subsequent infusion- all the precious sap to soak into us, marinate our human capsules and nourish our souls; then off to fairyland reveries.

I laid the joint on my lips and drew in deeply and my lungs expanded with a sudden swash of locomotive smoke, Burlington Northern plumes and Nebraska plains Indian's signals, held in it tight like submerged underwater and gaseous sacrament, then emphatic exhalation; coal dense clouds of cumulus cloud puffs that huffed over great vistas and mountain peaks, levitated above tender fragrant tall tops of choke cherry and birch.

And fortunately, thanks to the diazepam valium which mitigated the usual freak outs and tea paranoia's that I so often suffer from, stabbing jolts of mortality and sullen dark thoughts of serial killers, failures, bleeding insecurities; I felt quite happy, like a soft cheeked train conductor, free of worries, and imbibed with a rare sense of home.

"Inez, how is your choo choo train?"

"Very nice baby, thank you, very nice, quite a scenic journey."

I reached down my leg, opened my sock, and felt for the pellets; they had dug into my skin and clung to it like five dark vampire ticks sucking out angel juice from my ankle.

So this is the shit, the low-grade Mexican tar, the sunshine opium blue red purple poppy melted down, cooked out, brewed up and condensed into junk ready tic tac mint sized black pellet, black market, black dealer, black voodoo sketchy heroin bundles.

I split one of the packets open and held it up to my nose. It had the vibration and scent of deep jungle bruja magic. The texture felt old, dried out, like dusty engine grease rolled up into tiny balls. Sure enough I had never slipped under the mythic dark spell before, and for all I knew, this was, as I imagined it, my final calamity,

"Young Poet Found Dead Injecting Motor Oil."

Inez lifted an eyelid, took a sojourn from her train trip, cosmic tour bus, sensed I was up to something; turned her owl eyes to me, and noticed that I had the shit exposed.

“What do you think?”

“Can we get needles?”

“Maybe the pharmacy...”

“I think we can, I’ve seen them.”

“I don’t think so, you need a prescription.”

“For needles?”

“Yes.”

“We used to have a whole box of needles in my garage, my brother showed me...”

“What? Whose were they?”

“I don’t know.”

“So?”

“I don’t know, somebody’s.”

“Let’s call the pharmacy.”

“Good idea, ‘Hi, just calling to ask, how are you, do you have any needles?’”

“Diabetics use them.”

“Maybe we could steal them.”

“There we go.”

“They’re usually behind the counter.”

“Is there a needle exchange open?”

“Doubt it.”

“How many hits do we have?”

“Five.”

“That’s good.”

“Let’s snort it.”

“Huh? It’s tar.”

“Yeah, mix it in water and snort it. It’s only tar and water, it’s water, the human body is mostly made of water; 60 percent water.”

“HmMMM.”

“Well?”

“I don’t know.”

“Try it.”

Later on, I bumped into an old pal, the resident street junk authority and consultant of the gang, taken it on many occasions and was incomparably familiar with different methods of use, could elucidate on it for hours; and I told him the whole story, every detail, every nuance; he was engaged and curious and inquisitive about all things junk, and I described to him the sequence of events from that night and the strange build up to Inez and

I snorting the watered down soup-like mixture of black tar bouillon.

“Oh man, that’s the harshest way, it’s a good way, sometimes takes a minute, but very effective, gets to the blood stream, subsequent brain, but listen cat, it hurts, but I don’t need to tell you that, you know that already now, first hand; should’ve called me, I would’ve showed you how.”

I went to the kitchen and grabbed a spoon, a stainless steal, utilitarian, spoon that I had swiped from one of various ordinary cafeterias on one of numerous occasions that had unknowingly, yet generously, over time, furnished my entire cutlery set.

I brought the spoon to Inez and she polished it with her shirt, placed a ball of tar in it, and then instructed me to return to the kitchen with a cup of water.

I walked over to the filthy sink, grabbed a relatively clean looking cup, and filled it with a small pond of tap water. I returned to Inez and, with surgical precision, she allowed some of the pond to drip into the spoon.

The H looked like a waterlogged, soaked, rabbit turd that had haphazardly tumbled into a breakfast cereal spoon sized stainless steal kiddie pool. Inez produced a cigarette lighter, her favorite one, a vintage fifties big clear Zippo type lighter with tiny dice submerged and encased within the transparent base of lighter fluid.

“Lucky seven, baby.”

She flicked it, fire appeared, and then held it beneath the spoon.

“The click fire machine,” I mumbled, “Da Ho Chi.”

The flame, directed to the underbelly of the spoon, was like a sorcerer’s fire; it danced occult blue, orange, peach, violet, red. I stared at the scene transfixed; hypnotic bubbles materialized and fizzled like muddy champagne; thick and heavy, no color quite like it except for the same dark tones that you find to some extent in every smoky medieval portrayal of Christ, in any gloomy wing of a stale museum on a rainy day, sometimes the dark, spooky frame itself, or in soot soaked paintings in a clammy mildew filled catholic church.

The lighter illuminated Inez’s face, colored her skin in supernatural, phantasmagoric hues, and she stared at it with laser precise focus and intensity, timing it like a master artisan, sensing the exact moment to withdraw the fire, a ninja; her eyes showed Russian acrobats swinging from a trapeze, seals with beach balls on snout, and jugglers, incredibly tall high wire daredevils tip toeing on dental floss; she looked possessed, wow!

She pounced into it with the speed and accuracy of a puma; a viper spring coiled release of a strike- deadly, lightening quick, instinctive. She inhaled the solution up her

nostrils with thousand-fold zest, a cyclone, gagged immediately. Her simmering eyes welled up with tears, she yowled,

“Ugh!”

“How was it?”

“Rank! Disgusting!”

“Well do you feel it?”

“No...”

Poor chagrined Inez; no high, no Shangri-la, no opium dens in Chinatown underground hidden basements full of Edgar Allen Poes, Aleister Crowley, Arthur Rimbauds.

“Try it.”

I repeated the ritual and snorted what felt like battery acid.

“Fuck!”

“Feel it?”

“No.”

“Let’s smoke it.”

“Shit yeah, of course. Why didn’t we just do that?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you have a pipe?”

“No.”

“No? I thought you had a pipe.”

“One of the affiliates has it.”

“Then make one.”

I racked my languid easy chair mind for memories of the countless times I’d witnessed fiendish affiliates improvise some Rube Goldberg device or contraption for a smoking gadget; some of histories most generally scattered scatological minds in common day to day affairs, but suddenly like genius protégés in the realm of getting high.

I’d seen them smoke from a carrot or an apple, though we had no fruit, vegetables, or anything of actual nutritional value to speak of. I’d also seen them crumple up soda cans, beer cans, and then puncture them with a precise hole, or three small holes to mimic a brass screen, bend it with ingenuity, and create a bizarre cubist-like Picasso pipe, very aesthetic and functional.

However, all we had were empty wine bottles.

I opened the refrigerator door and peered inside the mournful barren sub arctic scene. Some candles, empty prescription pill bottle, a jar of mayonnaise, ketchup packets, nothing of use. I opened the freezer door.

“Ah! What’s this?”

The freezer, once big enough to fit a television had accumulated so much ice, out of sheer irresponsible neglect to defrost it, that I could barely fit my hand inside- a dark and narrow ice cavern; I risked severe frostbite, loss of limb, icicle puncture wounds, miniature polar bear attack, simply by trying.

Nevertheless, I closed my eyes and reached into the frigid blue darkness, felt around the icicles, the blizzards, detected something oblong and un-encased in ice, and pulled.

I shut the freezer door and examined my discovery; a dense object wrapped in tin foil, about the size of a large goldfish. The tin foil condensed and frosted up as soon as I exhumed it from the tomb of the freezer into the static thick air of the kitchen.

My fingers burned from the intensity of its subzero temperature on my raw flesh.

“Oh, that’s still there?”

I started to unwrap it. It looked like some kind of pink popsicle encased in a rough sheath of crumbly ice. It had taken on a bizarre uneven shape, nubs and edges conforming to the foil it was wrapped in, and, ultimately, had lost any semblance to what it once was.

“This stuff doesn’t last forever, you know.”

“Nothing does.”

“What about that elephant they discovered encased in a glacier from the last ice age? I read about it in National Geographic; he still had a daisy in his mouth.”

“I don’t know. Although I heard Walt Disney has his head cryogenically preserved; just a frozen decapitated genius head in some icy vault somewhere waiting for a Mickey Mouse body; the scientists in tomorrow-land are trained to attach it. Still, it’s all beside the point, almost unrelated and irrelevant, even though nothing is; yet this piece of pink popsicle cannot be eaten; it’s too old. Would you want to eat the elephant? Would you want to eat Walt Disney’s head, dripping with leftover ooze of winter? Does that sound good to you, frozen food? Frozen food is very low in nutritional content. How many of your daily vitamin and mineral requirements would you fulfill from a TV dinner of Walt’s eyeballs, the elephant’s ear? And besides, where did this come from?”

“Do you remember? That sketchy guy from work gave it to me, the one with the pimples. He spent the weekend at Disneyland and instead of getting me mouse ears or some LSD, brought me this Donald Duck popsicle, all the way back, encased in ice, kept a cooler full of dry ice with him the whole time; kind of sweet, but kind of irritating, too. It’s like a cat bringing you a dead mouse as a gift.”

“Affectionate.”

I unwrapped the popsicle, opened the window, and threw it into the yard.

“That may kill the grass.”

“The grass is dead.”

“What about the ants?”

“Well?”

“Ok.”

I wrapped the foil around my finger. It was brittle, but still had adequate integrity and conformed to the Navajo peace pipe shape I sculpted it into; a pinch here, a tuck there, and then I pushed up the end so it hooked into a small, but effective bowl.

“Where’s the Cheshire Cat?”

“With the Ancient Mariner.”

“Have you ever heard of leukoencephalopathy?”

“Huh?”

“Do you want to?”

“No.”

“Then hand me the pipe.”

I handed Inez the tin foil pipe. She held it up to the bare-naked light bulb (removed from a bar bathroom with toilet paper hand mitt and smuggled in purse) dangling over the kitchen table. She tilted the pipe inquisitively in the light, various angles, and squinted and focused expertly with the aid of her invisible monocle.

“And?”

“Good.”

“Thank you.”

“H always goes on the foil dull side.”

“As I suspected.”

We returned to the couch where, erect and mobilized, I dropped a fresh ball of H into the bowl of my Navajo pipe and Inez, ceremonially, lit it for me; my lungs filled with noxious scorching smoke, my throat cried foul. Still, nevertheless, laden with junk eager somniferum enthusiasm, I inhaled deeply; it was my blue-plate special for the night.

Hints of fumes from a burning car, or a plastic toy; I could hear the tar sizzle and bubble; and when I exhaled it came out like skim milk smoke, toxic gray vapor, diesel exhaust; though, somehow, it did have an esoteric sweet aftertaste, hints of boyhood glee full of shining glazed sweets and rich fluffy chocolate cake.

I don’t recall much after that, except that I fell into a very weird un-recollected Indian summer dream. Inez later told me what she witnessed.

“Baby, it was fantastic and fascinating, your head bobbed back, up, then down, and back again. Your eyelids drooped like bloodhound ears and I’ve never seen you look so at ease, so relaxed as if, after long last and a lifetime of procrastination and martyrdom, you had finally internally examined your Oedipus and come to complete, peaceful, and

indolent terms with yourself. It's as if everything inside of you was as tempting, effortless, and delicious as cherry jell-o"

"Oh wow."

"And then every few minutes you jerked your head, exclaimed something like, 'Ribbon collar heartbreaking afternoon gaunt Gandhi immortality clusters of illusion!' And then, bang, you were gone again."

"Baby, you're alive, right?"

I could hear Inez's voice; it sounded watery and far away; sank slowly into my swamp head from a different galaxy.

I replied, "Gurld het diurce..."

"Then what?"

"The shit finally kicked in hard, but casually, as if it were there all along in a general non specific kind of way; something leaking in from the roof, backyard, or fire escape. Weird potion, like an enormous cockroach soup of dusk; I felt good, and well, you seemed fine, so I left."

"What? Where?"

God bless Inez, never so long in the dungeons of time could she ever be deterred. We were high on H as promised, I was blasted, gone; and, at one time, she proclaimed that was everything she wanted from life, that basic triumph.

And so, when it came down to it, I delivered, and the moment finally arrived and, I guess the build up, when all was said and done, was actually far more compelling than the reality of the occasion. So in spite of the winning achievement of our self destructive, covered in grease spots, dubious goal; she remained reticent and unimpressed by my value, her self esteem unchanged, and retired all current and temporary enthusiasms about me.

Nevertheless, bless her soft skin, her sly and poignant heart, eyes embedded with the extent of the universe, crimson shirt that finely accentuated her womanly apple pie talents, a point of H in pocket, and also admirably tight jeans giving the sweetest temptation of bare legs.

She called another man, unknown number or competitor, beguiled suitor, who drove two hours in the bleak 3 am junk night, headlights shined on continents of empty street, honked twice, she approached with long strides, got in car, hello kiss, he turned around in cul de sac, accelerated, drove, turned to the highway, and stole her; gone. All the way back to his place that same night, gone and gone and gone again.

Damn.

I slept all day, woke at dusk, some affiliates came over to partake in sacred ganja, exchange quips and bemused literary tangles; and to dwell in mystic fraternal harmony like ancient Ali Babas lounged on velvet pillows and in tents of hookah.

They saw my sorrowful state as I stood stunned, shot in the blank vulnerable center of chest, drained of all blood, on the carpet of despair, a lamb dead-eyed on slaughter hook.

They made immediate efforts to cheer me up, rolled bombs, waxed philosophical musings, cracked jokes. But all futility; in the awful realization of it, I was paralyzed and determinedly hung up on tragic and pathetic martyrdom, a radical existentialism; and when they saw this they saw a lost brother, a deeply damaged psyche, and a stonewall of antagonism and indifference.

“Elevate those spirits, amigo, we love you, still love you, all’s well and there’s plenty of girls somewhere someplace somehow in store for you, for us, for everybody. Sing your heart out.”

I still couldn’t speak, so choked up with heartache and hesitations, and just wandered the halls with a vacant stare, occasionally overcome with fits of broken and erratic hacks. So the affiliates offered support by example and lifted the overall positive psychic vibration with their honest enjoyment of joints and observations of hummingbird jiggling with curiosity over yellow flower on back porch; then cracked open Valium bottles.

By then I had worn myself out with too many dreary gardens of despair, helpless sorrows, ruminations on splintered soul, vandalism on the walls of paradise, fragmented sense of pride, everyone was flapping and enjoying precious life in unison; where was I?

I jumped in, reasserted my common sense, threw back some blues, and gradually, though eventually, had a fine time laughing and teetering on joy; dug ‘2001’ on late night TV and was transformed by the time-stopping, mind blowing, profundity of the monkey scene.

We smoked giant tankers of joints, incredible mountains of magic smoke, and progressively everyone dreamily focused on their tea high interests; two affiliates played backgammon, another affiliate absorbed prose by Miller, two more watched crime drama on TV, and, in spite of the medicinal benefits of the sacred blues, I quicksanded and disappeared into tea paranoia; strange and scary thoughts tip toed into my head like a disturbed and creepy face of a depraved, blood thirsty, mime; I sunk into the dusty, threadbare, couch and scanned the details of the apartment, our headquarters, crash pad, and habitat.

“My God,” I thought, “Trailer park squirrels would never tolerate such a state of disarray. Do we lack the intelligence of squirrels?”

Suddenly, shocked and dismayed by the filth of splotch-stained carpet- where did all these vicious blotches and unbridled splats of doom come from? Beer, soy sauce, lost dream, motor oil, unfulfilled longing, ketchup, rejection, loose cum from dozens of squirming, slithering, pot bellied swingers shimmying and fornicating like schools of nymphomaniac fish in their synthetic lagoon of carpet?

Oh, and the undeclared Styrofoam, fast food mustard packet, quarter cup of spoiled milk off to the side, a beetle droning and bumping against the window, chop suey stained chopsticks, legions of moth corpses in light fixture, insecticide, empty flea bomb canisters, one million cockroaches, gurgling swamp sink water in rotten garbage kitchen;

and even, for the past two weeks, toilet backed up black with dark mud, smells, and mires of excrement and bodily fluids.

It all came to me keen, clear, and in painful Technicolor. I telepathically excused myself, adjourned to my space cabin, and smoked the last ball of heroin that Inez had generously left on my pillow,

“This is for you, baby...” Sweet high, nurturing, voice.

Alone, in my room, with a blue light, for some reason didn't get blasted like last time.

I thought,

“This doesn't hold a red poppy colored candle to the fine outer orbit cosmonaut flight dreams woven by angelic pharmaceutical morphine...”

My affiliate said it's because I didn't mainline it; that, if I quit being a vapid poseur and pussy and simply jammed a needle in my vein, the high would've come on without mistake, uncertainty, or misinterpretation. Nevertheless, if I so desired, arrangements could be made for the acquisition of morphine.

He said this with shrouded intonation, as if privileged information. Granted, he had a moderate amount of street cred, given that he periodically pulled through on various occasions at critical junctions with assorted pharmaceuticals, but that was months ago, and this could easily be a bogus rant and some typical senseless junk chatter.

“No money up front.”

“Please, how could you? Have I ever? That hurts, it really does. I'm speechless—that you would ever think or say something like that.”

“I'm sorry.”

I met this particular affiliate for the first time one year earlier; he spontaneously materialized at my door clattering on roller skates wearing a sailor's cap one peppermint afternoon by the recommendation of a shaky, fringe, associate; desperate for cash, carrying two bottles of morphine sulfate.

“What's up?”

He showed me the goods and proceeded with his prepared sales pitch offering up a resume of references and a viable, lengthy, and detailed tale to explain how he came to the acquisition of such a rare and coveted product.

Apparently, according to his spin, in spite of his sugar cured beatnik appearance, he worked periodically at a pharmacy his dad owned. I invited him in, laid two wine glasses on a table, filled them with orange juice, and he squirted a dose for each of us in the glasses.

Rest assured, the lovely and airy morphine was authentic; we were fluttering sparrows asking ourselves dreamy questions like,

“Why the wedge of blue, the darker blue, shining blue, water of the bay.”

I bought both bottles from him; the deal was agreeable to each party, I enjoyed the morphine for hours on end, and he roller-skated with unbridled grace down forever streets.

And in the following days and weeks I said,

“Aching Dilodin, Codeine, Benzedrine, etc...”

He occasionally pulled through.

However, that meeting became a benchmark, of sorts, for me. The morphine burned in my consciousness something of a vibrant and perennial excitement, an imprint of crimson flower Shangri-La, a summation, clarity, and Rosetta Stone to all enigmas.

Even the vomit, during the initial stages of discovery, violent and all over myself in the shower, the lights dim, a sacred and wondrous reverie; lulled back in cryptic time, eyes shut, mind wide, gently grooved to Ornette Coleman’s complex free jazz rhythms. The harmony suddenly obvious, the prism melody shined with new sophistication, the sound became a perfect mosaic, textile, internalized, gripped soul loins, like eternity.

This exact vision only days before my mountainous come-down, when, out of dope, money, will to live; not to mention, due to gang holiday circumstances, the headquarters abandoned, scarce, empty; I laid in bed for a full week, blinds drawn, blankets pulled over head, room locked, and watched closet door breathe; respirations of odd combinations of devil garments, secret adulterous love letters, zombie wiffle ball bat, stacks of jaw chattering skulls and skeletons as ominous as continents of catacombs; I received a mystic transmission, the revolving shapes of shadow,

"Open me..."

A golden well, infinity, divine wisdom; I could have chosen death, i.e. metaphor sanity.

Pacific Ocean Death Vision:

In an effort to convince myself that the disconcerting closet apparitions were simply a figment of my demented imagination, I said,

“If you really do feel so strange, then a swim will fix you, naturally flush out toxins, etc.”

With a strange, semi-conscious quality, I unlocked my car, turned over the engine, pulled out of my mystic rippling driveway, and commenced the windy road to the beach.

However, at an ordinary stop light, where I had dutifully made hundreds of full and complete, legally compliant, stops; I somehow reinterpreted the meaning of red and actually considered it as more of a cousin of yellow, with some of the same related DNA qualities, like orange; and slowed, but still glided, and collided, tapped, like metal feathers, into the bumper of a rusted pick up truck.

With interior authentic heart politeness, I yelled out my window,

“Sorry!”

I waved kindly, then reversed, pulled around the truck and sped away, no reinvention of green light necessary. In my rear view mirror, a humble, slow paced, Hispanic man in

workman's jumpsuit, casually examined the back end, hardly shrugged, got back in his truck, then, coolly, made a right turn.

I was tossed, helpless, as if inside mammoth washing machine on death cycle, extra rinse; relentless great ocean waves lassoed me, an ambush like landslide on daisy; and inside the inescapable ocean clasp, omnipotent compared to puny human short life retaliation; tossed and helpless, utterly spacey, drowning, and weak, I thought,

“This must be a dream.”

Yet after initial flailing and hopeless struggle, no pity from hungry fish, I encountered the enigmatic peace so often spoken of by near death or borderline annihilation survivors. And with the courage instilled in me by this overriding peaceful warm surrender, I opened my heart and soul upwards; congenially embraced underwater demise, offered my body to ocean's clamping jaws and razor teeth to devour, licked my fingers and fixed my eyebrows for proper St Michael presentation at pearly gates; when, in the weightless serenity of my heavenly submission, suddenly a savior, a Jesus wave, in a moment of decorative beauty, a Japanese print, from some merciful far off love storm; lifted me on its shoulders and I felt like a great genie atop magic carpet and levitated from turbulent tides to gentle maternal blankets of beach, delicately placed on shore with giant, forgiving, and divine liquid hand.

I collapsed and puked, cringed and flinched at the horrible crash, kaboom; the growl and bark, froth of rabid fangs. I huffed for delicious molecules of elusive oxygen; lay sprawled out as if washed up from armada or gold plundering pirate's ship, wood splintered and wrecked against fearsome rocks.

Hermit crabs crawled over me waiting their chance to pick at water logged, dead, wave limp, sun-bleached flesh. I felt a weird sting on my head; a strand of seaweed was knotted in my hair, it pricked me; I left it there.

I turned my head and rested it on the soft pillow of beach, collected my breath, it slowly returned to normal; the ocean lapped at my feet, now like little puppy dog licks, and I opened my eyes; a toddler packed sand into a tiny plastic bucket, turned it over to plop down perfectly shaped towers, stuck twig on top, and then sculpted, with tiny shovel, little baroque windows.

A blond nearby in yellow bikini- a greased up butterball of a blond on a blue and white striped Ralph Loren beach towel, hunched over reading People magazine, sipping a soda; a floppy hat drooped over her mystery eyes. And beside her a squat tense guy with hairy back and bald spot already painfully sunburned red. He grimaced and grumbled and brushed superglue sand from his hairy sweaty left arm.

Huddled beneath crumbly cliff, cradled in warm sand; gentle trickle stream over moss slide; that, somewhere in its pigmentation, cured in gold light, seemed to glow, like sparkles of tides on days of incredible effervescence, ectoplasm, glow in the dark micro species like green food dye number 9, from some underwater supernatural spigot.

Mist on face, mind at ease. The fiery sun melted into the sea; again, I stayed until; then.

Crescent moon climbed from covers, pure sky no interrupting clouds which normally capture the multitudes of hues from sunset like film screen; but tonight pure shades of impossibly deep peach blue violet orange red strawberry syrup all blended between each other like sunset rainbow ice cream orgy; piercing Venus in a micro dot laser white light.

Oh Sea! What do ancient mariners, drunk on sea; howling, truly believe? The echoes of man's cry; lands upon one thousand corked dreams. In a Baja breeze, legends resonate in pacific beach bar tiki.

Escape.

Escape, if left unattended, ferments in mind; slowly turns rancid; before then, sweet and delicious.

Eccentrics, recluses, geniuses, convicts, prophets; we all coalesce along the mutual border of nowhere; the stars take a place among us, in particular, the milky way; hapless days, or hapless life. Corrir! Corrir!

On the bombed out road, a dusty vendor peddled pineapples from the back of his truck, ten pesos per pineapple. They were stacked like adobe bricks and weighed down the rear suspension of the truck so the bumper hung only inches above the ground, the bumper tied on to the frame with wire.

"Pina?" He asked.

I picked one up and smelled it. Its scent was as sugar sweet as a quiet jack off felt nice; I bought three.

A raggedy bleached out dreadlock new wave hippy, tinge of henna to his skin, incredibly dark tan, wild eyes, breathed deep and remembered beginnings; hunched over a nervous brown dog, sweet face, no leash and timid like a bunny; he observed in reverent, earthly, saint-like observances the ungraspable moments; kid with soccer ball, mango pit on ground, pigeon in plaza.

We drank care free beers, or slept, on happy beach, or gazed nowhere and listened to the long stems of reeds move against each other or hiss in the breeze. Gulls called out, waves crumbled, and the sounds all separate, but one, colluding, and non-specific, the organic living calliope of nature's cantus firmus.

All the time, sweet Inez droopily watched wedges of blue waves pull to one glass point, collapse; and at twilight, cried.

"Love is Eden!"

Tranquility in deserted Mexico, warmth rustled over our skin through our hair and into the sand, leaving peculiar indentations, impressions, an infinite lopsided expanse, abstract sculptures, spontaneously craved from pebble and rock and space thought.

The afternoon slumber, together, on hammock; stitches of youth; we barely sagged above coconut white, which, as surely as we lay, rearranged itself, shed in imperceptible increments, like all of our selves into age, bits of cells and hair, thoughts and intentions, fingernail and tooth; slowly but surely shedding and dissolving here, there, and everywhere; the ageless sea.

I dreamed dreams even more spectacular than dream, or this, decoded, revealed, deep in the inner pulse of backstage illusion; tremendous hints of Samadhi.

We consummated eternity on the beach, and in the hotel room, or the back seat, the field beneath the tree; barely hidden from pious country farmers; sighing and crying all night with love's noises. I said,

"Baby, what do you say; to make love every hour of every day of every month for every year until golden blessed eternity?"

"Oh baby, it depends, but it could be so lamblike and perfect..."

Hawk soars, free of wing flap, such expert of air it simply imagines flight and subsequently glides in heroic altitudes over Indian hills, the town on sacred earth; mojo, ancient whistle, brujos call, imaginary rock, impenetrable solidity except for within shamanic emptiness.

Shaman summons purple deer, bleeding sun, an instant trillion degree cleanse; microscopic moment of sanctification, a tribal baptism, etched forever in fabric of universe, memorialized in alien ground formations, invisible except from limitless mountains or air.

A rattle and slither into bleached rock; vultures circle, squawk in wicked tones, fiendish eyes on man endlessly walking, stumble, delirious, drinking handfuls of sand, a fresh water mirage; then collapse. He is one million miles from temples jeweled in lizards, llamas, and martians.

The insane Aztec manipulator priest clutches the beating heart of a virgin sacrifice. He takes orders from, and obeys, astral commanders, alien agents, spirit sergeants; stands atop an impossibly scientifically advanced mystic temple, where the sun, determined by precise astronomical measurements, beams and slants into it, presently, an indecipherable image, on the dust and flagstone of a great floor, during the solar eclipse of the summer equinox.

Something more profound than pink horizons, when, suddenly I felt naked and humiliated, a little older, and initial immediacy, urgency, I realized the world as penetrable, obscured, and a diaphanous facade.

My drunken epiphany visited my mind's eye, like a little orphan Annie arriving suddenly with haunted gaze fixed into space of no-time; in post-sex warmth; on the warm balcony, in Mexico dark I became the vast cluster of constellations and endless stars in the universe.

Because it's hymns of rippled hearts like butterflies; chaos theory.

Moment, ungraspable like rainbow, carved wood, creations. At La Bufadora, where the waves crash, spout, and spiral, heaven bound, in a magnificent marine geyser blowhole of spray; a great attraction of simple outdoor cathedral-like joys.

"I used to come here in dreams," Inez said, "The water vapor and salty mist saturated the air with a million aureoles, as it does now; a sense of unique childhood presence bridges the childhood vision with the immediate unbridgeable present in such a respect that it corroborates the peaceful fact of no time."

The poetic dive bar; accentuated by torn vinyl seats; red neon hue, pug nosed woman, stuffy interior, holy; free of loud tourists, pollution, whistle tequila shot, violent and jarring dance music, whoops, yells, inane forced conversation by bathroom.

“Inez, dig those lamented men, their sorrow, how they sway with squiggled mariachis, lean on worn jukebox from 1971, and there’s a little disco ball in the plexi-glass jukebox display rotating in an off center elliptical fashion like orbits of planets in a solar system of howling Mexican ballads.”

“Yes, Baby, and can you dig the delicious windfall of Bohemias, almost a penny for every frosty bottle, stacked before us like trophies; that, when on table, by smoking ashtray, reflect, but only in that peculiar way that reflections do reflect or try to, or can, or are permitted, in that particular way as they reflect from curved glossy surfaces and round natural occurrences of organic view-masters, bizarre synthetic red from the interior vinyl bar kaleidoscope.”

We crossed the street to the scent of tacos.

Sour orange, popularized in the ‘60s, subsequently fell into disfavor, but conscientiously preserved in nowhere cliff dwelling delicious taco restaurant. An eggshell hue to the tables, with hint of yellow, and the chairs and wall too, splashed in orange juice base and, the fans, beige, languidly whooshed with ordinary Mexican laziness, as though eager to delay its lap until,

“Manana, hombre, manana.”

Still, dutifully, it circulated heavy flaps of humidity; also, on its blades, a bit of orange from the hue of the walls, spun slowly, precariously; observed in reflection of mirrors, cracked and tarnished, looked orange, but slightly browner, in a strange concept of mirror brown infinity.

I walked down the long hall to the dark rear, tested mystery doors like locked church basements occupied by dignified meetings of church mice with sugar cookies and coffee,

“Oh Mexico, it can’t only be you with fresh blue patio out back? And shower next to bathroom which was next to another one and each very clean and in blue, too, tiles?”

I said slowly, like an EP at half speed,

“Inez, oh.”

She giggled a sweet song,

“It’s really”

Gentle laughter.

The white plastic waitress, porcelain face, vampire crimson lipstick; prepared for an impromptu kabuki performance; starring her and the lone figure in the corner, who silently observed, or perhaps, puppeteer, the wizard, managed the movements of plastic robot girl, by telepathic remote control.

I ordered two exotic tequila infused fruit blended drinks.

The doll carried the glittery concoction to us with automaton skill; a precise and sterile operation; wore a crisp white baker’s uniform; the kind I’d only ever previously

seen in a well known 'I Love Lucy' rerun; of course the episode where Lucy and Ethel worked like dutiful loving smooth legged wives, I guess for extra bread to bring home to Ricky and Fred, their contribution to the economic domestic harmony and bliss of their 50's style domicile; at the assembly line in the chocolate factory full of shining and glazed, delicious, sweet treats, dispensed from some heavenly dark chocolate cake faucet or Willy Wonka garden hose, clusters of brownie and fudge nuggets; and the conveyer belt goes crazy haywire, chocolate sprinkler pudding splattering all over Lucy and Ethel and the factory; all in black and white delicious dessert surrealism.

But also, once before, with two affiliates who, after smoking sweet ganja sacrament, craved nostalgic boyhood sugar pastries from genuine Mexican bakery. Two bountiful rows of backyard wooden shelves lined with sweet smelling glazed pineapple treats, joyous custard pies, tres leches cakes dripping with milky starlight, extra-special sugar cookie puffs with almond on top, lumpy sweet bread with jam surprise inside.

Or one affiliate laughed, his unique and special pleading laugh, the kind of deep bodied soul center laugh that brings shudders of peace, smiles to children, swallows to San Juan Capistrano; all because his simple favorite, like a Zen masterpiece, scrumptious butter and sugar toasted on bread.

He ordered two, and also a wild assortment bag of cream-filled cakes; oh the scents of heaven, a magical dream, like birthday cake, and Hostess treats, Play-Doh, coconut cream, dinosaurs; anaesthetized by the good of gladness.

The sweet smiling senorita bakers, sexy in their outfits with matching white sneakers, still can see their come hither ankles, love deep brown eyes, soft hands; tickled and amused by us strange affiliates already drunk and stoned anyway, but with bizarre childish intentions.

And the sugar and butter affiliate, as always, incorrigibly and ineffably likeable, a charisma as big as the Empire State Building, adored by everyone, a secret celebrity, a thick bustling manlike puppy; and loud too, tumbling and with great prospects for the future.

And, with more than a bucket full of beers beneath each our belt, he was the first to ask, gently, at the perfect moment, for use of the bathroom; politely, with irresistible eyes, in his soft broken Spanish.

"Bano?"

The senorita said,

"Si,"

And she pointed the way behind the counter with her delicate finger lick fingertip and red painted nails as inviting and mouth-watering as the glazed cherries shimmering on tiny pies.

We all took turns to make use of the closet sized facilities, one by one; and the secret men bakers in the back, like any other kind of 4am steam liner worker in basic simple workman's uniform, feeding coal to giant fire breathing kiln all filled with sugar delights, keeping careful watch to withdraw them at the perfect golden brown caramel and soft

chewy moment; they watched us quietly and suspiciously as though we were sugar high junky maniacs.

The red-hot dragon fire spit vicious ten-foot flames, I felt suddenly as though I were in an inquisition dungeon on verge of awful torture and cremation, hooded executioner pain inflictor henchmen with Marquis De Sade grins clanked with heavy iron chains to lock me to dripping stone walls, pure black damp doom.

I thought,

“Judgment has been cast and they’re here to throw me into the kiln of flames to eternal ash! I shall defend myself to the death.”

I made mental note of a baker’s trowel resting on nearby table and cautiously walked around a giant sheet of pastry dough, all powdered with flour and sugar; my hand ready to swipe the trowel at a moment’s notice and leap for these hood’s throats, slash one, then the other, clean cuts and immediate death; then to sample hot fresh sugar cookie as blood pooled on floor.

I shuffled slowly, stared them down all the way to the bathroom. A bead of sweat dribbled down my temple.

“Stay cool...Keep cool...”

The white plastic waitress approached us as though on a conveyer belt, she lifeless delivered our drinks.

“Watered down Kool-Aid with withered chunks of papaya thrown in, same old recipe.”

“Cheers,” I said.

“Do you have any pills?”

The man in the corner jiggled his joystick and instructed her to ignore my inquiry. She shuffled backwards on the conveyer belt.

The drinks made dishwasher seem like champagne; week-old urine pureed with banana peels would have tasted better.

The booze helped a little, although the tequila, if it was tequila, tasted like it came from the bottom of a rusty gasoline can with distinct hints of sludge. Nevertheless, I’ve had worse. Inez blew bubbles in hers and the air pockets burst like little food-dye Jacuzzi bubbles and splattered sticky blue syrup stains on the cream table.

The waitress mechanically delivered the check to us on an orange plastic tray- same hue as the walls. I left a stack of heavy coins and nodded at the man in the corner. He jammed the joystick on his telepathic remote control and furiously banged at the red plastic button.

“Nice try,” Inez said. He punched the table, sneered, defeated, GAME OVER- not even initials or three letter profanities in the high scores.

Blue or red pill sustenance, something was off. The pharmacists expressed distress on some great thick subliminal level and, in an unprecedented chain of events, were

shamefully on guard and hoarding the most colorful and festive of skittles all to themselves.

“What gives?” I thought.

I asked a sleazy looking one, with mustache, dark skin, sloppily dressed; for codeine and his lip loosened as if a calm thought had stirred ancient feuds in his raging wild soul; but then, soberly, he denied my request and dutifully resumed the overriding and ubiquitous tight jawed antagonism prevailing throughout the former wealth of abundance.

In spite of my pleas, they all insisted on formalities.

“Una receta.”

Rumors circulated courtesy of my most trusted affiliates who counseled me on this matter of scarcity but immediately, without regard to reason, and ultimately, to my drastic undoing; I embarked on a bland, gray, journey into a profound, long lasting, state of denial.

“Hah, rubbish; there are always pills.”

My inner child threw a temper tantrum, defied easy communist hip Marxist culture swing composure; suddenly my heaviest life long repressed insecurities, anxieties, disassociations, reaction formations, amnesias came screaming to the surface; castration fear, annihilation, flashbacks, soiling myself, panic attacks, inferiority complex, superiority complex, primary incest wishes, triggers, agoraphobia, the trauma of the primal scene, and so on. It was all too much to deal with at once. I masturbated but still needed medication.

Pharmacy after pharmacy turned me away and I waddled out as though a penguin kneed in the loins, dejected, as predicted; and all this leading back to a chain reaction thanks to a flock of jocks and sleaze balls; they slipped pills into their prom date's margarita, waited for the shit to kick in, whispered some poorly chosen sweet nothings, soft rock in dorm room, pounced on aforementioned date, most likely blond, by now in deep doped out cloudy sorority sister brain state, and commenced to finalize corrupted sex taped ritual consummation.

Consequently, some over zealous dad at mom's request complained to old buddy brother of state senator, position of power; who then passed on the word to good old boy country club pal running the border patrol and then he talked to his amigos with the mafia and it all trickled down to the pharmacy and honest sufferings and now the real scum bags were in the game.

Sure enough, the pesky, puritanical, U.S. authorities were all tangled up in my shit; and making a shady business of what was once a very civilized and legitimate state of affairs.

Suddenly, a pandemic of scarcity swept throughout and within all of my formerly most reliable providers. Only a month earlier, at the pinnacle of high civilization, the scientifically minded chemist and pharmacist welcomed me with open arms; now just a side look, dismissal, and subsequent shameful departure.

A blitzkrieg campaign was launched with frightening intensity and destruction; all pills demonized; a mass hysteria sacrificing liberty, autonomy, sensibility; all infringements executed under the thin pretext and veil of a date rape prevention crusade.

It was an all out famine and nuclear winter for us innocent and dignified pill poppers; it stretched miles deep into formerly friendly territory, the homeland warm heart and hearth of Mexico, an unrelenting and vicious lock down.

Listen up, all these easy sorority sluts would put out anyway; why knock them out with perfectly good pharmaceuticals and ruin everybody's fun? I'll never understand these frat boy cretin brain thugs.

Even my back-ups back ups were bone dry, and now nearly dark, Inez already worn out and irritated. She needed her shit.

“One more, baby, I know we'll find it...”

I told the next pharmacist,

“I need them for my sister, see her shaking in the car?”

I pointed through the plate glass window at Inez disdainfully smoking a cigarette in the passenger seat.

“I ate her last bottle and she's crazy. She'll kill me. No valium, no happiness...”

The pharmacist referred me to a doctor's office next door.

“Inez, it's confounding, it's hard to believe, it's a complete affront to nature and good taste that it has all come down to this, this nightmarish scenario of total depletion, frustration, exhaustion; and now, in this unlikely twist of fate, this horrible turn of events, we stand on the precipice of annihilation. Shall I recap? All options worn out, beat, dog tired; we have gone from one pharmacy to the next with a cornucopia of viable angles and supplications, some realistic, some completely out of left field and entirely unfathomable contrivances; and tragically, cold rejection all down the line. And here, in our last ditch effort, our closest opportunity yet, we have only one, outside of drastic measures, plausible way out; and as we both know, since I've always been absolutely forthright and forthcoming and forth in so many relevant ways and eloquently communicated to you from the innermost honest heart place of soul sharing space about my extensive and deeply seeded personal existential dilemmas, my anxieties; on top of which, as we speak, my crucial defense mechanisms are self destructing and flailing miserably; which, needless to say, is clearly an added aggravation to my already depleted sense of self worth; and furthermore, and this goes without saying, I know as soon as the pills are in our possession that we will both feel overcome with relief, cheer, sense of hope, optimism; the day will be bright and the nights glittering with opportunity and replete with divine fate; we'll return to our familiar world away from danger, sad feelings, bad sex, weird thoughts, or stingy pharmacists. And as we both know, our innermost sense of right and wrong is nothing more than an accident of birth. So by all means, in spite of the blatant inconvenience, inconsideration, unnecessary formalities, and utter rudeness on all culpable parts; for God's sake go in there and tell them we're on vacation, you've forgot your prescriptions and can't fall asleep without medication and

can't wake up without the medication, and you know the drill, act really frantic, you know how, I learned it all from you."

"Shit, Baby, you're a god damn novice. Try and come to terms with why your feeling of being a human has become primarily a linguistic contrivance. Here you've almost lost us a battle you can't understand and I need to go in there and clean up the mess, reason with the doctor, perhaps even put out on both of our behalf's; please try and digest the inner roots of why you feel so worthless, helpless, dependant, mediocre, inadequate, and finite while I roll up my sleeves and legitimately take care of some actual business."

"Okay."

She flicked her cigarette onto the craggily parking lot, stepped out of the car with foot extended like a ballerina, flipped her hair over her shoulder, took in the details of exterior with complete sacred accuracy, and walked toward the entrance of the all night doctor's office in crumbled building; I rushed up to the door like an eerie old off key bellboy and held the door open with great low humble hanging head.

As soon as she had disappeared up the stairs, strange stairs, like dank old catacomb fire escape hallucinated stairs laden with soiled intentions, and up to the second floor doctor's office where, in the next room, I could hear an old whore wailing and weeping all over because of what a client referred to as her, "piano legs;" crying like storms of tears on her rickety tiny tim bed.

I darted across the street, begging for clemency, to a shithole bar to get a drink to ease my raw, un-medicated nerves. They were fizzling and sparking; it was a fire hazard to the combustible insides of my brain, like having a million volts of electricity burn through un-insulated circuitry already soaked in gasoline and waiting to blow.

Upon entry, I collapsed, dumbfounded, unprepared for such a remarkable and overwhelmingly profound experience of dive faux glitz glamour, it transcended ritz, transcended art, transcended any precedent of light.

The polished Reno counter tops, the twirling disco ball radiated an infinite number of glitters and twinkles, the heavy woman bar tender with dark skin operating the great protected bottles that stick up erect, like tequila nipples, on glass shelves; scar faced bandito leaned against wall, driving Mexican swing music wailed from the jukebox; another bandito, at the bar with one arm, blood stained hand, still wet, cut your throat if asked; a slight man with neurotic facial gestures, thinking of homosexual feelings, Zapatistas, the decline in the value of the peso.

I gave the one armed bandito a wide berth, registered the giant blade of machete on his belt in sheath, fine Mexican leather work; and ordered three shots of tequila to initiate some relief to my frazzled, jet engine screaming, thick shroud flapping brain sick head.

The tequila tasted fiery and good; I ordered three more shots to further develop and explore the leads, threads, and intricacies of my drunk. After that round, stoned enough to say,

"Your appearance is remarkable and profound."

The waitress, heavy, short, dark, Indian, pockmarked, shimmering blouse, soft spoken, unutterably sweet; she kindly served me frosty Pacificos with the cap off, bowed, smiled nervously, ran her fingers over her rough face, and then, crooked teeth,

"Soy muy feo..."

"Oh God,"

Depression for beer, for sweet girl, and the dusty street, an inner rebellion with giant explosions and expressions of guilt, repressed memories, confusion; all of my unconscious and scary inner motives seeping up from the tarry well of evolution; complete telepathic conversation with my terrestrial siblings, the frog, the banana, the pine comb, the starfish, all about slavery and blindness; then suddenly,

"Inez is dead! or raped! or both!"

I calmly stood up from my seat at the bar, the man with one arm had his hand on the handle of his machete, twitching, side looking at me; the lone bandito by the juke boxed, chewed the end of a soggy cigar and gave me the evil eye equivalent of a vicious hate fuck, and a tinge of a smirk; the neurotic, slight framed, prankster shuffled in the middle of the floor, twittered his fingers, and giggled in my direction.

I walked backwards, slowly, so as not to startle anyone, no sudden movements, one step then the other; the bar tender smiled her kind missing tooth smile as I leaned my back against the door and pushed out.

"Fucking weirdos," I thought.

As soon as I was out the door, I turned around and sprinted to enter the street, dodged a wild stampede of Mexican traffic, was a south of the border human version of Frogger, and ran toward the entrance of the building when I felt my body collide with what felt like cement wall.

I rebounded back, stunned.

Carefully, I inched forward again; put my hand in front of me, leaned and pressed on a curved solid surface that felt cool and smooth, like glass; I pushed my palms against it with force, it didn't budge, then to the side, it didn't budge; sure enough, I was in a glass box, a curved glass box- the contours like the convex inside of an hourglass; a trapped, tequila soaked, mime in the shrinking prison of his sand empty world.

I took this opportunity to let my eyes roll over the contours of the cinderblock fortress, painted in blotches of maroon and yellow, the sidewalk dusty, and roofed with a weird brown thatch that rustled with the movements of colonies of venomous spiders and ticks.

Why couldn't I have an invisible dog? Or an invisible rope? Or catch an invisible butterfly or blow up an invisible balloon? "What?" That's what I'm thinking. I pressed harder. I pressed my right hand and moved to the left- standing from one hand moving to the other. I reached out, moved over, transferred the other hand, and reached out again-

A surge of stale, diesel exhaust, sewage-tinged air invaded my lungs.

“Does this mean that there is an air duct, some kind of special tubing that feeds in here; some kind of central air conditioning system invisibly designed for functionality as drafted in disappearing ink on invisible blueprints by an invisible hand serving as a direct conduit and scribe to the warped vision of the primeval mind of the invisible architect himself?”

“Or is this lungful of fecal air simply just the first quarts of poisonous gas in what amounts not to an invisible prison at all but, in reality, an invisible gas chamber?”

I reached my hands up far over my head. I did calisthenics; I wiggled my fingers in jazz hands of freedom. It was only empty space, no blockage of movement, no glass ceiling, a tiny glass walled courtyard, possibly a giant cognac glass. My fingers gradually crawled up the front surface of the wall and reached a smooth ridge.

“Invisible Houdini salvation!” I cried.

I hoisted myself up and balanced on the edge, assessed the tall drop, how best to dismount- which could include a daring aikido roll, or a double gymnastic back flip as though tumbling for joy in the playground olympics of youth and afterwards, animal crackers.

With a mighty push, I thrust myself up and over the glass edge, twisted 360 degrees for effect, and slid down an invisible slide like a missile- my feet shot out in front of me; and with a high velocity kitten ball cannon ball roll, I swooped back onto the ground, onto my feet, dashed without infringing on any of the quick momentum from my high altitude descent, seamlessly transitioned into a covert Chuck Norris grenade tossing sprint and raced to the entrance of the doctor’s office.

I shuffled up the rickety old stairs, and looked through a crack on the fourth step. I could see a pale child locked in a room viciously tearing apart a piece of raw meat with his teeth.

I continued up the stairs and to the top into the hall and opened the first door on my left. A midget, in a wrestler’s outfit, and a beautiful young woman, in a shimmering tight dress, played poker at a low table, sitting on apple boxes. The midget stood up aggressively, looked at me with that menacing I’ll rip your intestines out look so peculiar and unique to bitter world-weary little people.

“Excuse me,” I said.

And further down the stale hall, like a spy, I opened the next door and leaning against the wall, hat tipped over her head, an artsy bohemian flapper girl on the floor smoking a cigarette.

“I apologize,” I said

The next door was locked. And then I opened the next, on the right, and a humid waft of hot air blasted out, I wiped my eyes; an incredible jungle world rustled and buzzed with African birds circling in blue sky, giraffe nibbling on leaves, hippopotamus grazing by lagoon, monkeys leaping from tree to tree via long limbs by virtue of long arms, screeching out deafening decibel calls like factory whistle monkeys amidst jungle splatter painted vines.

I opened the next door and gasp; there was Inez! She sat in an austere brown wooden chair, her back to me, in a claustrophobic office, the desk piled with files and newspapers opened to the cock fighting forms; there were cheap looking homemade plaques on the wall with childlike drawings of the caduceus, an open bottle of tequila and two shot glasses.

The doctor, a man in his early forties with glassy eyes and requisite Mexican mustache, regarded me with a snarl. Inez didn't turn around but communicated telepathically,

"Get the hell out of here before you fuck everything up, I'm about to get all the shit, subsequent bags full of our kicks, and we're going to resume our prophetic road consummations in proper full balls out pell-mell nitrous oxide down and dirty high as kites fuck like porn stars signature gentile method."

I got the message, closed the door, and darted out of sight, my back against the wall in the hall, heaving for breath.

"A split second," I thought, "I was only a figment of his imagination."

A young woman appeared in the hall and entered a mystery door; I winked a wink at her that said,

"I'm getting those pills, honey; I'm getting those pills at any cost; of course, provided that no federales decide to get mixed up in this innocent little party favor soiree."

I shimmied my hips in a tiny but clear rendition of the "twist," a mini retro dance for the lovely, young, hall girl to get a crystal clear idea of what I meant and had in mind.

Seeing as Inez had her end of the mission under control, I beat back through the hall into the stairwell, dropped down a few steps, peaked in on the pale boy, he hissed with pink eyes, and slipped back into the bar across the street.

I sat down, relaxed, and flew over the Bermuda Triangle.

A whirling vortex vacuum, the Hoover Damn of Hoover's, I was only a tiny speck of dust sucked up and inhaled through alien tubes into new atmosphere, I held my breath, gone; turned blue, a grim reaper like a death ET with big head and tiny, bony, weird skeleton galloped on space horse to knock my skull against the counter, over, and over, and over, like a bobble head doll, until the sky became ruby red.

My eardrums blew, I felt the temple of my skull, my hand was covered in snot green ooze.

Behind the controls again; readings haywire, altitude dropping fast, g-forces accelerating to 11, 11.4, .8, now 12; white knuckles splitting, breaking, gripping to hold on.

Down is gone; omnipotent currents.

A sideshow vacuum mouthed prostitute slut, slobbered and sucked and pulled, until man's balls shot out, with a splash, horrific slosh in urinal.

"Oh Christ..!"

The man turned ghost white, collapsed. With big wide, smacking of lips, she chewed the nuts he loved and guarded and massaged since infancy with tenderness and protecting strokes of pleasure.

Blood sneaked out the corner of her puffy mouth, red lips, vampire, crooked, an infected cut. She smiled the Indian voodoo smile, a beat-up girl.

That's it, suck the chrome off a trailer hitch; suck down a tanker from eighty miles away, pull it in as simple as a Dakota trout; easy as an oak leaf down a suburban gutter, in the void and dank of city sewer where crocodiles feed on bad children, pot grows wild like ivy; the crocs breed with gremlins and spawn off croclins; and albinos live autonomously in their own slimy hidden paradise.

Ocean whirlpools of lethal black and white carnivals, lethal Technicolor carnival, optical illusion spinning device carnival.

I landed; shit, and needed a drink, because I hate flying over that place, and every time do I say it's the last.

A man, dressed in a gorilla costume, came up to me; a big smile molded on the rubber face; his bloodshot eyes bobbed back and forth like monkey shines eyes and sat miles deep into their tunnel sockets behind the mask; he wore an unbuttoned dirty tropical shirt, brightly printed with flowers and also dark silhouettes of gorilla surfers; the coarse synthetic primate chest hair, matted and prickly, stuck out over the middle buttons.

He slapped his giant, hairy, gorilla hands on the bar, leaned into them, inched in closer, goofy. I stared at him, silently unnerved; he breathed rapidly in my face through his wide, raspy, gorilla nostrils.

I said,

"Smells like someone's been drinking coolant, or Vaseline, or rubber medical glove juice; very antiseptic, sterile, but somehow mixed with reeds and compellingly sweet."

He said,

"May I get you a drink sir?"

Without flinching I said,

"Whiskey sour,"

"Fine choice, sir."

His words slipped out a second too late; he held his gorilla gaze on me in just the slightest of most inappropriate ways; the moment felt wrong, like one of us had done something dirty, or like a ventriloquist trick had been divulged.

But I liked his voice; he sounded very refined, like an Oxford man; but smooth like a soul singer all at once; it relaxed me, like listening to Marvin Gaye, on a white leather couch, huffing turpentine and perusing Foucault.

The tables, made of bamboo, nevertheless, expressed hints of vinyl and neon; the front wall opened to a shallow patio that spilled onto a quiet cobblestone street. Two men, with very similar dark features, in fine white suits ambled in, were shown a table, and a pair of young girls soon joined them.

They all drank blue liquid in tall, frosty, glasses, with a maraschino cherry anchored at the bottom of the glass, a sweet surprise awaits; also a wedge of pineapple, and a pink umbrella jammed into it.

The girls, Siamese twins, slobbered on each other while the finely dressed men discreetly stroked each other off underneath the table.

The ceiling fan hung low and slow.

A leather faced gigolo crouched next to me; his cloudy pink tongue wiggled out of his mouth like a worm into space. He swigged a sparkly soda pop, and then, enigmatically, pointed to a dark room, like the kind of room you'd find in the back of a tricks and novelty shop.

I acknowledged, yes, that is the room on the inside of my inner dialogue and have decorated it with the most energetically conscious design of Feng Shui.

"In fact, I'm supposed to go in there shortly for a palm reading." I made my move to the hallway, but before I could take a forward step, the man in the smiling gorilla costume blocked my path.

"You'll- need this..."

He urgently thrust a heavy bamboo cup into my hand. I can't see my drink but, it smells; it reeks, like Ovaltine.

"This is whiskey sour?"

With his big grin, he forcefully, though amiably, shoves me to the back.

As he did, I glanced over his big hairy shoulder; just in time to see the white suited men ejaculate blue frosty cum. They erupted into shrieks and laughter like clown seals at a Coney Island water park and bounced the maraschino cherries on their noses like beach balls. The Siamese twins lashed their blue insect tongues together.

A bead of sweat dripped in my eye.

"I'm so thirsty, and the humidity..."

A slender man, with a vague elongated resemblance to a Gumby-like version of Michael Jackson, placed a coin in the juke, and a scratchy, energetic, calypso tune blared abrasively from the torn speakers; he did the mashed potato.

I pulled a vinyl briefcase from the bathroom cabinet; but when I hit the street, the sky inverted orange and I vaporized into a sidewalk shadow.

I choked on paranoia, worse than my personal worst, on tea, in Venice, high; I left twenty dollars in the garbage at Chan's Vietnamese take out. A shopping cart schizophrenic told me to do so; a street quack hypnotized me, compelled me to walk like a chicken,

"Bawk, bawk, bawk..."

A crowd gathered and laughed like crazy, and when I snapped out of it, I was naked, center stage. I split, post haste.

I waited by the Karmann Ghia. The pill itch made an infected spider bite feel like an angora sweater. Every fraction of a second, a new rusty pin stabbed the inside of my eyelids. The dashboard Jesus lifted his arms, turned his plastic robed body to me and said in a tiny polyurethane voice, "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth."

The door of the pharmacy opened and Inez, the patron saint of all things pure, super charged, melancholy, and noble, had scored the whole damn candy store, three giant bags of rainbow party favors; Vicodin, Percocet, Valium, Dexedrine, Xanax, Ritalin, Oxycodone, Adderall, Lyrica, Klonapan, Nembutal; and others I never even heard of but was confident of their pedigree.

We had enough beautiful skittles in those three bags to last any normal human for a lifetime; but for us, it meant one rock solid hell of a weekend.

Inez, an anonymous genius, a hidden female Rimbaud channeling fire and brimstone visionary sermon by virtue of swirling moments in time as if they were chunks of paint; an incredible 'Wheat Field with Crows' onto the canvas of her life; an unstoppable masterpiece.

She gave the doctor a hand job and let him stick it in. Numero 86.

Who knew that a blotchy yellow and maroon thatched roof side road run by grave diggers by zombies joyless stale pharmacy could, in reality, be the ultimate one stop super-shop for all of our weekend narcotic needs?

I chivalrously opened the car door for Inez, humbly bowed, hummed, and she gracefully sat in her designated seat; I closed the door, elegantly slid over the hood in my signature return to the drivers seat maneuver, opened the door, turned the ignition, reversed the car, paused just long enough for Inez to hand me a heart felt cocktail of pills, washed them down with a beer, and hit the road.

And, that night, naturally flying, with ease, pure, unadulterated south, Tijuana 2D to 15D to Hermosillo to Guayamas to ciudad Obregon to Navojoa and on to the unknown as the landscape buzzed and thickened; I ate half a bag, she ate half a bag, and we pulled over and fucked on the side of the road washed in swashes of pale blue moonlight, the heavenly air sweet and misty, the radio gently dialed in to a moody version of "Cielito Lindo."

Eclipses boundary, tequila downing, thousand mile an hour, chase, chaste, dust, heat, dope; enough time to love, we left again, to find it, further.

Rocket speeds, the word and the act, though manifested in all guises, its favorites still remain sex and drugs; and in the right dosage, synergistically, the time tested additive of rock n roll.

Rocket fuel, megaton-octane to power unparalleled dizzying speeds, the fuse is sizzling, itching toward a blow; it's already breaking speed records and time honored triumphs, it's already taken off and flying high; Inez her highness, and high we were.

Oil smeared on the road like the blood of a thousand slaughtered lambs; crank it, up, full force, nitrous oxide, Adderall, hit it!

“After-burn the hallelujahs straight to my cunt baby! More pills for escape velocity!”

Inez thrust her hand in one of the paper bags and yanked out a blister-pack of pills, popped three out, and shoved the green gems down her throat, then she busted open the Dexedrine and shoved five of those shit colored tablets down as a chaser.

“I need a little zip!”

She bent down and cranked up the radio and mariachi punk rock shuddered and raged through the speakers into our skulls; the sky, perfect serenity blue, we hyper-jetted into Sunset Strip overdrive like Jalisco style roadrunners on crack.

The Mexican coast dangled on the edge of the world and the road hugged rabid cliffs like a junky to his needle and threw around bends as if tossing a boomerang; peered to the right and deep down, in a monster chasm, rusted out cadavers of tumbled trucks speared by arrowhead rocks.

“Hoooooooooonk!”

A giant blow horn blew, “Get out of my way fuckers!” in the language of Mexican trucks loaded to the ground with weird cargo, tanks, and tarps covering secret underneath villages; and homemade wooden side rails buckle to hold it all in while wild faced, rubber burning, Mexican drunk truckers command all lanes.

“Stay in your lane, bitch!!!” I screamed, “You want a piece?!!!”

And played intrepid games of chicken like Miles plays trumpet cool, mad hep thrills just for the shit of it, skinned to the bone, and almost everybody run off the cliff road to tumble fire death.

“Yes, baby, yes!!!”

I swerved and kicked up dust to shoot gravel, launched busted spark plugs down the freefall cliff side and drowned in the ocean whoosh.

“Faster, baby, drive it fucking faster!”

She stuck up her thumb, jammed in the cigarette lighter, wondered where a candle flickered, found her fags, pulled one out, and lit it up in full locomotive coal smoke steam blazing high times hipstamatic color mass sensation mind head explosion.

She pulled out another one, lifted the end to the cherry of the one in her mouth, took a few puffs, made sure it glowed, and handed it to me; I placed it on my lips, took an expert curve, and inhaled deep.

The sweet ancient Virginia wisdom of sunhot tobaccos of shady willow and front porch swing plantations transfigured into delicious cigarette inhalations did me right kindly. Inez placed the pack on the dashboard, next to the plastic Jesus, for easy chain smoking access.

“God Bless Jesus, Baby! He has built our American dream of fucking and driving!”

“Absolutely, baby! We are all co-pilots and architects of this instant! And think about your uncanny similarities to Jesus! As John reported of Jesus, 12:32, ‘And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me!’”

Inez meditated on this thought, took a last drag of her cigarette, lit a new one off of it, and flicked the old one out the window, off the side of the road, and into the blond Mexican brush that lifted up the hills like helium brush to the upper echelons of cloud touch and probably, most likely, ignited raging flames of wild fire blazing in our dust.

“Let ‘em burn baby! Eat our smoke! Suck our tailpipe! Raging flames for the hills is like a rollicking bonfire of all vanities.”

We cruised easy on open road in fourth gear, pedal to the floor, my hands on wheel, eyes on highway, on curves, on subtle gradations, debris, and obstructions.

She popped a couple of fresh pills, leaned over the stick shift, grabbed my jock, and unbuckled my belt. She had the most dexterous fingers and tender touch, like she was playing a Chopin nocturne.

“Baby, listen to the motor hum! We are on an auto pilot pilgrimage headed straight to the source of pure Mexican salvation!”

She bobbed her warm lips head up and down; what a natural, she had so many talents. I smoked my cigarette and mariachi blasted like a nocturnal flower opening all of creation in my ears, beautiful strained and painfully glorious flower petal screeches of trumpet.

Inez lifted her head, “Drive faster baby!”

I dug in even deeper on the accelerator, as if there were no floor pan or chassis, and I could feel the tires fight to keep their grip on the road. No matter, I knew we’d be fine; I could drive with my eyes closed, prayer was enough; I was in mass, the church of the holy road, green pill Eucharist, the altar of Ghia, and Saint Inez between my legs.

Her swirling shamanic mouth; transported; my mind went blank and surrendered to the pulse of life and all of its imaginary machinery: all of its perverse tropes and ironies, all of its angelic possibilities and cathedrals of self-subjugation, all of its circuses, all of its blank looks, all of its soulful hymns, all of its dead, all of its suffocations, all of its sorrow-face workmen in overalls and oily rags at sunset, all of the limitless sorrow of tailored men committing gradual suicide at home and offices, all of the imaginary incomes and moneys, all of the artificial nations, all of the all of the; and in spite of these machinations, in spite of these pulsations, here was Inez, here were roads, here were vast webs of roads, limitless horizons of innocent generous roads, unfolding roads full of blow jobs, drugs, and triple X full octane nut busting life.

Fuck it; eat my dust. I flicked out my cigarette and Inez got more animated with her head bobbing. And in spite of the chaos of road crash and piston wail, I could distinctly hear her sweet poetic grunts and gags, earnest melodies like a nightingale in the middle of Mexican raceway sunblast highway high noon.

I swerved around a curve, took a bend, Inez dug in with more enthusiasm, clouds floated in the sky, pharmaceutical pill clouds of all different flavors; there’s a get your brain like cheese cloud; and there’s a magic rainbow get your pulse screaming high frequency cloud; and there’s a happy smile with balloon animals cloud; and there’s an introspective moody and genius cloud unraveling the secrets of inner cloud and outer

cloud and the meaning of cloud and suddenly in unexpected convulsions rains out of himself cloud and disappears.

And the ground, heat steaming and tar black, face scrape coarse pavement blurred into soft grey velvet, kitten fur; yellow etches slapped down the center line to trace a racing stripe, to trace a thin yellow brick road, somewhere a Mexican OZ of heaven and hell.

I intuited the road while I reached back and grabbed the super eight camera. I gripped the handle and pulled the trigger and held it up high up to my forehead and filmed the back of Inez's head bobbing up and down; I filmed the dashboard Jesus, I filmed the speedometer, I filmed the hood, curves, the wild road in all its capricious Mexican bends for no reason, just impulse, honest impulse and twists.

The mariachi wailed louder in other world radio trumpets and the pitch of the day grew higher and I screeched the tires on a curve close enough to look down the ghastly and deadly drop; all the fearsome rock boulders at the bottom of the cliff and I saw a moment of eternity blaze before my eyes in a white flash, the reflection of a windshield in the on coming lane.

“Oh Yeah!”

My bug juices flared in Inez's mouth and she milked me like I were a push up, draining the last drip of pearly goodness she so skillfully and nobly extracted. Then, in a rare display of affection, she rested her head between my legs for three whole mariachi songs, perfectly at peace in faithful repose beside my flaccid flesh.

I carefully opened a box of Oxycodones, busted a few out of their blister foils, and tossed them back. There was no limit to the amount of relaxation one was in entitled to in life; there was no limit to the amount of orgasms and sacreligion one was entitled to. We are not rewarded for our sufferings, but for our joy in life. If you could manage to avoid or survive the all-fronts axis assault by the innumerable Machiavellian mosquitoes constantly circling your head at any given moment, then you stood a fighting chance to actually live, really live something alright, and look back with old man wisdom in rocking chair and soft nights, early bedtimes and antacids that it was all worth while, while it lasted, and unquantifiable peace except in sweet nostalgic smiles and weird flashbacks on afternoons in rocking chair.

“Fuck the kids, let's eat them for dinner!” Inez yelled.

“Too much gristle! You already ate them!!!” I yelled.

The teachers don't know shit, the church don't know shit, the government don't know shit, the parents don't know shit, I don't know shit. Let's take some LSD and let everyone have some fun, trash the place with gasoline and hot rods, let 'em do it. Burn up the world with spray paint and methamphetamines; let 'em do it. Strip all teenage girls into their tiny bikinis and have their joys because they will anyway and wanna', let 'em do it. Anyone left behind; blow them the fuck out of the water.

It's top gear, it's full speed, it's drugs, its kicks.

A line of cars bumper to bumper backed up in the on-coming distance; a checkpoint. I turned the volume down on the mariachi music and Inez stashed the pills, pulled out her

lipstick, and dolled herself up in the side view mirror. I zipped up my pants and buckled my belt.

“I hate these fucking things,” I said, “It’s terrible for gas mileage.”

We inched closer behind the minor jam up of cars, all spewing out that dirty sulfur smelling Mexican gas- a direct shot from their choking exhausts into my lungs.

A group of Mexican soldiers in dark fatigues sweated their balls off in the black blazing asphalt sun, a few on the road, a few leaning against a government pick-up parked on the dirt roadside; one absent-mindedly switched the safety on and off of his m-16 dangling from his shoulder keeping one finger on the trigger at all times. A stern faced soldier waved the car in front of us forward and we came up to the stop.

A baby faced soldier put up his palm for us to halt, walked up with his machine gun, and leaned into me.

“De Donde Vienes?”

He had terrible dental work.

A third soldier, a grizzled Escobar-looking veteran, simultaneously came up on the passenger side and peered in the car, observing our stacks of luggage and scattered belongings. Inez struck up a friendly Spanish conversation, something about his long machine gun. He took the bait.

He told her she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen; he was in love, she said something coy and they both laughed. Everything was fine.

I told the soldier,”

“Una vacation...”

The congenial laughter on the other side of the vehicle disarmed any malintentions on his part; he calmly waved us on.

“What did you laugh about?”

“I let him peak up my skirt.”

“Oh. You speak good Spanish.”

“It’s my language baby, it’s my heritage,”

“I want to pour your heritage all over my honey nut cheerios and eat it with sloppy bites and slurps and gobble you up in all of your Andalusia Argentinean softness, they’re grrrrreat, Andalusia sweet nuggets is the smart way to start my day.”

I pulled up to a dusty tienda painted red and white, the coca-cola colors; and next to a ferreteria, an auto shop where a guy in a blue jump suit, big gap in his front teeth, slick sideburns, crawled beneath a red Nissan.

And while Inez observed the compulsions of sky, I leaped up on tall concrete sidewalk, past ubiquitous and requisite mangy skeleton dogs- dogs everywhere on sidewalks on rooftops on highwires- and into the shop.

The place was cluttered with shelves of beans, canned vegetables, and candy that looked like it could be a plastic toy. I trekked my way through the colorful products to a dingy cooler in the back where I grabbed three six packs of Pacifico, brought them to the front, laid them on the counter, paid the wide faced proprietor, then jumped back past the mangy skeleton mutts, slid over the hood, and landed behind the wheel just as Inez was taking her fourth mental note of fresh discoveries of sky.

We were back on the road and I floored it to the max. The sun burned in immediate and personal star like ways, flared incessant solar fires like the first strike of match; we were in a rocket ship drag racing through the mad cosmos of Mexican highways, searching for life on earth.

I turned on the windshield wipers,

“What for?” Inez asked

“To get these fucking ‘Have A Nice Day’ smiley faces off of the window.”

‘Have A Nice Day’ smiley faces- all colors, some spinning, some with swirling eyes, some with tongues sticking out, some with little devil horns; some in neon and crawling across the hood of the black diamond Ghia leaving a slimy slug trail of different tacky neon glitters.

I tried to catch one as it bounced off the windshield but missed, slippery little bastards. From what I could tell, they were soft and made of something like snot and bounced off the car like a pogo stick.

“Just go with it,” Inez said.

I looked at her; she was a goddamn smiley face, too.

“Ugh! Enough smiles!!! I’m being mocked!!! I get it!!! Hah, Hah, Hah!!! Sarcastic smiles because I’m an artist of the fucking road! I cannot work under these conditions!!! I cannot tolerate a hail storm of ‘Have A Nice Day’ smiley faces while I’m creating a serious masterpiece out of this excrement of an autopista!”

I struggled to concentrate in the faces of the torrential downpour of electric Kool-Aid smiley faces sizzling like sparklers on the road and splattering on the windshield in day-glow paint spatters. A curve came up suddenly; I cranked the wheel and barely made it.

“You okay, baby?”

I refused to look at her ‘Have A Nice Day’ face.

“Couldn’t be better, jut testing the handling, everything looks fantastic.”

I cracked open a Pacifico and bent my head down low so I could peer through the lower edge of the windshield, beneath the barrage of smiley faces sludge, and dug my foot into the accelerator to barrel directly into the ocean of faces, not a problem. The faster we went, the sooner we’d be out of the storm.

I looked in the rearview mirror- a hailstorm of ‘Have a Nice Day’ faces. They, like everything else, were left tumbling in the distance behind us.

All along the highway, crosses and flower altars marked where wrecks had slammed into the side of the mountain or cars flew off the side of a cliff; memorials in roadside gravel to the shadow of human carnage.

Some were just sad forgotten altars of burned out candles and bouquets of dead flowers, sometimes a weather-torn teddy bear. Others were a grand exhibition of plastic bouquets and rosaries dangling on rebar crosses with framed pictures of Jesus, Mary, and the pope- neatly arranged in that order.

The earth fluttered like flailing modern dances, expressive motions, and the absence of the fourth wall, audience participation, an ambitious and interactive joint experience of the broad stage; the movements were a lean to the side with one arm back interspersed with skulls, from one side to the next, broken up into jittery parts and full of important symbolism; the dancers themselves freaky looking and insane.

And then a growl and crawl, a jump, a gesture of the elbow.

We blew past a construction crew, tanned brunettes in construction hard hats and in skintight bikinis jack hammering the asphalt and digging out a new trench. They looked up at Inez with baby-oiled looks of interest as we whizzed past.

Inez stood up on her seat and jumped up and down like a mini trampoline, little balls of dust exploding from the impact of her feet like dirty motel rooms with a stack of quarters in the vibrating bed slot at an Arizona junction of hot dog stand and diner, hamburger, long counter, milk shake.

Her hair tossed in the wind, she raised her arms, laughed with joy, and bounced on the seat; rapid bounces- her legs firing like NASCAR cylinders.

It all came in flashes like a mad cathouse roadhouse barroom brawl, accelerations and faces pushed back on bones like soft clay 9-g astronauts, new sputniks of outer space inner world tequila soaked keen tremendous bliss-kicks; rockabilly rages, ear piercing decibels, thrust, and elegant bombshells with tattoos of sparrows across their breast; and now it's mariachi wailing, the loudest and most raucous of all punk movements when combined with asphalt, pills, pussies, cocks, hideous cliffs, suicidal deranged maniacs, courage, and explosions of synapse.

Dust has no conscience; the road trailed us without regret, we shed, piece by piece, cell by cell, our former pods of self, hitherto symbols of identity; brother, sister, mother, apartment, employment, friend, inquiry, trinkets, jewelry, memories, indoctrinations, toys, collectibles, books, inclinations; all bits of dust spewing from our rear tires and lost in the past of the Mexican highway; new dust ahead but immediately forsaken and rejected to the graveyards and catacombs of backwards roads.

Flames exploded from the tailpipe of our jet car; supercharged, sexed up, pill high to the sky.

“It's like tic-tac-toe, baby, the most beloved of all children's games, yet is so basic and satisfying, it employs X and O's the way people signify kisses in love letters; the road is our X's and O's and love letter to the universe, it offers non marginalized edification and is our chosen icon of kisses and affection.”

Inez cracked open a new Pacifico, handed it to me, and then another one for herself. She opened up some more pills and handed me a handful.

“What are these?” I yelled.

“Who knows?” Inez yelled.

I swallowed them and washed them back with my beer.

I looked off to the left; a circus family expertly performed a tap dancing juggling routine on the side of the road. They waved as we blew by; it all turned into an abstraction, the past and realities and the implications of beer choice, of devils and saviors, I liked it whatever it was; triple X redemption.

Las Vegas neon strippers danced inside red light windows carved from cliff walls; they blew kisses at me and jiggled their hips and rattled their pasties with sparkle and panache.

“Hey, check out those strippers!” I yelled.

“Good idea, baby!”

Inez stood up on the seat again; I saw her in multitudes, the wind whipped through her hair and body, she separated and reattached, bent back on the seat arching her breast and gave that stripper I want to suck and fuck you look.

Cars swerved from the other direction, eyes wide and mouths gaping. I heard the faint howl of a truck driver; another yanked his huge horn. I pulled the super-8 out and pulled the trigger and could actually see the film frames in their celluloid texture codifying the light and images and, unable to withstand the content or intensity, warped and overexposed in particular random heart-wrenching patterns imbibed with honest moments of clarity. The passenger seat was a Vegas strip club and Inez was the high priestess in stiletto heels and slutty sparkling string bikini.

Her shirt fluttered up to reveal a skintight bikini top; nipples poking out like little sex hungry kitten paws. She held onto the edge of the seat, a stripper pole, and flung herself on it, wrapped her legs around it, made tramp pretzel shapes, swiveled around it, humped it from the floor; her arms flailed in the air in a weird club LSD go-go move to the extreme; hardcore asphalt, mariachi trumpets, pill head, and booze brain, truth body.

The radio wailed, our jukebox of the soul; a relic from bygone cat clubs of buxomed angels bikini past; music roaring, smoke hovering over heads of bleary-eyed and voracious sex hungry respectable gentlemen direct from work as retail manager, bond salesman, human resource director with collar loose and hanging over jacket, whiskey splashes spilled on table and emitting up its powerful wafts of alcohol perfume to nostrils and fog head.

The mariachi record spinning, the needle twisting along its fine grooves, it wailed out fossils embedded in vinyl, forgotten musicians, and in some cases dead, trumpet blows of somewhere; key changes and frenetic, blasting out canciones of grace and mystical intensity; selections, press keys, K-5 or L-2 to combine number and letter with quarter in slot and record chosen plays with needle hint of scratch and soul shattering triumph.

Inez tossed her body with triumph, her arms flailed with go-go grace, and the curves became more dangerous, and she gyrated and shook it baby in every dog-panting expression and classic aesthetic.

A deep breath, an inhalation, a lewd thought; the ice in glass clinks, a swig, a driven lyric, a twitch of the nose; a brow furled with concentration and hope; cigar dangles from mouth like racetrack horse watchman.

The speakers, the incredible inanimate allies and creations delivering raucous soundtracks from invisible waves of mariachi space like transmissions to mission control or dots on the TV, but sound, pure complex sounds and all rearranged in outside heads with beauty and power to compel, and listen, and drive forward.

“Let’s go now, hotter, faster!!!”

“Go Baby Go!!!”

“Wail!”

“Come on, Baby, go!!!”

“Go, Go, GO!!!”

The shiny stage picked up flashing colored lights of the sun and hills, a glossy platform for Inez to rub her ass up against the back of the seat and then bend over; her skirt hiked up to the curve of her ass and her smooth legs rode all the way up, like in a limousine, to her tight panties.

She arched back and let the air rush up through the upper limits of her legs, ran her hands slowly up her thighs as she bent over, and then kneeled down and crawled on the stage like a starving sex fiend meowing for a sip of milk; a sweet little soft purring creature begging for a pet and for someone to indulge her innermost thrilling feline wishes.

The music moved and elated her, she screamed into the highway,

“Wooooooooooooowwwwwwwweeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

I sipped my beer and enjoyed the show.

She jumped and shook and jittered; and the ‘Have A Nice Day’ smiley faces returned and bounced all over her like a phenomenal light show and spectacular accompaniment to her wild amphetamine driven version of the twist; they flew past her face and between her legs, little flying ‘Have A Nice Day’ faces rubbing up against her pussy and tits.

Suddenly I noticed a dirt road turn off on the right.

“Hey! I wanna’ check this out!”

I screeched the car full speed onto a desert road that looked as though it could lead to a beach, a roadhouse, or the Manson Family campground.

Perfect, I felt like taking a break from the road, let the pills sink in, soak up some sun, drink the beers, and get down with some infinity.

I gripped the steering wheel with honor, the captain of the ship and the hills rolled by us and behind us anonymously; wild Mexican hills of no law, brush with death, no

containment, no impediments, or hang ups; mad bandit hills of Mexico where the west could still be won.

Inez laughed, fully absorbed in the joy of it.

The hills, pure hot heat and dry, rattled with old Indian souls and shaman spirit that hovered as hawks above our trail of tears and rapid race to nowhere; the smells were hot, the smells were dry, they were rich and full of earnest and tender rattle snake cries.

Horns wailed!

I kept my foot glued to the floor as we hollered full speed over the bumpy road, no need to slow down; Inez was too thrilled and I felt psychic thanks to the pills and the smiley faces and now the golden Buddha's everywhere offering all their Zen perfect directions and navigations.

The road abruptly ended in a wall of cacti.

I came to a quick halt and dust kicked up the front of the car and suddenly the radio sounded incredibly loud next to the sacred silence of the land. We looked ahead; just past the cacti, a path opened up to a golden beach resting softly along a bay.

"Que Rico!!!" Inez screamed.

She jumped out of the car, threw off her dress, and sprinted across the beach and dove into the smooth waters like a mermaid reunited with her lost tribe.

I opened a new beer, lit a cigarette, got out of the car, and walked down the dusty path past a piece of drift wood and then onto the sand and toward the water's edge. I liked the way the water looked, so afternoon shimmery.

I drank my beer and watched Inez. She swam in schools of fish and breached the surface with dolphin acrobatics; she splashed in the water with perfect marine innocence; she waved at me- a voluptuous Lolita child in possession of dangerous sophisticated Mata Hari complexities.

"Curious that there are no fishermen," I thought, "No dark tanned man tossing nets with sinkers in the shallow water, not even any boats with names like, 'Maria de Carmen II,' 'Los 3 Garcias,' or 'La Gaviota.' And no one shooting the breeze in baseball cap, sleeveless shirt, shorts, hand on hip and smiling, while other guy leans on an outboard engine of boat attached to pick-up trailer."

Still the shaman hawks soared effortlessly overhead, five dark birds against the blue sky, big sweeping weightless air-circles around the bay.

"Is this how birds fill their free time," I wondered, "their idea of recreation, soaring away afternoons with noble timeless interchangeable nonchalance?"

Heat waves poured up from the sun soaked ground and obscured everything in its wiggly waves of energy; I gazed through the soup of the energy waves and, as though through clouded glass, could faintly discern a house.

It was situated in the shadows of some of the hills that bulged up on the outskirts of the bay, golden and solemn.

Candles flickered in the weird windows. The gate, crooked and rusted, looked like it belonged at a cemetery; then, in the avid rustle of the trees, I could see spectral figures, haunted spirits, fresh from a Dia de los Muertos procession; smiling skulls, their cheekbones high, elegant skeleton women in Edwardian gowns carrying parasols beneath the moonlight, graceful, prominent.

A skeleton singer with a giant guitar rattled his teeth like a maraca marionette and strummed lost pirate songs from sunken ships.

I looked more closely, a coffin was open for view; a skeleton soldier, dressed in military fatigues, badges of heroism on his lapel, lay motionless, a machine gun in his hand.

Weird stilt people stroked long, forlorn, notes with age worn violins; harsh smells of burning incense, Palo Santo, voodoo, wafted like fog through the hills.

Monkeys called out in rapid staccato chants layered one upon another in spooky, rhythmic, language; a sophisticated animal music. The sound of the chant left vicious bite marks and chunks devoured from tree limbs.

A band of zombie monks, wearing colorful layers of silk, like rowing roman slaves, strained to wheel a strange and heavy medieval apparatus weighed down with brass tons of different bells, magical chimes, mystical gongs.

The chime songs, with their twinkling charms, wove spookily through the layers of my thought frequency, penetrated my ancestral DNA.

Gypsy skeleton drummers shuffled along in clumsy clusters, macabre clowns, like samba, scratched out strange and exotic rhythms with their bony parturiciencies on their grim reaper instruments.

Candles flickered everywhere, some like mine- Santeria Jesus candles; they cast uneven and shuddering shadows onto craggily, yet mighty, trees that were filled with industrial strength cables of ivy, vines, and man eating anacondas that dangled from limbs intent on falling upon shoulders, seizing, and suffocating victim in a death choke grip around neck.

Galleries of deceased, restless, spirits, materialized and emerged along hill swashed in moonglow like a phantasmagoric slide show; uncles, stillborns, sisters, grandparents, murder victims, car wreck casualties, suicide victims, daughters, pet parakeets, family dog, former school teacher.

The windows of the house were grave, sober, spade-shaped like strange satanic portholes into the underworld, prisms to look through and witness the frenzy of heathen wisdom and the intelligence of sensual copulation. Each window flickered with a different color like cute rainbow cartoon inspired cyanide candies.

The door towered up imperiously, all dark oaken wood, like a strange cathedral door, a grim Charles Dicken's like door with a heavy iron latch for a handle. The artisan knocker was sculpted in the shape of a gnarled monkey hand with sharp nails ready to claw its way in. I pushed on the door and it easily swung open, a feather door, to expose a pipe-smoke entrance way.

It smelled earthy, touches of mildew, the soot from a bottle of aged wine, like being in a cellar, an evening stroll through the catacombs. The floor was made of dark stones laid by expert hunchbacks with fingers the size of logs.

A trail of serpent candles beckoned me deeper into the bowels of the temple and I followed them to the left, up a small flight of stairs, and then into a strange womb like room that evoked memories of parturition.

Tall, terrifying, ceilings and a second floor balcony, like balconies in theaters where a pale wrinkled woman plays organ, and here, though no visible wrinkled woman, was an organ, its bronze pipes tarnished and aged from a lifetime of dissonant chords and Locrian melodies, perched against the wall; strange, long paintings of dark, cloaked, 19th century hanged characters gloomily hung.

Giant brittle bouquets of enormous dried flowers dangled on the walls on the main floor, others ordained tables, dark and heavy wood, their legs scraped at the floor with clawed feet.

Exotic instruments, from lost tribes in Indonesia, the Amazon, Africa, edges of the world; littered corners of the room, stringed instruments with husks on one end, strings sharp and made of wire and human intestine; drums with whale bone frame and horse ribs knobs to tighten the percussive belly skin.

An elevated platform stood at the front of the room plush with rugs and velvet cushions. Shifty eyed gypsy women lounged against these cushions dressed in feather fabric, lean bodies, luxurious long hair woven with beads and colorful fibers. They massaged themselves with oil and looked stoned and lay next to each other and caressed one another's face, arms, and shoulders.

Massive wooden beams crossed the ceiling like giant locomotive trellises spanning the chasm of darkness and voodoo wisdom. Spears and crossbows, authentic inflictors of countless deaths, mounted on redwood plaques across the room.

At the height of the front wall, a stained glass window- icy, congealed, blue with streaks of fire engine red; light refracted through it with inflections of the devil's pentagram subtly worked into the detail; decorative and functional, like the skull and crossbones symbol for poison.

My eyes adapted to the shadows and light; I could see squiggling movements of more creatures around the room, reclined on cushions, smoking pipes with bulging eyes over bowl, mischievous grins and chatter among them, wild haired, screaming thoughts, dirty toes, bruise on shin, secrets and whispers, eruptions of laughter; some meditative and solemn, dressed in white, shoes absent, stretched out on wide wooden floor, plucked haunted notes from piano, ruffled dresses, nappy dreads; just in from the teepee, from the vision quest, from Machu Picchu, and piranha rivers; just in from desert wanderings and cataclysmic peyote peaks and glimpses into the hidden caverns of reality.

More creatures emerged from pillows and blankets, from underwater; rustled, yawned, stretched like cats after a day long nap, reached their long arms, some with tattoos, some with long beards, bony faces, sunken and serious eyes, some with marks, some with bracelets.

A table was placed in front of the platform; covered with rattles, hawk feathers, brown shakers, yellow bowls, bits of flowers, herbs, bundles of tobacco; candles flickered among the inconceivable collection of Judas Iscariot materials.

A man, with a soft and gentle face, his eyes filled with temperance like a forgiving brother on a quiet day, the lidded gaze of the Buddha that says, “calm now, it’s alright boy, I know, you’re here now.”

A thick assortment of necklaces clustered like seaweed around his neck; made of beads and fisherman’s rope, dangled with lizard teeth, falcon feather, a quartz crystal from the quarries of the Chilean Andes.

They tumbled over a loose, beige, Indian shirt with a colorful, hand embroidered, collar, a wide opening at the neck; loose cotton pants and no shoes to expose bare rugged feet of wise and distant wandering.

With a smile and a graceful gesture of his arm, he invited me to join him by the table. I placed a pillow on the floor and sat cross-legged to his right. Another man, sober and grave, sunken cheeks, dramatic eyes; sat between the table and me. Then, slowly, the other creatures slithered and filed into their habitat and sat in an orderly circle.

A blond woman, about twenty-five, sat to the left of the man. She exuded profound intelligence and intensity, seemed capable of speaking to one person in German, while simultaneously inserting another conversation altogether, within the spaces and pauses of the first conversation, in English with another; and, at the same time, having deep mathematical musings in Spanish about the universe in a whole separate train of thought.

Her hair tumbled on her shoulders like soft wheat, skin like creamy California hills in the summer, lean body like a jaguar; she shook a rattle in her hand, sounded like an Elvin Jones diamondback; sang, full of passion and in perfect key, hypnotic melodies imbued with tribal spirit essence, patterns of repetition and qualities of the viscera; she closed her eyes and shook her hands, and rattled the instrument with outer dimension precision.

The Indian man laid out a long leaf, placed chunks of tobacco on top, picked it up and rolled it into a prominent cigar. He held it to his heart and gave it a blessing, then lit it; plumes of smoke emptied out of his mouth and nose. He took the smoke, as though it were liquid, with his hands and washed his body with it.

He passed it to the blond woman who drew in a deep waft of smoke and cleansed herself, an adorable smoke bathing genius. She passed it to her left; a tall wiry man with stringy black hair and big lips, he replicated her action.

One by one, all the creatures drew from the cigar and cleansed themselves with thick, white, smoke. When it came to me, the end was sappy and full of creature slobber; they were animalistic and careless and allowed their drool to cover and soak the sacred instrument.

I carefully inhaled the smoke, harsh raw tobacco, into face, into arm, into leg, into hair; cleansed myself of evil and the demons I had unwittingly carried with me into the space and been harboring like scoundrels of mind for decades.

Then came a bowl of dark liquid; first the Indian, then the woman, then the creatures, held a spoon, dipped it in the swirling potion, scooped some to their nose, and inhaled the magic.

It was at that moment that I believed in Inez; I realized that she, in all of her foresight and compassion, had trained me for this very moment; her unrecognized, unorthodox, and unstructured pedagogy, however utterly fringe and peculiar, actually ranked among the highest in the universe, and the advanced lesson featuring the liquid H had finally reaped huge rewards.

The Indian and the beautiful woman shook rattles and feathers and sang, with blessed ancient voices, spirit chants and supernatural melodies.

I dipped the spoon in the potion like I'd seen the others do; and inhaled the sorcery. It felt like fire ants rushing in furies through my forehead. My lungs revolted and I hacked and coughed like the other creatures; they gave me a judgmental and sneering look.

I took another scoop and brought it to my nose; I used my other nostril and the rush of the potion hit my brain with motor revving, cylinders thumping, tires spinning and smoking.

The sullen faced man to my left inhaled it with ease and remained stoic as a holocaust memorial statue.

I shifted my legs. We had been sitting on the floor for hours already; and except for the periodic clatter of shakers, occasional chants and songs, all were silent. I gazed upon the walls, concentrated, and deciphered the wicked candle shadows as they danced with phantom spears and spectral arrangements of dried flowers.

The Indian placed a small case on the table, unlatched it, and exhumed a crusty glass bottle filled with deeply opaque black tar. It had a strange label on it with writing I'd never seen, like a lost language.

The writing looked slightly like Arabic or Pakistani script, but with strong hints of childlike cursive. The Indian held the bottle with reverence; the creatures gazed upon it with salivating lizard mouths; lizard eggs were about to hatch.

The Indian poured the thick tar into a small ceramic cup, held it to his forehead, whistled over the brew, and drank it. He poured another cup, whistled over the brew, and quietly offered it to the genius woman.

She accepted with angelic eyes, bowed in reverence on an exotic carpet, took the cup, held it to her forehead and, after a moment of pure intention, drank it back.

Her resolute performance had the air of a German kindergarten teacher, timeless and maternal, omnipotent to emerging souls; a gentle though unchallenged command of authority, leading a class of wobbly butterflies.

She returned the cup and bowed to the Indian. The Indian slowly wiped the glass, poured another cup, whistled over it and quietly offered it to the wiry stringy haired creature; he bowed and took the midnight secret, raised it to his head, and drank it.

After all the creatures had replicated this ritual, years later, the potion came to me. It tasted like burnt chocolate, roots, and raw earth mixed with black liquorices; left a pleasant residue in my mouth and sat easily in my stomach. The smoky tingles of spirits began to open their droopy eyelids in the interior of my energy vortex.

The woman rattled a cymbal as the Indian sang haunting melodies; every note hovered and lingered beautifully in the room like smoke rings drifting up and slowly pulling apart.

Time had evaporated; I had no hint of what time or universe or bosonic string I was in. Perhaps, as far as I knew, time suddenly froze everywhere in the galaxy and we were in a spacecraft dashing through clusters of stars into crevices of dimensions between the Milky Way and prehistoric pre big bang time.

Some of the creatures urgently stood up and left. The other creatures watched them indifferently and calmly remained in their place, musing on peculiar concerns deep within themselves with agonizing depth and complexity.

Two brown haired girls, gentle vibrations, at the opposite end of the circle, almost sisters; shared each others' clothes and most intimate details of feelings, lovers, and viscosity of emotion; childlike innocence of tumbles across rug with puppies tripping over words and castles built with blocks and gallons of crayon.

The Indian let his song reverberate and pulse through the room, slowly dissolve, like the diminishing gyroscope vibrations of a top, and invited the creatures to partake in the tar again.

The woman took another calm drink, bowed, then picked up a rattle, hummed, and shuffled out a rhythm as a soundtrack for the creatures as they approached one at a time, held the potion to their head and drained it into their lizard bodies.

I drank mine and savored it even more than the last; it tickled my belly with electric soul sparkles. Some more creatures urgently left while some others returned.

The Indian and the woman resumed their performance, a new song; I began to undulate my torso, still cross-legged on my pillow, with serpentine movements, heaving my chest in circles as though I were a severed belly dancer.

I could feel the tar nourishing my innards, massaging my stomach and colon. It felt warm and welcome to the layers of my guts.

The woman laid down her rattle and the music dribbled to far away lands. The Indian offered another cup of potion for interested creatures.

I swished it in my mouth this time, savoring the potent flavor like a fine scotch, let it trickle down my throat, scratched an itch, and wondered where my brother was, reclaimed my position on my cushion and let the beauty of the woman's voice infiltrate my cells and bring organic joy to their tattered organization; a reclamation of crystal like harmony into my transfiguration into a collection of fractals.

Rubbing a cooling salve on the marks from the toils of life and assaults by hallowed souls that had broken through the defensive layers of these cells and attacked their inner

most essence, co-opting them, in a hateful attempt to transform them into replicas of their fear filled hearts.

I had strange reclaimed memories of pre-school; a stormy day one afternoon and the lightening boomed and flashed with incredible magnitude and I first comprehended ineffable energy.

And daring heights of jungle gym, crawled and dangled from geometric bars like agile child animals without fear or reluctance; rushed across the concrete in profound battles of dinosaurs, I always Tyrannosaurus Rex, my companion always triceratops; and sweet sister somewhere nearby engaged in mature activities in exclusive pink domains of older sister little girl worlds.

My chest undulated in grateful accordance with their music; a simple choreography of movements as mandated by the instructions from my DNA and ancestors. All originating from mutual bottomless wells within hearts, music poured out, and from ancient rituals passed through generations of semen that saw its genesis in the hunting tribes of nomads and before that in the initial steps toward self-awareness with homo-erectus, Cro-Magnon, and the Neanderthals.

A tiny ballet; the curtain raised in the frontal cortex of my head, just an animal head, just a lizard head, just a creature so similar to guinea pigs and goats and other reptiles; indoctrinated in similar and peculiar ways; my lizard thoughts crawled around my head like blink of eye, tension of muscle, desire for safety.

Time seemed to wear on, but perhaps none passed. Some of the other creatures left to other galaxies while still others returned from distant dimensions. I had been too concerned, too preoccupied in pre-school, I should have marched into the universe with my chest out and merged with holy existence.

I had remote thoughts to seek out what strange cosmos lingered in the back of this occultist clubhouse that periodically beckoned the other lizards.

I asked the Indian for more tar. He looked at me with soft, kind eyes, and said,

“Wait until the water is passed.”

“Oh, the water?” I thought.

Moments later, a creature with thin mustache entered the room with a giant, almost swimming pool-like, glass bowl of water. It swished like mountain purity at dawn beneath July trees.

The creature had a kind, eager voice, intent on fulfilling with honor this prominent duty and essential component of the gathering.

“Oh water we thank you. Water that comes from clouds, into mountains, into streams; water that nourishes our cells and gives us life; water that feeds plants so that we may eat; water that purifies our bodies; thank you water for sharing your spirit with us; water that rests in this bowl patiently; water that survived ancient histories; water that has felt the pound of lightening; water that has seen the fire of volcanoes; water that has touched the bottom of seas; water that has trickled along rocks and soot; Water carried in jug in Bethlehem; thank you water for being here tonight; thank you for being blessed;

thank you water for cooling our skin; thank you for washing our tears; thank you for being our tears; thank you for crashing in waves; thank you for falling down falls.”

He slowly waved his hand, in figure motion, over the water and knelt down before it. He stayed there for an eternity; worlds were born and demolished. Most of the creatures sat reverently, silent; though some had begun to recline, their faces loose, tracing out diagrams of thought in the air.

Some were squeezing eight year old children from muscles of their friends; they abandoned cushions and a magnetism of souls commenced; they telepathically exchanged memories of ancient Greece and the time they picked pears by the river Ganges; they mentally chatted of Mesopotamia and the crafts they weaved at the village market during the times of the Ottomans.

The creature of the water lifted his head from his bow, held the bowl up with mahogany arms, and brought it to the front. The Indian waived hawk feathers over the water and chanted, then took ladle to the liquid and sipped, a gentle dewdrop sip; and passed the bowl to the woman.

She sipped from the blessed water while the Indian began to sing more mystical hymns. After a sip of the water, she joined in the hymns with angelic melodies and indecipherable ancient words of magic.

The rhythm of the man’s drum picked up and he played in perfect beats pulsating with blood memories and power. I continued my undulations and could feel the tar rumbling through my belly; stalled inside of me; but the movements helped work it further into the deepest thoroughfares of my body; I planted my hands on my stomach, could feel the alien growing, and massaged it down even further.

I wasn’t thirsty, but still eager for the water; after which more tar would commence to lubricate and fill up like epoxy the ancient fissures in the damaged lining of my scarred mental terrain.

The bowl traveled in increments of micro soul steps.

A herd of wild horses galloped, traversed canyons, untamable presence, slap of tales, thud of hide, clap of hoof, grunt of snout, kicked up dust of rangeland plains Montana’s, raced with wide strides in valleys of multi galactic strata; they thundered through my head and I leaped on one, rode it along precision of lines through sky with one hand on its mane.

The water was only inches away, the liquid rite of passage, my entry ticket to new movie theater, diorama, an unparalleled production, an always leave them wanting more.

However, I couldn’t resist the compulsion; I followed candle trail into the mysterious black of back where the other creatures dissolved, a leman prince, perhaps, following the heard of lizards off a goliath precipice into the mental wasteland, then devoured by cobras.

And down steps into a gentle garden, shrouded in bleak cloak of night, yet flowers huddled together, storybook on nightstand, closed for bedtime sleep, leaves turned skyward to soak up the dewy nutrients of night, vines and tangles wrapped around roots of growing up ‘why’ trunk tree.

A few creatures lingered in the garden candle light with glassy hypnotized visages; eyes, ears, nose, fingertips, tongue, third eye; all a vacuum for the intricate dust of the world, fulfillment of the fact; smoking peace pipe, whispering cryptic secrets.

The tree stood with somnolent dignity, observed the movements and vibrations of the creatures with impartiality. His authority was never in question; he commanded over the garden and had erected a monument of himself. The branches; giant arms as though made of granite, mightier in proportion than that of the phenomenal master of feats of strength situated outside circus tent.

The leaves, dark and broad, shimmered in the subtle trickles of breeze, and little swishes of hiss when the wind came on in a rush and swiped through the sky. A canopy of dark, hidden, and delicate green fleshed fingers, tender, omnipotent; soaks up sunlight, feeding trunk, bark, roots, energy encapsulated in shades of erotic chlorophyll.

The well, like an ancient village well, English serfdom, the well of pooh bear, full of honey, the salad days before the plague, and filled with the hidden bounty of underground; opened from top of earth peek hole bottom of eternity, and a spectacle to the center of the colossal inner workings; raw, un-birtherd terrain, unbridled ancient bones, insect drool.

The well, made of stones, roughly built, weathered by time, heir of seasons and decay; elegantly surrounded by garden flowers, cottage blossoms; wayward tree roots pushed at it with wandering tentacles, a sleeping giant reaching out for more bits of nighttime quilt; a wooden bucket, like ice cream buckets in 1914 Wisconsin, cranked with ice and sugar, cream, vanilla, add salt to ice for a chemical phenomenon of even colder ice, and crank with gleeful eyes and anticipation of the sweet treat that awaits; tender lick of sweet cream balls as though made of snow, taste lingers on lips, devour goody.

I peered down the well into the inconceivably deep ridges of its down crashing plight, the dark blood of its rivulets, the cloaked expression of its inner most neuroses and feelings. I leaned over and wept for it, for all of its triumphs and inadequacies, for all of its forgotten dreams and lost loves; my tears flowed charcoal tears, full of debris and flotsam, tears of byproduct of sad years, tears of the superfluous unnecessary elements of soul, the glut of negative backlog.

The tree tapped me on the back with gentle limbs and encouraged my catharsis with sympathetic strokes of mother finger leaves; rocks at the rim of the well jutted inward into my gut and thrust out all excesses of unused tar.

It was an assembly line of branches and stones watching out for me like caring nurses the day of birth; hugging me and my shivers and supplicating, like pure lover at the moment of man seed, the purge of darkness from my soul. With every heave they cheered in supportive elemental cheers and rounds of enthusiastic applause, chatterings from one rock to a side rock in the peanut gallery,

“Well done.”

“Yes, indeed.”

The friendliest rocks and branches in all of the world; loving me like a gentle concubine, infusing and exchanging living cosmic earth loves, so unconditional and generous, unlike the sad loves of people filled with desire and hunger.

The tree lifted me with soft hands, smiled in the windy utterance of his language, and placed me to rest by his belly.

And with back against belly, I could see cottages and houses nearby, little adobe make shift shanty homes with open spaces for windows huddled on the hill.

While I sat there, the volume from the cathedral, the noises of the ritual, the underground hive, rattles so beautiful and immense, gothic buzzing and chant, grew thunderclouds and reverberated against the soundboard of hills.

The gentle windows of these ramshackle houses, like cardboard card houses of tin, how did they stand in the wind, and gentle yellow lights peaking out, each window; golden, rich, elfin; and perhaps a child with head tilted out listened with intent ears, with perked up, absorbing, interested ears; sounds processed through the tiny genius of emerging mind, irrevocably impressed with haunting buzzes of song, visions of strange creatures and the cherry glow of their pungent pipes, trembling tree with its wave of arms, the beckoning well in all of its dark and mysterious magic, the garden full of capricious, free loving, flowers in drastic colors huddled at night.

Somewhere in those windows a little Frida Kahlo or Garcia Lorca lay secretly watching, smelling, hearing all of life's richness as it swam in clusters of palpable hums; feeling to the bone every drip of information, every touch of wonder that spilled from the edge of deep lake of mystical strange creatures in valley; soaking it up and reinventing it into new and modern phrasings, combinations of paint, trope; and new, unused, meanings of word that emerge from the mask of subconscious years later like recollections of a soft and eerie dream from youth, haunted visions.

The music leaked out everywhere, overflowed into the sky and splashed onto the celestial constellations of stars, intermingled with the chatter of crickets and rush of ocean tides. The percussion and rattle gradually built up in energy, every moment more urgent, every beat more relentless; it built, it built like towers in ancient Egypt, it built like traffic in Times Square, it built like pound of heart throbbing in new love.

I returned to the cathedral, the creatures flinched, intimidated by my new found knowledge; an ally with trees, stones, flowers, and followed an invisible path to the epicenter of the magical symphonic chorus of us of drums and voice.

The woman sang with renewed intensity and the melodies vibrated with subtle frequencies like blood pulse angel melodies from the womb; melodies volunteered from ancient minds of Mozarts and Beethovens, great unspoken compositions by musical masters of Indian tribal night, African valleys, teepee concert halls, gorilla orchestras.

Rattles and feathers flowed down the Indian's back originating from a head dress of power; he welcomed me with kindness; understood the wisdom of tree, had spoken with council of the rocks; he observed my heart beat and blood pulse.

My body was translucent, like an earthworm held up to a flood light; streaks of red, lumps of color, trails of vein; filled with invisible spirit life that grows and multiplies in soft hues on rugged landscapes of soil.

I saw the intricacies of nerve, ligament, cartilage, artery, capillaries interconnected through amazing biological architecture; muscle wrapped along bone attached with tendon in an efficient and utilitarian act of evolutionary necessity.

My hand moved in a coordinated effort in full, widescreen, panoramic view; a spectacle, open hand squeezed into fist, then spread fingers out, then wiggle of hand.

Some of the other creatures had new courage to them, fresh looks of health, embodied beatitude; others were immersed in frantic scratches at ear, others with streaming tears of joy, others with streaming tears of agony.

The woman sang perfect songs as the Indian lit a thick bundle of herbs and gradually walked around the creatures, cleansing them with smoke and the ancient Amazon alchemy.

The feathers of magnificent eagles and hawks fluttered over his head as he made smoke filled movements with his arm, an aromatic forest fire for renewal in his hand.

Lasers shot in geometric precision from every cell of my being, super rays, dissected the universal microstructure of the creatures and cathedral; I took a step forward, then another, and then gradually began to run into an all out sprint across the geometry of grid.

Mud spouted up like sludge geysers between my toes; with every step I accelerated to a higher frequency of light intensity, the vista of laser grid surface ahead of me expanded to an infinite horizon and limitlessly small micron dot of a vanishing point.

My legs, muscles exposed, gripped with certainty every sub movement of my dash; my feet, responsive and accurate, cushioned by the soft surface of the grid, calibrated with precision the perfect structure of step; I was a humble stallion in the midst of a conjugal visit with the heavens.

As I raced more quickly the grid expanded, and I witnessed the elasticity of time as it stretched out even further in length; and even me, miles long, but relative to the velocity, just simply of ordinary size.

The information of the hills entered my repository of knowledge more deeply with every step; the ancient wisdom of earth, embedded in the soil, air, fire; every element reentered my consciousness with a virginal sense of déjà vu.

My heart pounded like a herd of buffalo in my chest with strong, solid beats, grateful for the rare opportunity to open up, to unleash, and test the potential of bodily joy. My lungs heaved in gigantic hot air balloon sized breaths, became inner zeppelins and caverns for magic molecules of oxygen, nitrogen, and other trace gases.

The man from behind the table waved the herbal smoke and lasers erupted from his kind being; red lasers, blue lasers, and as he knew, the organizational lasers of the cosmos rearranged and redefined in new geometric senses of understanding.

The creatures lounged and reclined, wrapped in robes, inside a Greek cathedral, baths of Athens; absorbed in leisure, with contentment; contemplating Aristotle and

Plato-like thoughts, tinges of what Einstein felt, and at peace with the curious rules and harmonies of the universe; at ease with our place in timelessness and the invisible blueprints of world; a forum for inner men talk, projections, and whims; awareness of the incessant struggle of the lizard and ape flying creature with delayed processing talents.

They leisurely lay with wafts of steam billowing about; lasers surrounded them as if they were submerged in an ocean of laser liquid; the girl creatures twirled each other's hair, their shirts already off to proudly reveal breasts; their inhibitions of socially indoctrinated false modesty obliterated in the kingdom of wisdom and a natural return to the archaic of tribal civilizations.

I was among them in my own personal Greece, a prince, and they were autonomous entities of emperors and dignitaries, all gathered in an ecstatic summit of honest soul bearing selves, all of us engineers of our own Romes and Athens and ancient Africas.

Engaged in the super heightened awareness of animal sensitivity, like the feeling of a lion on a hot meadow, satiated and comfortable with food, or the perfect pleasure of the soaring hawk with lidded eyes in leisurely flight.

And also the communion and peace of birth to death, the arbitrary relation of self to time, the impedance and artifice of nurtured and corrupted belief paradigm; a return to the moment in Greece when the moment of Greece and the moment of now exist as one, and the shining sliver of a line between infinite life and no existence at all.

Giant bonfires blazed in a teepee village as I danced among my brothers, my tribe, in raging warrior dances, the music escalated, thundered, and pounded out fearsome rhythms and all of us hither to masters of the hunt, hides of skin on our back, deer, wolf, caribou, moose, wildcat.

And the season was changing and the position of the stars was in transition as we had seen before and the time had come to shed these skins and adopt a fresh skin, a new coat; a rite of passage into the next epoch of our existence, to abandon other lives, outdated allies, beliefs, and understandings; all in exchange for a brand new foreign, exotic, more evolved, updated, and accurate view of time and existence.

And in the flickers of fire I saw my mother and I made an agreement with the flames to fulfill my duty to protect her always; and in the flames I saw lascivious joys, the women I had made, and I knew that a new era had come.

I saw my sister in the blaze and I agreed to protect her, for she lacked the knowledge, an incredible privilege, of the fire; to cherish with love and temperance my brethren and allies, and to destroy all enemies of myself and the tribe with brutal tenacity.

I made an agreement with the fire to amend my ways in accordance with the knowledge of the well and the tree, though only as a reference, for I had become new again in myself.

And in the flickers in the fire, I felt pains of lost hunts, pains of injured soul, pains of cut leg, of limp; pains of loss of attention, pains of loss for words, pains for loss of youth, loss of friend, pains for loss of opportunity; and through these pains, even though they reverberated deep in captivity, the fury of this tremendous blaze hungered for them; I threw them into the fire and they were devoured and obliterated.

The Indian invited me to the center of the room, his spirit a soaring eagle; his eyes, windows into all dimensions; he visited earth from a distant inconceivably wise planet of Bodhidharmas, pooh bears.

The eagle soared in the sky and I joined him in the heights of white cloud; we smiled with the smile of early morning joy, hot coffee and sweet pastries with his father and grandfather and generations of Indian chiefs, a pantheon of spirit animal protectors, overseers of the world that they once inhabited and bequeathed to us with original divine intent; and not divine as in something passed on from somewhere else, another heaven or celestial kingdom, but divine in the sense of truth resonating inside of himself from soul center.

I sat on the floor in the center of the room, the pod decorated with spears, long paintings, creatures, massive bunches of dried flowers; he took a cloudy mescal bottle, infused with shamanic herbs and ingredients; shook it vigorously, and the chunky bits of magic stirred inside; he poured the potion in his mouth, swished it around his teeth and gums, and sprayed it from his lips onto my face in a fire hose of strange voodoo juice.

He circled around to my back, chanted personally prescribed hymns, lifted the bottle to his mouth again and ruthlessly sprayed me with angelic fury.

The genius woman sang in more phenomenal frequencies now, her stamina increasing, incredible, majestic, outer worldly; she sang with the gentle purity of mother with baby to breast, the force of nature, a spring for the inner milk of knowledge.

And the man continued his orbit to my side and sprayed me again with the potion; it washed all over me and I could feel the alcohol evaporate while the herbal magic infused my skin; then the other side, possessed and chanted in weird tongues, full of esoteric Spanish riddle words and indecipherable images from deep soul excavations from the center of the divine galaxy and took his hands in rapid rapturous vibrations, channeled the skills of the hummingbird, placed them on my torso, and vibrated my organs with perfect frequency; the newness emerged in my body, newness emerged in my head and of reality.

The woman sang out gilded songs from Avalon, coated in rainwater and sunshine, dripping everywhere with the dew of light and nourishment.

And the Indian pummeled my body with his hands tuned to ancient frequencies, until all demons expelled; then reached under my armpits and lifted me up, my body limp, and embraced me in a beautiful and perfect hug, no sentimentality, no enabling, no greed, no lasciviousness, just a hug of honest communion; a truthful, perfectly timed and held, hug.

Gradually, the creatures begin to disappear, fading in the fatigue of their netherworld; one laid down, another evaporated, then the next.

Still, the Indian persevered, drumming, chanting; pungent smells of herbs lingering; the woman played her rattles; creatures vanished slowly, dissolved, one at a time.

I stood there in awe, internalizing the information of the fire as it still sent bursts of its flame into me. But even the flame was fading and trickling away. The dawn combed its first golden hairs and time had joined the world again. It was a new life, a new body; I arrived with an understanding of purpose.

The creatures disappeared or flew away, I couldn't see the Indian anymore; I could hear the woman, but from a faint distance, her voice still divinely beautiful.

I looked at myself and realized I had disappeared, too. The cathedral was empty inside, it was only a shell, once inhabited, now abandoned and made of opal or pearl.

Inez's joyous splashes, "Oh this is a gas!"

Splash!

"Whew!"

She looked different, more beautiful. I felt different, full of buzz and strength.

"How was it?"

"Delicious, baby, simply delicious."

She came in close and gave me a deep kiss on the mouth, rubbing her tongue over mine. I tasted hints of ocean on her lips.

"Wanna' hit the road?"

Inez let the sun wash over her body, the little beads of water on her bronze skin gradually evaporated.

"Mmmmm, this feels divine."

I sat on the piece of driftwood and looked out into the ocean. I knew there are maps of the world, pictures from outer space, but if I had to guess, it seemed like there was no end.

Inez put on a sweet, rose colored, summer dress, no bra, and slipped back into her seat and lit a cigarette. I hopped in the drivers seat and started the car. She leaned into the back and pulled a cowboy hat out from her luggage; she looked great, like a porn star in her sweet cowgirl element.

The engine fired up with a nice growl and I pulled back onto the narrow dirt road. I took it slower this time, appreciating the gradations and bumps, the cacti, the haunting calls of birds; a driving meditation. Inez smoked her cigarette and gazed dreamily over the texture of the hills.

Up toward the turn off onto the highway, I saw a yellow Camaro parked inside a dusty cul-de-sac surrounded by shrubs. It had blue and yellow California plates, fishing poles and sombreros stuffed in the hatchback.

"Let's see what these cats are up to."

A man with a beer and mustache had what looked like a pink stick of dynamite in his hand. I pulled up close by, sipping my beer, and honked the horn.

"What's up?"

"Just gonna' blow some shit up."

"Cool."

"Wanna' watch?"

“Yeah.”

“Sweet,” Inez said.

I parked the car.

The guy shoved some Red Man in his mouth, chew; he squirted out the muddy juice on to the dusty ground.

There were a few kids kicking around in the brush; a teenage boy, about fourteen, with coke bottle glasses and flared out blond hair. He had an orange crush t-shirt on and very tiny shorts; He gouged chunks of dirt out of the cracked desert ground with a pocketknife.

A chubby girl, tan face, wore a weird Kmart inspired outfit. She had a curiosity about her and ate a Mexican pastry as she leaned from side to side ingesting the gradual dissolution of time.

“Where’d you get that?” I asked the guy.

“You can buy them anywhere.”

“What is it? A dynamite stick?”

“No, probably a half stick.”

The teenage boy chimed in, “It’s an M-1000”

“Like an M-80, but bigger?” I asked

“Basically,” he said.

A chubby boy, about eight, wearing the boy version of the Kmart inspired outfit, helped the chewing dip guy scour the brush to find a good place to ignite the bomb.

“How about here?” The kid pointed to a snake hole beneath a rock.

“Why the hell not?” The guy said, “Fuck it.”

“Fuck it!” The chubby girl chimed in.

“I love this,” Inez said. She walked a few steps back to the car, grabbed the super 8 camera off of dashboard, and filmed the pyromaniacs.

“Blow that fucking rock up. Blow it up!” Inez laughed.

The kids looked at her with curiosity. The guy looked at her with keen interest, licked his lips, but respected that she was spoken for, spit out some dip juice, and carried on.

“You got any more of those beers?” He asked.

“Sure.” I tossed him one

He cracked open the Pacifico, took a sip, and attempted to jam the dynamite into the snake hole beneath the rock. All the kids crowded around and eagerly watched him. It was a tight fit, took a few tries to find the right angle; he kicked it and heaved and finally jammed the dynamite in the hole to his satisfaction.

“Gonna' blow the be-Jesus out of this thing, stand back!”

The kids retreated a few steps; Inez and I watched from just behind them, their blond hair at the bottom of my vision. The dad took a swig of beer and struck a match. It didn't light. He tried another one, a dud.

“Here,” I said

I walked to the car and pushed in the cigarette lighter, waited a second, it popped out and I carefully handed it to him.

“Here, try that.” The guy said to the fourteen year old.

The fourteen year old looked nervous, but reluctantly took the car lighter and approached the stick of dynamite.

“Alright!” Inez yelled.

“Fuck yeah!” The guy yelled.

The kid bent over and held the glowing coils up to the fuse, it lit. The guy, with a formidable beer belly immediately jumped back and everyone scattered back further.

The fuse sizzled as it inched closer to the pink cylinder, then inside it. The kids and the guy covered their ears, they all looked like they had gone purely mad; but they'd clearly done this before. I covered my ears, too.

A profound silence fell over the moment. The fuse was inside, but there was no explosion; we all kept our eyes fixed on the demolition site.

Kabooooooooooooooooooooooooom!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Suddenly, a huge crash, a flash, and cloud of dust kicked up everywhere, pebbles pelted me like shotgun shot. Still, through the debris, in slow motion I watched a chunk of rock rocket from the explosion in a slow heavy arc straight for the teenage boy. The boy's glasses slid on his face as he managed to shift out of the way of a direct hit, but it still pegged him on the side of his arm.

“Agh!”

He went down. He crouched on the ground and held his arm, in a state of shock, and tried to fight back the tears. He was terrified to look at his arm.

The girl screamed, too.

“Noooooooooooo!!!”

The guy rushed to her to see what was wrong. She held up her sweet pastry; a decapitated rattlesnake head sunk its fangs into her dessert. She dropped the pastry and it twitched in the dust.

“Holy Shit,” I said.

The teenage boy was still on the ground, cowering. We left the girl and came up around him.

“Let's take a look” the guy said.

The kid reluctantly moved his arm; it was quite an impact, the first sign of a very mean bruise. He started crying full force.

“Why’d you do it, Dad? Why’d you do it Dad?” The chubby girl said.

“Shut the fuck up!”

The little boy watching everything from the back began, randomly, crying too.

“You little, asshole, stop crying, stop being such a pussy!”

The firework excitement had devolved onto an awful dysfunctional portrait of a bizarre family.

“Get in the car!” the guy yelled

Tears streaming down their face, they all stuffed themselves into the tiny seats of the yellow Camaro.

“Thanks for the beer,” the guy said, pulled the Camaro out and drove north.

The road came up fast in bursts of light; like a silent movie; sun was still high, but sinking quick, we were still high, but only getting higher; we threw back more pills and I spun the tires back on the autopista with full force

“Where we going baby?!” Inez yelled.

“We’ll know when we get there!”

She leaned back, the pills coming on strong and rested her head against the seat to let it fall back to observe the sky as we hurled through the Mexican somewhere afternoon.

We effortlessly glided through corrugated tin towns and expanses of geologic virtuosity. The sun drooped lower in the sky, it was getting ready to quit for the day; and little drops of cloud scattered across the heavens, more delicious every second, smothered in lavender, strawberry, and peach glaze.

The sky blasted the cloud dough with its cosmic dyes blending, merging, marinating, folding in deep and dizzying ways; like wearing 3-D glasses outdoors, strange, unearthly colors, vibrant and saturated to the atomic core, illuminated, twittering inside one another; sky infusions with flavors like apple, banana, plum, grapefruit, watermelon, blueberry, blackberry jam in the glaze oozing and sugar dripping and topped with shining sprinkles of stars, the crescent croissant moon, and Venus.

Shifting patterns of light glistened off of the reflecting ocean surface as we traced wrinkles of towering cliffs; all the way to the horizon, the water, a miracle pool of popsicle juice, rainbow flavored like delicious ones at the park on Sundays.

And up higher, the light thrust itself against the granite walls with gamma aggression and gave life to the cliffs; aurally transparent, I heard the beating inside of the mountain, the gentle rhythmic pulse of one of the many hearts of the goddess earth.

I swigged back the last of my beer and gave the car more gas. Inez cracked open another one, took a big sip, and handed the rest to me.

Then, just at that precise moment, the sun sunk another centimeter, giggled with supernatural mischief, a show off of the galaxy in all its flirtatious flairs, explosions, and eruptions in a radical unfathomable blaze of pure fire.

“It’s ingrained in my head!” Inez yelled, “I visited the sun once and swam in its gaseous oceans of flames and fire, it told me so much more than simply a yellow circle in the sky.”

Because of the contour of the cliff side, the road curved to the right and we were driving west in a direct pure straight shot to the sun.

It filled the sky and looked close enough to fondle, a blazing gummy treat; and we flew down a ramp and launched across the sea and landed into its soft orange belly as if it were a cosmic jacuzzi.

Its autonomous gold edge touched the tip of the horizon and the horizon began to decapitate the flaming circle- no bottom, no top, just pure equanimous decapitation. It dove, steadily, into the ocean abyss, voluntarily sinking into it for the joy; but with unbearable buoyancy, a temporary sinking and slow motion bounce to rise again.

“Baby, I’ve got two eyes but can only see one sun; we have two ears but only hear one wind; and, sadly, only really have one thought at any given moment; are we insufferably linear beings?”

“Shrewd, baby, but what it suggests is not so much linearity as it does a type of threshold; the awkward shoe gazing space we occupy in our driftwood development before perceiving everything, the clumsy space where we still prescribe to archaic concepts of brain, yet consumed by ideas of eternity. And this fundamental tension manifests itself in quiet spells and nervous twitches- an elusive awareness, uncomfortable, yet utterly alive; and the more alive we are, the more uncomfortable we become; however, music is a palliative; and the pills, of course. Sing! Baby, Sing!”

“The day destroys the night; the night divides the day...”

I delivered a heartfelt rendition and Inez leaned into me. The sun slipped further, almost submerged halfway; it was on our right again, we were headed due south, deep into the heart of it all. I was zinging. Inez was zinging too; I could feel her frequency through my arm.

I cranked up the Mexican music. Inez closed her eyes.

Twilight lingered for awhile and I admired the new neon strippers that appeared in the cliffs, taking on all new poses I’d never seen, and colors; a stripper in leopard print bikini, a whip, illuminated in parts; starting yellow from the high heel, up the leg in red, up through her bosom in white, to yellow again for her head; and her arm, like her leg, also in red, flickered behind her as she snapped a whip crack, little crackling sparkles illuminated in white. And an L-shaped arrow that flickered on and off, “Nude Girls.”

“Giddy up!” She winked at me.

Another set her sights on me, “Some here, sugar.”

We were flying down a Mexican cliff side crazy Vegas strip.

“Double down!!!” I shouted.

Inez slowly blinked her eyes, engaged a glad smile; she stirred in her seat, reached to the floorboard, and rifled through the brown bag of skittles.

“Baby, how about mixing me up a cocktail, a little special treat, a concoction of shits and giggles; I like the orange ones, and the oval white ones have a killer kick.”

“Way ahead of you, baby, as usual; I’ve taken quick and accurate inventory of our stash and candy bag; investigated my mental rolodex of combinations and synchronizations, indications and recommended usages; and being well familiarized with your unique chemical make up and psychological conditions, multiple personalities, for instance; dug deep to exhume one of my most special and rarely concocted creations, one of my most thrilling personal recipes.”

“Yeah, but go heavy, I mean real heavy, on the uppers,” I yelled.

A big Mexican truck blew by.

“We got a long drive ahead of us, I can feel it.”

She dug through the brown paper bag, the crumply joy pouch; pulled out squat small bottles, put thick round bottles back, pulled out a square looking bottle, opened that one, took two of those pills and put them aside, occasionally ate some like chocolate chips.

She was the master chef of a five star personal pharmacy in the fury of the night, big puffy chef’s hat (in her case a glorious cowgirl hat), employing all the finest ingredients of rare herbs and delicacies, exotic spices, curious flavors into a gourmet dish of indescribable pleasure.

She took one out of her palm, replaced it with another, dug in the bag, split one in half, added it to the mixture; moved her hand up and down as if it were a scale and carefully measured the chemical proportions with flawless intuitive precision; always right.

“Baby, this is the perfect refreshment, a crystal splash of cool water, the perfect remedy to all your anxieties and apprehensions.”

“Is it heavy on the speed?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Give it up!” I yelled.

I put my hand out for the pills.

“No, no, please,” she implored, “let me.”

I slid low in my seat, tilted my head back, opened my mouth, and slammed my foot on the accelerator as she leaned over and carefully filled my mouth to the brim with a rainbow assortment of pills. She then held up a beer over my face, piss from a cherub’s dick, and poured it on top of the colored pharmaceuticals, like milk on fruit loops.

She was right, the unique combination of the pills, the way they flavorfully interacted with one another with bitter chemical overtones, but mixed proportionately with the beer at just the perfect moment and the rush of the Mexican air in my nostrils, all

combined and collected in my senses to a feeling best described as a beautiful kiss on the balls.

I cranked up the stereo, “Besame mucho.”

“I love this song!” I yelled.

“Sing it Baby, go, Sing it loud!”

“Besame, besame mucho, como si fuera esta noche ultima vez. Besame, besame mucho, que tengo miedo a perderte, perederte despues...”

“Baby, you’re so fucking hot for once, I can’t hardly believe it.”

“Believe it, baby, it’s all coming true straight from the source.”

Suddenly the pills kicked in hard. She wasn’t kidding, I felt like I had a microwave oven in my head, no door, on full blast; a blender jammed ten notches past liquefy in my brain and screaming; yet, concurrently, gooey as though I were made of Jell-O.

I slipped into a robe, like a robe worn by a prince after a shower and bath, in the quiet moments before his concubines are summoned. In the moments when he reads a poem and scribbles down a verse, hums to himself, sips from a glass of wine and stretches away the follies of his princely world; of horses and carriages, brash nights of intoxicated pageantry; mornings hung-over in palaces with drunken retribution and haggard wenches.

The night conquered the sky. Smells gradually began to change, became thicker, more exotic, hints of orchid and vanilla; and the blackness on the sides of the road took on even deeper pitches of darkness.

Pitch black for miles on end, except for the raw bits of asphalt illuminated for a second by the dutiful glow of my headlights. I kept my eyes on the road, occasionally dipped in my paper bag, helped myself to a pill for a snack and supplement to my already swinging high, and became a lightening bolt through the cloud of night.

Stars emerged in timid twinkles like shy children until the celestial ceiling overflowed with them, one for every dream-wish and bedtime story. The world felt soft and as if we were tumbling through the galaxy of blankets.

I pulled into a Pemex, one of the state run Mexican gas stations. We’d been running on empty for a while and with the pueblos few and far between, it looked like a good chance to fill up. Not to mention, we were running low on beers.

A gas attendant began to fill the tank. I exited the car and left it there with Inez who, with tea saucer eyes, stared enraptured at the glowing “Pemex” sign. The attendant looked concerned but I reassuringly patted him on the back and walked out of the gas station and past a driveway full of floodlights. In spite of the late hour, a crew of Mexican ferreteria guys had a turquoise Suzuki jacked up on blocks and were working on the underbelly; other guys just stood to the side in a waft of marijuana smoke with beers and scratched their face.

Nearby, a street vendor had a white push kart with a foot peddle operated rotisserie of horsemeat; he cut off slices with a machete, pumped the pedal, squirted spicy Pepto Bismol sauce from a plastic container, and made tacos for his hungry audience.

I came upon a cluster of spectral concrete homes illuminated by naked light bulbs, moths lurching to light bulb death; it never failed- always a crucifix dangling, always a TV flickering; often times an ancient wrinkled woman on front porch hunched over and counting her rosary beads; sometimes huge elaborate altars commanding half the house, full of flowers and candy offerings, devotions to Nuestra Senora De Guadalupe.

I stopped dead in my tracks. I paused to listen. My ears rang from the relentless hours on the highway, my brain buzzed, but now the stillness; the night was soaked in high-pitched murmurs, crickets, rapid crickets, earsplitting hissing beetles. I smelled burning plastic; something on fire, some baby crying, music blaring, a dog whimpering.

I picked up the beers in a bare concrete tienda, back tracked on the double, paid the gas attendant, and burned onto the road again.

“Mexico.”

Inez just looked at me dopily; she was stoned out of her gourd.

And except to fill up on gas again in Rosario, we blasted through the mystic night, covering miles as if they were inches.

The cities and towns, dusty glowing dots that we connected together and watched it all develop before our eyes; this dot to that one connects to that one, connects to that one, and then to that one; and, eventually, you have a picture that you think you should’ve seen all along- clear as day, a perfect satori picture of a banana, hat, donkey, or peyote button.

“Baby, the earth has become overpopulated, more people than there are ideas; how much of what we say is remembered, how can we possibly have an original thought? Are you going to etch it in pyramid walls, start a religion? Even if you do manage to think of something unique, it isn’t, someone probably already anonymously thought of it centuries before. Are we simply sipping from the collective soup of the unconscious and regurgitating it back? We don’t have any spice to add? Is it a Quarter Pounder with cheese or Moroccan lamb? Is it frozen fish sticks or shawarma marinated for days? Do we chew up marrow, seeds, and nuts and regurgitate it back like baby food, spit in the mouth of a drooling slobbering brain dead child?”

“Ineffable,” Inez slurred, “stick with what’s ineffable.”

She was in deep down on the downers. It’s alright; I didn’t mind a lovely barbiturate jar fly on my hands. As for me, I was sticking with the rapid pulse of the uppers- the perfect brain shimmer frequency and crazy eye alertness I preferred as chauffeur of this funky voyage.

Inez purred at my side; I took in the strange smells, the wild music, the rumbles of the road; it all dripped on me like looking glass dewdrops. Everything felt timeless and light, I could drive forever.

The world behind us- suburban plight, a creepy memory, we emerged from an odd dream into a holy new reality. Everything was new again, like childhood; the pace was different, the air was different, our eyes were different, our skins were different; the world ahead- full of beautiful songs; and most importantly, the automatons couldn't find us.

Tender tiny towns sprinkled the autopista and as I slowed down to drive through them, little lights illuminated sidewalk bars where music leaked out, where caballeros and rancheros or fisherman simply stood with arms crossed; and everything was slow, even the way they stood there was real slow, slowly sitting on pieces of wall, slowly leaning against a pole, their expressions were in no hurry, it was a slow palace of the abyss.

And when I got a peak in a house, through a vacant block of window or open door, it was still true, from Tijuana to Tierra del Fuego, a crucifix on the wall and a TV flickering; though one of the apartments had an extensive collection of liquor on display.

Between the pills and the beer, even though I veered and weaved at times, near mutt casualties, the drive was easy as pie, a five-minute joyride. I looked at the odometer, over 1400 miles so far. I did the math and at an average of 60 to 70 miles per hour, we had clocked about 20 hours into the drive, not counting stops.

That added up; the line of the hills glowed with a touch of dawn.

We were well below the tropic of cancer by this point and unquestionably in the irrevocable heart of it all. Hell, at this rate, we could easily drive to South America in time for dinner; top it all off with a Colombian snowcone for dessert.

I followed a sign for a route that split off of the main highway; a bumpy and dark road which connected into an even bumpier and even darker road; and as we followed it I could hear, deep in the churning machine drone of the jungle, faint crashes of waves.

And as the morning light grew, fisherman walked along the road with ragged bags full of bait, snacks, and tequila for the daily enigmatic voyage to the sea.

The road curved along the beach and I could see a line of motorboats all lined up on the sand; "Karmine I," "Karmine II," "Coral," "La Jolla..." It was a parking lot.

Oh parking lot, of sand parking lot.

Men doubled up on each side of the boats and strained to push them into the shallow water; some placed a foam cylinder on the sand and heaved and pushed the boat over it until the cylinder popped back up on the other side. They repeated this technique until the boat floated in the lapping waves, yanked on the motor, and rumbled off into the dark beginnings of their hunts.

The road opened up on a tiny collection of houses and shacks, a few restaurants, some bars; everything closed. It looked like there might be some activity during the day and early at night; probably another fishing town that a few adventure seekers and wayward tourists had come to discover; probably a few escaped cons thrown in the mix, too.

I saw a two story building on the right; as I pulled closer I could read the sign, Posada Amor.

"Perfect." I thought.

I parked the car in front of the Posada, inhaled the warm ocean air, left Inez sleeping in the car, and entered the lobby.

It was a simple lobby, orange walls, concrete and wood, a chair next to a table with a lamp, mirror, ceiling fan; a few dark paintings, some dark plants, all simple and clean. I could see a small restaurant in a veranda, all shadows with the chairs on the tables, through a short walkway on the side of the inn.

A small wooden sign hung behind a wooden desk,
“Recepcion.”

A bell sat on the edge of the desk; I rang it. It had a nice timbre to it; sounded fresh like the first awakenings of a new day. I rang it again.

A door to the side opened and a sleepy looking Mexican woman in her robe leaned out,

“Si?”

“My wife,” you never knew how prude these catholic women could be, “and I would like a room for tonight please.”

“Do you have a reservation?”

“A reservation?”

“No”

“One moment please.”

She retreated back into the room and I could hear her rustle; lights got flicked on and the lamp glow leaked beneath the crack of the door. A moment later she came out wearing a skirt and a light sweater.

She was in her late thirties, attractive, wore librarian glasses; her eyes looked very sleepy.

Nevertheless, she had a kind face, with soft shapes that fell in all the right places, a theatric hint to her expressions, a touch of restraint and mystery- like a port wine velvet curtain in an elegant old movie theater.

She pulled out a gloomy book from beneath the desk, placed it on the counter, opened it, shifted a desk lamp so light fell on it, squinted, rubbed her chin in concentration. We were in luck she said, this was high season, but she still had a room available.

“Also, there is a festival tonight in the next town, a fiesta; many, many visitors, you’re lucky you arrived early.”

“A fiesta?”

She unhooked a key from a wooden rack behind the desk and opened a big, wide, guest book and flipped through the thick parchment pages. I could see generations of signatures scribbled throughout time. Some signatures very dark and bold, others timid, some completely false, others with every middle name, initial, and suffix ever conceived of.

I signed in and paid for the night.

“Would you like to get your wife?”

I thought about Inez in her drugged out stupor.

“No thank you, I will see the room and get her after.”

She took me up a cement staircase, a crucifix hanging in the stairwell, into a dark hall. It smelled distinctly Mexican with scent of leather, mildew, and concrete, thick jungle air stuck in the hallway, trapped; also the distinct scent of the strange wood that the doors were made of.

She opened the end door, leaned in, and flicked on a switch. A light came on a ceiling fixture and a fan began to wobble ever so gradually, picking up speed. The bed looked sturdy, a colorful woven blanket neatly folded on top. There was a dresser with mirror and a nice large window that opened up onto a balcony.

“Lovely,” I said.

She opened a door to the right and showed me a simple bathroom; toilet, sink, tile shower, and a candle on the counter. She took me back into the room and carefully demonstrated how to unlock the sliding window of the balcony. She left the window open to let some of the fresh morning air in.

“In a few hours, there will be fruit for sale on the streets, and a tienda on the corner for simple things and beer.”

I asked her if we could dine in her restaurant.

“Of course, we open at 7” she said.

I thanked her and let her walk out. I listened to her steps and when I heard her bedroom door shut, I went back outside to get Inez and the luggage.

“Baby, we’re here.”

“Huh?”

We lay on the bed and I slept for a few hours. Inez was so bombed on the downers I doubt she’d have woken up even if a cavalry stampeded into the room. As for me, maybe it was the speed, or maybe it was something about the buzzing of the jungle, even after 1400 miles, I felt restless.

I stared at the walls for a while, especially at a grim painting of circus clown faces. And then I stared at another one, a naïve art canvas, “Santos,” with a woman saint floating in the ether, a halo around her head.

“Where did these paintings come from?” I thought. I didn’t remember seeing them before.

My eyes drifted along the wall, there were more- a garish circus elephant holding the trainer in its big arms, also an unsettling visionary painting of a lizard devil beast.

“Forget it,” I thought.

I got up and went downstairs.

I looked in the restaurant and it was actually busy. Dishes clinked, servers hustled, a light clamor of conversation, and the good morning smell of fresh brewed coffee wafted out from the veranda and into my nostrils. I inhaled deep. This was a sleepy town, but not as sleepy as I originally thought. Nevertheless, the pace still seemed alright and the ocean air was fragrant and clean. I walked outside and saw that the car was fine where it was parked, no weird surprises.

A dark skinned squat Indian woman, white shirt, white skirt, flip flops, brown baseball cap, colorful blankets and sarongs flung over her shoulders, one hand carried a wooden tray with stones, with shellfish? In the other hand she gripped a leather book. She walked up to me and opened the book. It was filled with pictures of Indian kids with sad eyes, a photo album of her hungry family?

Across the street a man stood with an orange fish in his hand, still alive, he passed it to his hesitant son to hold.

And just beyond them, along a stone wall, there were fruits and vegetables of every color- mangos, bananas, avocados, cucumbers, tomatoes, pineapples, cantaloupe, starfruit; fruits with flies buzzing on them, fruits with spikes, fruits with wrinkled skin, fruits I had never seen, potatoes in every shade of purple; a calliope of produce all stacked in a row of wooden crates. A forlorn woman nervously stood guard. She wore a green sweater, blue skirt, baby blue bonnet, held a basket of homemade goodies; no buyers.

On the corner, I saw the tienda that the senorita had told me about. It was dusty and simple like all the other tiendas, but the senorita was right- it had what we needed. I grabbed a six-pack of Modelo, paid an elderly man behind the counter, and cut back to the room.

Inez was still out like a light. I pulled my Jesus candle from my bag and placed it on the dresser in front of the mirror. I opened Inez's luggage and exhumed the brown candy bag, closed my eyes, reached my hand in, a grab bag surprise. I pulled a box of pills out- Vicodin, not bad. I took a couple and stepped onto the balcony and popped open a bottle of Modelo. The mist of the ocean smelled great, the heat of the day was coming on, and if I do say so myself, everything was aces.

The balcony hanged right over the beach; a healthy sized beach that ran along a wide bay, maybe a mile long. The fishing boats I had seen when we arrived, now out at sea, only ever occupied one small part of it.

Because of the shape of the bay, the town was well protected, jammed between two vertical jungle hills, like bookends, that created a natural fortification. The hills wrapped all the way around the village in a crescent. At the tips of these points, waves crashed onto jagged rocks liked canon explosions from goliath armadas.

The beach was divided into three even sections, in a way, because two tiny creeks trickled out from the mysteries of the hills into the anonymous oblivion of the sea at an equal distance from either edge.

I finished my beer and opened a second. Inez was still asleep. I looked downstairs and there was a blond white girl, a hippy with dreadlocks walking to the beach with a

dark dog. She seemed happy and had a spring to her step. She looked up, noticed me watching her, and called out as she walked by,

“Hola!”

“Hi”

“Doing good?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Appreciation appreciates!”

She continued down the beach.

“Alright,” I muttered.

I polished off the beer and had another, placed the empty bottles on the balcony, went back in the room, undressed, slipped beneath the sheets, and hummed in Inez’s ear. She smiled. I put my hand on her breast; she pulled me in.

And Inez was feeling generous that blessed Mexican morning and I howled from the deepest architecture of my soul, voyaged to another planet.

Both of us sweat soaked and calm,

“Yes.”

“HMMMMM.”

“Want a beer?”

“No thanks, I just want to lie her and let everything soak in.”

I wasn’t totally sure what she meant by that, but I got up anyway, cracked open another beer, and stepped back onto the balcony.

“Shit, it’s lovely here.”

“An elusive warmth,” I pondered, “a delicate scent of turf with hints of salt water, tepid lagoons, and sodden jungle trees.”

I gazed out onto the soft blue of the ocean, hypnotized by its subtle rhythms and currents, sipped my beer, and turned back to take a look inside the room. Inez, eyes closed, lay sprawled out on the bed perfectly naked. I looked at the ocean again,

“I’d like to walk on the beach, do you want to meet in the restaurant for breakfast?”

“Sure, baby, sounds good, real good.”

“How about half an hour?”

“Yeah, baby, sounds good, real good,” she slurred.

She must’ve popped some pills; she was rekindled and toasted.

I rinsed off in the shower, put on some fresh underwear and pants, a light shirt, brushed my teeth. I laid out my toiletries on the counter- a razor, toothpaste, toothbrush.

I grabbed the keys and glanced at Inez on my way out, she was out cold again.

“There’s no way she’ll be awake in time for breakfast,” I thought.

It was quiet downstairs; although there were a few more blank faced vendors in colorful indigenous outfits set up on the street; homemade toys, pottery, wooden bowls, jewelry, blankets.

“You want a pipe, man?”

A barefooted guy in his mid twenties with a black ponytail and surf t-shirt slithered up to me and snarled. He clutched a handheld display case full of pipes, bracelets, earrings, rings and polished stones. The case had a handle and hinges on it and could collapse into a briefcase.

“No.”

The sand spouted up between my toes and felt warm. The sun, having returned from her underwater respite, eagerly infused the world with all her energies again.

I walked up the coast, toward the second creak. As I walked, I listened to the incredible symphony of birds squawking, blathering, and operatic chattering in palm trees. A chorus of further birds deep in the imposing jungle greenery talking nineteen to the dozen added further supporting texture to the arrangement.

Some high altitude birds hovered in the air, circling for prey above the hilltops, I had hunger pangs of my own.

I smelled a faint scent of smoke, as if someone were secretly burning brush and plastic nearby.

The water was calm and barely lapped up onto the beach. I rolled up the bottom of my pant legs and let a small rush of water wash over my feet. It felt cool, but not cold, perfect. The smell of saltwater, touches of seaweed, and a rush of mist refreshed my lungs still so accustomed to the toxic brew of perpetual suburban smog.

I stayed there for a few minutes, just letting the water tickle my feet, then headed back to the inn to wake up Inez.

The indigenous vendors still blankly stood on the street with their toys, blankets, jewelry, pottery, and bowls, but no sign of the guy with the briefcase of pipes.

Once inside the lobby of the hotel, I heard a sweet, unmistakable, giggle come from the veranda. I looked down the narrow hall that led to the restaurant. Sure enough, there was Inez.

A broad shouldered dark featured guy sat at the table with her. The sinister pipe selling guy stood beside them with his briefcase of trinkets open; Inez was trying on a bracelet.

“I love it!” she said.

The man sharing the table handed the barefooted scumbag some money; the vendor closed his briefcase and left the restaurant. As he exited, he brushed past me and snarled.

Inez giggled and smiled, admiring her bracelet. I walked up.

“You’re awake?”

“Of course. This is Gilbert; look at the beautiful bracelet he bought me.”

“Lovely.”

“Not that a beautiful arm like this needs decorating.”

Gilbert ran his fingers up Inez’s arm; she let his hand linger there.

“Gilbert is such a smooth talker; you should take lessons from him sometime.”

“Do you offer lessons?”

“You either have it or you don’t.”

“May I?” I referred to the open seat at the table.

“If you must,” Inez said.

“Gilbert is from New Mexico, aren’t you Gilbert?”

“Yes I am.” He stood up, “Got some sports fishing to do, don’t want to keep the crew waiting; I’ll catch up with you later on.”

He winked at Inez and made his way out.

One side of the veranda opened up to the beach with a few tables set up outside of it on a concrete patio. On the other sides, except for the one facing the lobby, big wooden shutters were open allowing blinding light to flood through, a nice breeze drifted in.

The beach buzzed with activity. Brown skinned boys played in the mud of the creek and futilely attempted to build a damn. Every time the mud seemed to hold, the water breached a section and a chain-reaction commenced that resulted in the collapse of the whole enterprise, flawed engineering.

Mexican women, almost fully clothed in long sleeve shirts and shorts timidly splashed in the water and then later, with three kids, a dark skinned guy holding one; all of them looked lost in the shallow bay.

A dark faced bandito man in jeans, cowboy boots, and long sleeved shirt balanced a tray on top of his head. The tray was loaded with dozens of bags of pork rinds for sale.

Some little girl with pigtails and in diapers, pink plastic bag nearby, sat on a blue towel. A young dad with mustache, jeans and white t-shirt, exhausted, lay face down in the sand. The Grandma held onto her knees and stared out to sea. And the young mom, in a white shirt and shorts, ate an orange slice beneath a beach umbrella. Another daughter in little green bikini, 5 years old, dug in the sand; a baby stroller planted next to her.

Cart: “Helados Alaska Ricos Capuchinos.” A man in tan shorts and white polo shirt sweated and strained to plow the heavy three-wheel cart through the sand, front wheel up in a wheelie. He rang a loud bell, opened a blue umbrella, and set up shop by the creek. Two girls peered into the cooler with discernment and anticipation. Both girls were chubby; they each got a tan scoop of ice cream on a cone.

White tourists, two girls in bikini, guy with expensive sunglasses, necklace, Hawaiian print shorts, athletic, pale, tossed a Frisbee. They posed for pictures of themselves; drank beers, and then another group arrived, “Perfect timing,” “Sit down!

Lay down your towel! A dark tan blond in bikini and her guy in slick hat speared an umbrella into the ground while a pale couple leaned on their hands and chatted. Another couple hugged in the water like they do in magazine pictures.

Three Mexican bachelor fishermen stood at the back, one leaning his leg against the bumper of a pickup, stern looking with mustache, coolly observing the beach scene.

Inez had a gourd of yerba mate in front of her, Argentinean style, and a bowl of mixed fruit.

“You having a nice time?”

“I can’t complain, the mangos smell like jasmine bouquets and the pineapples are sweet and ripe. Also star fruit; have you ever had these? They’re kind of crisp and watery with a hint of citrus. But they really, really look like stars when you slice them up. Look!”

She pierced one with a fork and showed it to me.

“You’re right.”

She put it in her mouth and chewed it.

“Gilbert says there’s a festival tonight in the next town. Everyone is going.”

“I heard about it, too”

“Gilbert is a wonderful whistler. I heard him whistling on the street by the beach and I had to run and catch him, it sounded so beautiful. Really, like a natural talent, like a whistling prodigy.”

The waiter came up, a teenage boy, and looked at me with disdain. Apparently, Inez had already developed an intimate repore with our server; she spoke to him with a sense of familiarity, in Spanish,

“Hey Cutie.”

He blushed.

“Two plates of scrambled eggs with tortillas and salsa,” she switched to English, “you want scrambled eggs, right?”

“Yeah.”

She ordered the eggs and a glass of orange juice for me in Spanish and the boy took our menus.

“Isn’t he adorable?” Inez said, “I adore him.”

The eggs were delicious. Inez ordered me a second plate. I was starving.

“The waiter told me there’s a very quiet beach just south of here; he invited me to go with him. I thought maybe I could take you there. He has to work the lunch shift. I can always meet up with him after he’s done.”

We got the check. It seemed strikingly expensive. It didn’t have any of the prices itemized- the coffee, the orange juice, the eggs; just a piece of paper with a number circled, 470.

“470 pesos? That can’t be right,” I said.

“Just pay him, baby, come on.”

I left the money on the table. We went upstairs, Inez threw on her bikini, grabbed a big, wide, tan hat, and some giant sunglasses; I grabbed two towels, put on my swimsuit, dug my hand in the paper bag, we both tossed back a few skittles, and began our hike.

“Are you sure this is the right way?” I asked.

The trail seemed rather steep and rugged, perilous.

“Baby, after all we’ve been through, how can you possibly doubt my instincts.”

We continued along the narrow and dusty path. Strange shaped leaves slapped and brushed me; a spider web, a fearsome net stretched between two branches, hung low, and a terrifying brown spider the size of my fist hissed at me; also strange unidentified species of biting insects chewed on my legs.

We came to the top of a small slope and then down, and then over another one and then, after a few hundred feet, the path grew wider and we came upon an even steeper slope.

“I’m getting sea sick,” I said

“Don’t be a pussy,” she said.

I dug my feet in, sweated, and we came to the top; and just beyond there, the path passed through a tall, cement, purple arch.

“What’s this?” I asked her.

“The violet arches,” she said.

Once we walked through the arches, still at an upward slope, the sides of the path became a wall of dense green reeds and plants; I looked up and could see a thick, chunky, cross with the sun blazing behind it, burning like a pink light into my cornea; the cross looked pure black, like negative space, and the blinding light of the sun washed everything else to oblivion.

Then, after a few more steps I saw another one, this one tremendously overgrown with thick green foliage; Born October, 1973; deceased November 1976, three years old and already departed.

The graves were rough, mostly made of cinderblock and plywood; one was simply a concrete cross propped up with a pile of rocks. There wasn’t any order to the placement of the graves; they were as completely arbitrary as the deaths.

The path led through the contours of this small burial ground and we passed more graves, some adorned with the empathetic and martyred face of Christ, crown of thorns upon his head.

A pink cement grave, weather beaten, shrubs spilling over it, scattered leaves, a plastic wreath of flowers leaned against the headstone cross; the wreath covered in shiny cellophane and not even imitating flowers, really just a wreath of yellow shell shaped chunks of plastic glued to an oval piece of cardboard; with the exception of one large

plastic lily of orange and yellow, and two plastic green leaves that splayed out at the bottom; and in the center of the wreath, painted onto the cardboard, was a creepy teenage boy angel with long hair in a pink robe with both arms up and a halo around his head frozen in space, keeping the grave.

A clunky cement coffin rested on the ground; simply a washed out concrete block with giant back straining stones on top, sealing the lid. A weird crumbling miniature cement mansion altar was perched atop the headstone upon two pillars, one of which had already tumbled, and the other leaning. There were twelve windows in the luxury elf dwelling; and a crucifix placed inside of the altar, with a synthetic Jesus nailed to a twig cross; the Jesus gazed down onto the grave, a form fitting loin cloth around his legs crotch and ass, plastic roses at his feet.

A cross eyed man, the caretaker, worked in a cluttered, dreary, open air structure made of cinder blocks, full of plastic flowers and crosses. With a deranged expression, he polished a head stone; he'd been in the business too long.

On the right, plastic pots of flowers, tumbled over, circumscribed a gaudy and crudely ornate mausoleum, fenced up and locked. Also, a dead bouquet placed inside; and, enclosed in a glass case at the head of the tomb, a little clay angel, rose colored robe, gold rope around waist, a cherubic boy, wings spread, blessed, flying heaven bound with a cartoon expression of exaltation.

There was a pastel tomb of pink, light blue, tan, white; of miniature proportions, kindergarten proportions; burnt out candles lain around the perimeter and rosary beads dangled on the latch of the entrance. Three Charles Chagall angels, painted on the side, two of them praying, full of rapture, one of them relaxed and leaning his chin on his hands, arms crossed, like a high school portrait, all levitated among heavenly clouds, resting on a weightless bible in the sky, and below was a caption that read, "We are not sad, we are happy."

Finally, at that moment, I understood why people believe in heaven.

The slope of the path shifted again to a sharp downgrade and as my feet slid on the loose soil, I looked ahead and caught the first bright glimpse of golden sand.

"See," Inez said, "a little periodic purgatory is healthy for you."

Even though it was just the afternoon, the moon was high in the sky and cast a haunting pale hue to the afternoon, suspended in the taboo of daytime air, up early to sneak a peek on the lovers of the day, a voyeur.

Rocks, bumpy like big thuds of mud or spilled concrete, looked like the rough back of a brown dragon asleep in the sand, and jutted out on either side of the tiny cove. Craggily trees, leafless, bleached out, and white, grew from the rocks like ghost twigs.

Water swelled up and swallowed the rock's stumpy exterior limbs, straining for air, and then smashed against their torsos in an explosion of white and foam. A fisherman perched on the far edge of the rocks to the south smoothly tossed out his line.

Palm trees lined the edge of the sand and, I hoped, kept the wandering cemetery spirits at bay.

I felt like we were at the kind of beach that I'd only ever seen in National Geographic or on travel shows; One of those pure white and gold sand beaches from another world, the shallow water a glimmering cerulean blue.

The fisherman noticed us, pulled in his line, and went further south on the rocks.

"Check this out."

Inez pulled out a lumpy looking cigarette.

"Smell."

I held it up to my nose. Not, bad, some mid grade Mexican shit. We placed our towels down just ahead of a palm tree and settled into the soft warmth of the sand.

"Let's smoke it," I said.

"Yes, but I want to jump in the water, first,"

Inez stripped off her clothes and bikini, ran, and dove into the perfect cyan waves and splashed and tumbled, laughing; she really was a mermaid, I thought. The fisherman look irritated; a man of the hunt, he was uninfluenced by her particular charms. Perhaps we had infringed on his secret spot.

He moved even further away from us around the tip of the cove. Clearly, Inez was scaring away all the great Marlins and Moby Dicks of his Old Man and the Sea destiny.

I took off my shirt and shorts, sat on this remote beach in the nude and let the sky with all its immensity take me as on of its own.

"Jump in!"

I got up and dove in the water. It felt nice. I saw a stingray glide away, big wings flapping in slow motion within his underwater atmosphere.

I splashed next to Inez and felt like a kid again.

"Marco Polo!" she screamed.

"Marco!" I laughed and closed my eyes.

"Polo," she yelled.

I swam in the direction of her voice.

"Marco!" I yelled.

No response, she must be underwater.

"Marco!" I yelled.

"Polo!" she yelled.

The sound came from the other direction, a little further away. I took a giant leap in her direction.

"Marco!"

"Polo!"

I could tell that my quick leap caught her off guard. I followed the splashing sounds of her kicks, gave an extra heave to my swim stroke, reached out, and grabbed her ankle.

I did summersaults in the water. Inez flipped upside down, perfectly erect like a synchronized swimmer, and twittered her feet.

“Oh yeah!”

I dove down and stood on my hands, held my breath, and let a little trickle of air come out of my nose. I opened my eyes. It was blurry, but in an underwater upside down kind of way; the sun penetrated the water with enough power to perfectly illuminate the blond sand and Inez’s legs that kicked nearby.

Bubbles trickled from my nose and levitated to the surface, little carbonated champagne bubbles; imported from the sky and dispersed to tickle all over my chin, up through the blue blanket of water, and back to the sky.

Inez pushed me and I tumbled over, blew out the rest of my air in big watermelon bubbles, and came back up.

“Inez, why do bubbles go up and not down?”

“It’ ineffable, baby, you know that.”

The waves pushed us at their whim and we tumbled in their force, twirling and rolling underwater. I let one push me all the way back onto the sand. My heart thumped deeply from the exercise; it felt good.

Inez joined me and we sat back down on the towels. She pulled out the joint from the tangle of her clothes, and a pack of matches. She lit the joint up, inhaled it deep, held her breath, and then after a few moments, exhaled a giant waft of smoke. Her eyelids drooped and she already had that lidded tea high look. She handed me the joint and I hit it deep, too.

“Where did you get this?” I asked.

“That cute little waiter, baby, of course; it’s the glamour of Mexico. Why do you think breakfast cost so much? I’ve got another three in my bag.”

“Well done.”

She hit the joint, leaned in close, and blew the smoke in my face; giggled and gave me a gentle kiss, laid her head on my lap. I could smell the coconut suntan oil she rubbed on herself, it made her skin glisten; I lay down, too, and we dug the clouds together.

“This morning,” Inez confessed, “I came to understand details...”

“Details?” I asked.

“Details of myself and particular facts of this vague present.”

“And you said this morning, correct?”

“Yes, you were walking on the beach and I was alone on the porch, in an unusual state of lucid calm.”

“Hmmm,” I hummed.

“Your empty bottles were strewn about in a pattern of queer random logic...”

It was getting toward evening by the time we got back to the hotel room. I sat on the bed and popped a couple of oblong, white, pills and Inez ate some red ones. I dug through my bag and pulled out a notebook and some crayons and started to sketch some weird globular shapes and shaded them in with the freakiest colors in the crayon box.

“I’ve been doing a crayon drawing every night before I go to sleep,” I told Inez, “I’ve done crazy drawings, modernist self portraits where my eyes are separated from my face and my lips are on my forehead, no nose.”

She propped up a pillow on the bed, leaned against the headboard, and smoked a cigarette.

“And, one night, in quiet solitude, I promised that I would do a portrait of you, too,” I continued, “And even though, at that particular moment, you weren’t with me, off on some angelic whim, I suddenly realized that your physical self does not need to be present in order to capture your likeness on paper. I interpreted my inner neural responses to the glorious idea of you and translated them with purple crayons and semen. Look!”

I opened my sketchbook to the purple squiggle portrait of Inez.

“Jesus, baby, it’s awful.”

Perhaps she didn’t understand it. I opened the sketchbook to a fresh piece of paper and began to draw a new, more angular, shape.

It had come to me as I stared deep into the moon during the drive; the moonlight poured into my head through the French windows of my eyes and filled my brain with millions of incredible wild and unprecedented shapes.

I had strange and mystical thoughts in regards to life, the universe, and time; and suddenly fully understood, thanks to the power of the moon, everything; poems, music, stories, pictures, lives; they are all shapes, the simpler the shape the better, everything organizes itself in the universe in the mystical way of shapes, dots, circles, squares, parallelograms; thoughts are shapes.

I explained the epiphany of shapes to Inez.

She got up from the bed, cracked open a beer, and stood on the balcony.

“There are a lot of good looking men in this town. I like that one down there selling the fish, his muscles look so tight and graceful as he holds up fish cadavers and calls out with his tenor voice, ‘camerones, camerones del mar, pescado,’ yum.”

She sipped her beer, “Are you going to the festival tonight?”

I put my crayon, sepia, down.

“Yeah, I thought we were going.”

“I’m going, I was just wondering if you’re going.”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I?”

“How are you getting there?”

“Drive, I guess, I’ll get directions from downstairs.”

“You can’t drive, you’re car is stuck, look.”

I walked to the side of the balcony and looked at the dusty street; packed, totally boxed in by jalopies, ten cars deep.

“Jesus, where’d they all come from? It’s a street, not a parking lot.”

“Everyone is here for the festival.”

“I guess; How do you want to get there?”

“Don’t worry about me, I’ve got a ride, I’m going with Gilbert.”

“Who?”

“Gilbert, you met him this morning.”

“The waiter?”

“No, that’s Caesar,”

“The hunky guy from New Mexico.”

“Oh.”

Inez’s face looked wobbly; the white pills were really kicking in.

“I don’t... I’ll figure it out later”

“You don’t have much time.”

“Hopefully I’ll see you there.”

“Not likely, there’ll be a lot of people.”

“Yeah. I’m going to take a nap.”

“Poor, baby, so sleepy.”

The room went black.

I was peaceful in a very far away place. I could hear a watery voice trickle in my head, begging me to come back; I didn’t want to return. I opened my heavy eyes. Inez was frantic, pushing me.

“Wake up, wake up.”

“What’s up?”

“Gilbert found another girl, let’s go to the fiesta, you and me.”

She was dressed in a festive red dress, her bust bulging and begging to pour out of the top. She had her hair in a bun, held in place with two polished chopsticks.

I closed my eyes; she shoved a couple of pills in my mouth.

“What are they?” I asked.

“Don’t worry about it.”

I swallowed them.

The shower felt electric as the amphetamines jittered inside of me. I, with great attention to detail, washed my hair and skin, got out of the shower, thought about shaving, decided the scruff was cool, killed a mosquito, combed my hair, then put on my jeans and a clean shirt.

We popped a couple more pills, grabbed some beers for the road, went downstairs, and asked the innkeeper for directions. She said it was about a 25-minute walk if we followed the road.

“Come on baby, let’s go for a little stroll,” Inez said.

The road, crowded and frenetic, was buzzing; the fishermen had all come in early; clean, sunburned, tourists in colorful outfits, maracas and cocktails in hand, all made their way in the direction of the festival.

A loud motorcycle, a guy and his chick, carefully drove through everybody and zipped ahead as soon as the congestion thinned. It felt like rush hour at grand central station, the population of the village had multiplied by at least fifty since this morning.

I cracked open a beer, it was a nice evening; I felt good and looked forward to the walk and to the festival.

“Inez, don’t worry about that creep, Gilbert. I love you. I’m crazy about you. Don’t give yourself away; we’ve got everything we need.”

“You haven’t learned a damn thing, have you? I can’t believe you had the nerve to say that.”

“Oh.”

“Number 81,” she tossed in for good measure.

I opened a beer for her, apologized, gave her a kiss on the cheek, downed a couple of more pills, and walked among the loose crowd of people finding their way onto the road.

People laughed, whistled, screamed; everything felt so vibrant, palpable, and alive. After a few sips of beer, Inez relaxed again and I held her hand. From the looks of it, it was still about an hour before sunset.

“Baby, all these sounds are phenomenal, it drives me wild. I love it when the guys call out and howl, it’s so sexy.”

I howled into the air. Some of the others in the crowd turned and looked. Several attractive women gave me an extra long and inviting look.

“Yes, baby, yes, it’s great!”

I howled again, she squeezed my hand.

“Isn’t it amazing baby, here we are walking along a dirt road nearing sunset in holy Mexico, and for all we know we are perfectly upside down; we don’t realize it, but are truly, actually, probably upside down as we speak; that, at this moment, the earth is tipped topsy-turvy; and even though we think we’re standing straight up, if we were to really get the full, accurate, panoramic view of the solar system, you would see that we are dangling upside down like spiders, as if we could walk on a ceiling, and we can.”

“There’s no absolute in the universe.”

The opaque jungle with its big leaves formed a canopy over the road and walled us in on either side, like a tropical tunnel. I remembered an article I read once about a prehistoric boa constrictor, forty feet long, over 2500 pounds, and fed on animals the size of cattle.

Is it really possible that they’re all extinct? I mean, if there were some to survive, where else would they be but in the dense jungles of Mexico or South America?

People scooted to the side of the road as a big wide rattling white pick up, hard to tell what make, no emblem, some generic tailgate, cowboy hat driver, deep scratches all over, bounced up.

They were five guys in the back of the truck all drinking beers, howling and laughing; mariachi blared from the cab.

Inez let go of my hand.

“How fun!” she yelled.

Inez screamed at them in Spanish as they came by. They stopped the truck, waved her on, and she jumped in the back. They handed her a fresh beer. She tossed the one I gave her into the black of the jungle.

I could see one of the guys was the handsome Mexican fisherman Inez had commented on, the one with the dangling fish cadavers. Shoved in the corner of the bed of the truck, I could see the white cooler full of silver and grey fish on ice.

I followed Inez to jump in the truck but they laughed,

“Aye, Pinche Cabron!”

And closed the tailgate on me and pulled away, kicking dust and gravel on me and leaving me in a cloud of that suffocating Mexican poison gas exhaust.

“I’ll see you there!” Inez yelled.

I could see her bouncing up and down in the back with all those guys, her tits jiggling, the guys all pressed up against her, howling out and laughing.

I kept walking in that direction, humming and following the trail of dust.

As I got closer to the town, auxiliary roads, driveways, and pathways all fed onto the main road; people came from every direction and, after about fifteen minutes of walking, we all merged onto a dusty bridge; schoolgirls in special blue outfits, boys in neat matching shirts, wild gangs of men already drunk, a man with colorful clay pots, two of them, heavy looking, balanced on a stick across his shoulders and filled with tamales for sale; a dog sniffed my leg, then leapt on with a glad look on its face.

Trucks with mysterious, big, cylindrical, white, tanks squeezed by on the bridge, intent on leaving the madhouse town before dark; they inched along, cut through the crowds like a bow of a ship through water, spewed out horrible choking diesel fumes into the crowd; no one minded, a free high.

And then everything all bottle necked on the bridge as a big truck with giant blue tarp covering mystery cargo made a sudden three point, reverse, turn; people carried on and slipped through the treacherous space between the bumper of the truck and the railing of the bridge; and there's a fruit vendor with mangos, ripe and peeled, on a stick.

All kinds of vehicles, cars, ATV's, horses, even a truck loaded to the max, the suspension bottomed out, with dozens of water jugs; it said, "La Fuente," on the back; like a rickety, beat up, south of the border version of Sparkletts spring water from back home. Loud energetic horn-driven high-voiced Mexican music blasted out from every one of these vehicles through merciless earsplitting treble blaring ghetto loud speakers.

And to the side, a holy, brown skinned, Mexican Van Gogh wearing a straw hat, a pile of paint-drenched rags on his easel; he watched with intense eyes and captured the festivities with dramatic swirls of color and passion; thick slabs of paint, ecstatic and turbulent crazy swirls; he jumped up and flailed his arms like wild because the big three point turn truck shifted gears and was blowing dust everywhere and especially onto the wet paint of his vibrant masterpiece.

People hollered with laughter, beers in hand, as the truck driver almost smashed into the rail.

And to the right, a large soccer field with a corrugated tin dugout, painted both green and white, the paint peeling, rusted bars over windows; and small concrete bleachers close to the road. A woman sold goodies next to the bleachers, flan, tres-leches cake; she set up a table full of her yummys with an old tarp tied over her stand, already covered in thick dust; and also a rainbow umbrella acquired somewhere, no questions asked, propped up and tied to a tree with a bungee chord; a man with a humble dark wife and chubby kid waited in line.

The bridge hovered over a slow trickling creek with steep and sandy banks, probably a furious rushing river during the rainy season. Banana trees swayed, bushy trees trembled, and shrubs lined the creek down to the beach; a narrow pedestrian bridge crossed it even further on, a Mexican version of the Japanese moon bridge

A young guy and his gal, both carrying puppies in arms, joined the crowd.

Little triangle flags, tied from telephone poll to tree top, or from tree limb to balcony, fluttered in different plastic colors on strings over the road; a tienda, with a line of people buying beer, a white cooler outside with blue paint that said, "Hielo;" Vinos y Licores Rosales and also, to the left, Pescaderia Piolin, all the fish were sold but I could see a beautiful mosaic counter full of fish scale luster and melting ice.

Like everywhere else, mangy dogs roamed everywhere, sniffing, licking; I even saw two mutts lazily watch the crowds from the flat roof of a ferreteria, as though they deserved a martini in their paws.

The Van Gogh man watched it all, concentrated, and sketched in his notepad.

Telephone and power lines dangled lazily between buildings; I followed the crowd to a fork in the road, a tree, a bench, and Tienda Don Rudolfo on the road-splitting tip; desperados congregated there.

Good smelling restaurants lined the cobblestone streets, a burrito stand on the right, different bungalows and Posadas, Hotel Gradita.

A hot dog cart sent giant wafts of delicious smelling hot dog and bacon perfume swirling around; a woman with a giant aluminum tub attached to the handlebars of her bike sold boiled corn on the cob covered in mayonnaise sauce. Cute little girls ate the corncobs, the cobs as big as their heads, and made a mess on their shirts.

Further along, a main plaza opened up with a cement gazebo and cement benches all around the square. Tough looking banditos loitered, hanging out and looking mean, on low rock walls. An old cowboy leaned against a pale wall, lit a cigarette, the match illuminated his wrinkled face and the under rim of his cowboy hat.

Different bars with balconies surrounded the square, one had a duck theme, another a surf theme; they were humming already, mostly tourists.

The tourists, gringos, seemed like surfer and sports fishing types, mostly, usually a little overweight and obnoxiously loud and always with their lady. Hippies also dominated the gringo population, for the most part; but they actually lived there, refugees from the machine, got sick of living on the grid and made a run for it.

But there was always something sloppy about them, too, slightly corrupt; the way they drank their margarita or ordered their food, looked at their daughters, lauded their money over the Mexicans; inhabited a self-righteous sense of superiority.

Palm trees, painted white at the base to protect them from insects, filled the center of the plaza. A rickety pickup truck, overloaded in the back with coconuts, parked on one corner. Two men jumped out of the cab of the truck and opened the tailgate. The older one, about twenty-four, flailed a machete like a samurai sword and chopped open the coconuts like a human wood chipper. The other guy, a younger brother type, stuck straws in the decapitated coconuts and hustled to sell them, "Cocos! Cocos Frescos!"

In the meantime, a crew of sweaty Mexicans worked at breakneck speeds to set up a large stage. The sun was almost down, but they were only halfway through completing the frame, assembling metal poles together like a giant spider web.

From the near side of the square, a couple of American hippy girls appeared in patch work dresses, doc martin boots, incredibly nappy dreads, and a dog on a rope leash. One of them, supremely obese, wore a dusty fedora hat. I overheard a trailing bit of conversation, "isn't it funny-"

They cut through the plaza and circled back around. The fat one with the fedora hat grinned, descended on a trashcan, and dug through it; combing the Mexican refuse for treasure.

In spite of the requisite hippy dress, her friend accessorized her nappy look with designer eyeglasses, a silk scarf around her head; and when she broke a smile, exhibited perfect teeth. She dismissed the trashcan with an air of repugnance. The fat friend pulled out a bottle and held it up with pride. It may be worth a few pesos at the recycling center.

A loud group of guys raucously tumbled out of a tienda, laughing. They were all dressed in colorful tropical shirts and competing to out shout the other. A girl's voice cut

through their male howls and screamed along with them; Inez, in her fire hot red dress, celebrated, and was celebrated, smack dab in the nucleus of these clowns.

They slapped each other on the back and teased her; when she didn't notice, they looked at her with hunger, as if they were about to bend her over and fuck the shit out of her right then and their in the plaza. I walked up.

"Hola," I said.

"Baby, I was wondering if you'd get here."

She was drunk and laughing hysterically.

I thanked the clowns for kindly escorting her to the plaza and that I could take care of her from there on out. Incredibly, they didn't put up any resistance, hardly noticed, screamed with laughter, and simply spilled back into the heart of the celebration.

"Where are they going?"

"Are you hungry? Let's grab a bite to eat."

"Ok," she giggled.

We walked through the plaza, a few hippies weaved bracelets, a drunk in a wheelchair commiserated with his friends, some school kids kicked a ball that ricocheted off the rock walls like bumper pool; and came to the perimeter.

Even though it was getting dark, it was still hot out; all the restaurants surrounding the plaza had tables set out on the sidewalk and into the street, candles flickering, a barbecue close by for immediate grilling convenience.

"Baby, look at the seats, they're adorable, let's eat here."

Four seats jutted out horizontally from a cement wall beneath a small outdoors counter on a, relatively speaking, quiet corner of the plaza. The food looked good; and it seemed like a relaxed place with mellow reggae music, surfer vibe.

A wild-haired Mexican man sweated over his frenetic wide grill; threw on strips of beef, chunks of chicken, then bits of fish; switched over to the side to his cutting board and diced up tomatoes and jalapeños like a flesh and blood Cuisinart.

The food smelled delicious. He had Christmas lights dangling from the top of a palm thatch awning that reached over the counter.

"Hola Amigos!" He affably yelled.

He threw down two menus on the counter.

"Para Tomar?"

"Dos tequilas and dos cervezas, por favor," I said.

He mentally registered the order and returned to his ninja cooking, intent on serving us, but also intent on catering to the herd of customers that just filled the tables on the other edge of his corner.

Our seats rested on a solid steel bar that jutted out of the wall without any kind of structural support outside of the concrete that it sprouted from. The color of the concrete

exterior was an attractive amalgamation of generations of paint that all pleasantly chipped off and faded away at its own unique pace.

The seats themselves were made out of wood and reminded me of a ride I used to play on as a kid at the park. It was a boring ride, simply a seat on top of a stiff rusted spring probably salvaged from some garage door or an old fire truck. All you did was sit on it and kind of jerk your body trying to make the seats bounce, about as much fun as flopping on a slab of cement.

Every seat but one was finished a different color, red, yellow, green, red; you could still see the texture of the wood beneath the finish. I liked it, it felt festive. Hell, I felt festive. I even hummed along with the upbeat music.

“Baby, I love it when you sing, you’re actually strangely attractive when you do, I can’t quite explain it.”

“Are you ready for my free jazz interpretation of ‘Besame Mucho’?”

“Stick with the hums, baby, I like the reggae.”

It was best not to push the limits too much, hell, things were going fine. Inez looked stunning, and I rarely use that word, but she looked stunning in her red dress. Every time I looked at her my jaw dropped; her legs gave me shivers, it brought a tear to my eye.

Inez sat on the yellow seat and I sat on the green one. The feverish chef laid two shot glasses down, two limes, and some salt; he poured some light colored tequila in the shot glasses and then placed our two beers on the counter, condensation already frosting up the bottles, nice and cold.

“Baby, we’re going to be just fine,” I said.

I grabbed a tequila, “Salud.”

Inez smiled and we swigged back our shots together. Neither of us rushed for the lime or salt; no pussy shit, just sweet flavorful tequila.

Little pearls of sweat glistened on Inez’s face. I was sweating, too. Maybe it was the pills, or the drinks, or maybe it was the heat of the kitchen, who knows, but every minute felt like the thermostat had been cranked up ten degrees.

“No wonder everyone is so passionate here,” Inez said.

“I feel like I’m on a rotisserie,” I said.

She sipped her beer and let her eyes wander over the plaza and the growing crowd. The energetic chef flipped some meat and it crackled and sizzled on the grill, springs of grease sprouted up, tiny fountains, like raindrops exploding.

“What would you like?” He yelled out in a thick Mexican accent.

A rock steady version of Gershwin’s, “Summertime,” came on over his sound system. The vibe of this pueblo was vastly different than the one we came from, without question. They were accustomed to, and definitely emphatic about, gringos, more specifically, gringo’s greenbacks.

Apparently, consistently picture-perfect surfing waves graced their beach. A dozen or so years back, a couple of gypsy surfers stumbled on the break, took an oath of silence, monopolized it for themselves, and had their way with it. Nevertheless, after what must have amounted to thousands of slips of the tongue, negligence due to beer and marijuana, word steadily got out until, slowly but surely, the pueblo devolved into a veritable Disneyland for surfers. I half expected to see Mickey Mouse in board shorts posing for pictures.

Whatever, Inez liked it, and I thought it was fine; it still wasn't some bourgeois getaway, although I heard the New York Times wrote an article about it, shit. At least dust still covered the streets, the farmacias looked adequately sketchy, and the tequila was good.

Hell, to top it off, I was actually in the mood for a festival, whatever this three-ring circus may be about.

In spite of the noise- the sizzling of meat, the reggae music, people shouting, firecrackers exploding; a drunk, with lungs no smaller than the state of Texas, sang his brains out in the plaza, a throaty and gravely version of some Mexican canción, a real crooner wooing a big lipped Mexican woman.

Simultaneously, a nappy crew of gypsy hippies congregated at the far corner of the plaza. All of their clothes were in tatters, beads dangled from their wrists and necks, piercings covered their faces; they pounded out disconnected rhythms on well-worn jambes, vaguely evoking first nation tribal sensibilities.

All of them darkly tanned, children of the sun; their faces dirty and they wore dusty sandals and long cut off khakis. One of them twirled a stick in spirals and airborne circles in some casual circus art. A few playful dogs orbited around them, ropes tied to their necks for a leash.

"Oh I love the way they play," Inez said, "The way drums sound, it's so full of intense primal passion."

"There's a lot of noise all at once," I said.

"Oh no, baby, you need to open your ears, bring it on, the more the better, I love the music, makes me tingle, I can hear every layer and adore it all."

Not me, I found it irritating, even though I didn't say so. And I thought those guys were as mangy as their dogs. I didn't care what kind of weird rhythms they had in store.

"What would you like to eat my friends?" The chef repeated himself.

"Dos tacos de pescado," Inez responded.

"Lo mismo," I said.

"Okay, fish tacos for both of you!"

He was excited; tonight was clearly going to be a big night for him; maybe the biggest of the year.

"Hey, what is the festival for?" I yelled to him.

He didn't hear. The rock steady version of "Summertime" was going strong, and the annoying drummers; and the other customers were all calling out at once. I let it go.

The clamor of the square was definitely escalating. The drunken Pavarotti still belted out his gravely operatic cancion, the woman with big lips rubbed his leg, he was doing well.

Women wore gold dresses with ruffles, a rose planted between one woman's copious bosom, blue wigs and blue eye shadow, giant smiles, big laughs. Men with sweat flying off their face, full of madness and booze, howling at the women, howling at the moon, caballeros with cowboy hats and big belt buckles and studly boots; dandies with fedoras, other men with thick helmets of Mexican hair, well combed and cemented in place with gallons of Tres Flores. Some women fluttered hand fans and others twirled parasols, feathers and ribbons in their hair; others held crucifixes close to their heart with solemn expressions and librarian sentiments, others exuberantly held cardboard stars on sticks bouncing them up and down; kids with party poppers snap pop launched tissue paper confetti streamers into the air.

A troubadour with guitar wandered around the square singing love songs like it was Valentine's Day. Teenage girls in short skirts chirped and chattered on the concrete benches and watched with sex-curious eyes as boys and even mustached caballeros wandered past.

The frenzied crew of Mexican workmen rapidly bolted together the last metal and plywood parts of the stage.

"Baby, I've been thinking about your elucidations on shape, and though I appreciate your feeble attempts at understanding all things bigger than yourself, which is all things; I feel compelled to correct you on the error of your irritating thought. I used to have such an oversimplified view of the world as well, shapes being such an obvious method of interpreting the extent of existence--"

Shapes can be felt and sensed.

"Baby, what do you think? Are we a narrative species, everything understood as having a past and a purpose as opposed to some sort of abstract or concrete shape?"

"It's useless baby, all things profound escape you. Even after all this time you have yet to comprehend the most golden of all understandings, ineffability."

Everyone, the crowds at the restaurants, the teenagers, the hippies, the dogs; everyone at once sang, yelled, or made some kind of racket.

Firecrackers cracked like they were raining from the sky; children threw snap caps on the cobblestone streets and plaza; some kid had a package of Piccolo Petes and lit each off in a succession of ear-piercing firework screams.

A teenage boy hovered around the square and sold roman candles and sparklers, incredibly long Mexican sparklers, lethal looking and dangerous. A few shimmered already around the plaza already; they emitted radical showers of stark white sparks off of a shaky red-hot wire.

"Wow! Look at that!"

“Sing it baby, if you’re going to yell, then sing!”

I put on my best Harry Belafonte voice to match the thumping reggae that pumped out of the kitchen of our taco stand.

“Day-o! Day-o! Look at ‘dat...’

“Baby, it’s beautiful. I love it when you sing to me!” Inez nuzzled into my neck and hugged me.

This was interesting; I’d rarely experienced this kind of causal connection from Inez before. Generally speaking, her support and affection made about as much sense as a Mad-Lib on a bad day. Winning her affection was like praying for rain in the desert, if you kept at it long enough you occasionally caught a downpour. But sing a few calypso notes? Had I totally overlooked this simple formula all along, for all these years?

A large boom thundered through the plaza, women screamed, then laughed; maybe a M-1000 like the one that weird family with the yellow Camaro blew up. The chef brought us our tacos. They looked fresh and vibrant, overflowing with cilantro, tomatoes, and a watery green salsa.

Some Mariachi’s performed on the restaurant patio. The crowd, beginning their drunken journey, hollered to the musicians, and even that strange, cackling, Mexican “Ha, ha, ha!” that encourages the musicians and ignites the crowd; an emphatic show of support from the highest register of the vocal chords.

Everyone knew this song, the audience sang along, full of joy and feeling, and when the musicians finished the crowd yelled, “Aye, aye, aye!” Everyone applauded and laughed. The violin player held out a basket for tips and people tossed in gold edged coins. Beers and tequila flowed everywhere.

“Dos Mas!” I yelled to the chef and slugged back the remainder of my beer.

Inez smiled and bit into her taco.

“Delicious, baby, as predicted; these seats called to me. Here I knew we had found an artisan in the most profound and authentic sense.”

“So true, baby, so very true, and not only is he the profound architect of these inspired chairs, but also a three star Michelin chef of the fish taco; well versed and refined in the subtle blends and layers of spice, sauce, and texture of taco shell.”

Another giant firework exploded. A couple of horses in the street jumped back at the forceful sound and the caballeros on top yanked the reigns with a stiff jerk to regain control; everyone laughed.

A collection of snazzily dressed men in silver studded charro outfits carried big shiny tubas and trumpets and congregated at the side of the stage, now finally set up. A grand piñata, in the form of a colossal and bloated Hello Kitty, dangled from a tree.

“Honey, look at those caballeros atop their gallant horses. What if those are not horses at all but in fact two Pegasus on the verge of taking flight? What if they lift off into the sky at this very moment and wave to us with glitter manes and smiles?”

“A Pegasus can’t wave with its hoof, I’ve ridden one.”

I bit into my taco and when I looked up again a pudgy man in a sailor's cap had sat down next to Inez. He was in his late forties, fair skinned, and wore a light colored pair of pants and shirt; carried a dark case in his right hand, about the size of a bowling ball, that he placed on the counter.

His companion, a guy in his twenties, shaved head, half black and half white, on the darker side but even with a touch of red to his features, hints of freckles; broad, built like a brick, wore flip flops, Hawaiian swim trunks, a loose button up shirt, necklaces, a tribal tattoo on his muscle tight arm, touted a guitar by his side; lingered behind the three of us.

He looked Inez up and down with hungry eyes. She noticed and let his eyes wander freely, even shifted her posture so a little bit more of her thigh showed from underneath her stark red dress.

"Would you like to hear a song?" The pudgy man asked Inez. He had a southern accent.

He flipped two latches and opened the dark case on the counter, an accordion.

"Why yes," Inez demurely said.

Evidently, the chef knew them already and immediately brought them two beers. The pudgy man drank a swig from his beer, took a deep breath, and then began squeezing his accordion and tapping away at the keys, attempting to play along with the music on the sound system.

It took him a minute to find the right scale but, after a moment, he did, and played rather clumsy melody lines along with the reggae music. Inez, entranced, swayed side to side.

"You like the way I squeeze my accordion?" The pudgy man yelled out.

"God, yes!" Inez yelled.

He played on.

The tough guy with guitar kept watching her; I could see his eyes freeze on the flesh of her breasts, the top part that overflowed from her dress. I couldn't blame him; I had my eyes fixed on them most of the evening myself.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Phoenix," he said in a serious voice.

He didn't ask me mine. I didn't offer it.

"You play guitar?"

"Yep."

Phoenix leaned his guitar against the wall next to the red seat closest to me, reached for his bottle of beer, took the lime off of the rim, and swigged back a large portion of it in one gulp. He laid the bottle on the counter and kept his hand on it.

"Yep," he said again.

"How long you been in town for?"

“A few months,” he said.

“That’s awhile.”

“Me and Forest; we sailed out from New Orleans.”

“That’s quite a sail.”

“We did alright.”

“You went through the Panama Canal?”

“You and this girl, she your friend?”

A firecracker went off close by. A few kids squealed, laughed, and disappeared into the throngs of the plaza. The reggae song ended and Forest lowered his accordion.

“Oh, it was wonderful!” Inez exclaimed.

“I played in Zydeco bands all over New Orleans and Florida. We get the crowd hollerin’ wherever we play. I bet we get you hollering too, hah! You ain’t heard nothing, yet, just you wait.”

His fingers enthusiastically ran over the keys of the accordion.

“Oh, I can’t!” Inez giggled and touched the corner of her lip.

I shouted over Phoenix’s arm that still gripped his beer on the counter, and over Inez’s shoulder who had angled her back to me now.

“Where you from, Forest?”

“Texas! where else!?! How’d you know my name?”

He had a loud, booming, and brash voice, the kind that you’d hear all the way across the Dakotas. He was a jovial guy, with an innocent disposition. He seemed content just to be in the presence of Inez, have a cold beer, and an excuse to play his accordion. He exuded the kind of good-natured arrogance that only comes from years of drinking, hoedowning, and barnstorming all across the south.

“Phoenix told me.”

“Phoenix, my first mate, that’s right we sailed here all the way from New Orleans, I come out here every year, then I sail back to New Orleans then turn around and sail back again.”

“That right.”

“Hell yeah, man. I worked for years, Texas oil fields. I don’t have a college education but I did damn well, yes I did, ‘til I got injured; look, colectomy.”

He lifted up his shirt and displayed a jagged scar down his abdomen.

“Now I’m on disability, go back to New Orleans and collect my checks and cash them in and spend the next six months down here in sunny Mehico.”

“Not a bad deal,” I said.

“Hell, in a weird world like this, you may as well run, hop, skip, and jump; ain’t that right, Phoenix?”

Phoenix didn’t respond; he just kept his eyes fixed on Inez.

“That’s right, my boy Phoenix, fresh back from I-Raq. How was it out there in I-Raq, Phoenix, go on, tell them”

Phoenix’s eyes were serious and still focused on Inez. She returned his look with a slight blush, but unflinching.

“Weren’t so bad, got me some I-Raq-I’s.”

He smiled; one front tooth was made of silver. I sipped back some of my beer. It didn’t taste quite as good as before.

“Is all that shit about Iraq true, the suicide bombers and all that shit, is any of it true?” I asked.

Phoenix shifted his focus and fixed his eyes on me.

“Good,” I thought.

“Never mind Iraq, that’s old shit. What I’d like to know is who your good friend is. I bet she a better friend to you than you are to her, am I right?”

“Definitely!” Inez said. “Phoenix, do you play that guitar?”

“Yes I do, and sing for you, too.”

“Phoenix,” Forest said, “Let’s leave these people be. Let’s take our beers and roll on out of here”

“Phoenix nothing,” Phoenix said.

“Phoenix, come on; man, look over there at that plaza, I see some girls there I told you about this morning, let’s go over and talk to them.”

Phoenix kept his dagger eyes on me.

“I bet I know what’s running through your head, yes I do.”

“You do?” I asked.

“Yeah, I sure do; what’s running through your head, ‘Now here I got myself a big crazy black motherfucker and what am I going to do with him? Maybe I have to shut him up before he says something insulting to me in front of my woman?’ Is that what’s rolling through your head?”

I looked around the street. Nothing but cobblestones and people with big joyous looks on their face; I looked at Inez, she was zeroed in on me; the chef was zeroed in on me; Forest was zeroed in on me. I thought I saw a tumbleweed bounce by.

The reggae music blared, firecrackers exploded, but I hardly heard a thing. At that very moment, I wished I could crawl under my covers, take some pills, and make it all disappear.

I thought I saw a friendly guy take notice, but if he did, he just looked away.

“Ain’t you got something to say?” Phoenix said.

“Come on Phoenix, let’s go on over there, the music is about to start-“

I could feel my muscles constrict and beads of sweat curl up on my brow. Phoenix was a big guy.

“We’re listening,” he said.

A firecracker exploded.

“Shit. Hah! I’m just clowning. Ain’t I Forest? I hardly done any clowning since I left Baghdad. But I sure clowned with them I-Raq-I’s, I clowned with them good-“

I looked at Inez; she was clearly impressed by him.

“Show ‘em your necklace,” Forest said, “go on Phoenix, show the lovely lady.” He turned to Inez, “you’re going to love this.”

Phoenix gave a big grin, finished off his beer, and reached down inside his shirt among his clutter of necklaces. He pulled something dark and chunky out that dangled on a steel chain along with his dog tags. He put it in his big palm and showed it to Inez.

“What is it?” Inez asked.

“A finger,” Forest said, “A god damn Iraqi finger, how about that?”

“Oh, cool, how wonderful,” Inez said. “What finger is it?”

“Index finger, a little souvenir, he don’t need it no more,” Phoenix said.

“It’s incredible, look at the fine detail of lines in the knuckle, perhaps he was a sculptor before he was a soldier, or piano player. Baby, isn’t it phenomenal?”

I laid two hundred pesos on the counter, well more than our check would be.

“It was nice meeting you fellas’,” I said, “hopefully see you around.”

I helped Inez off of her chair and grabbed my beer. She turned back to Phoenix,

“Would sure love to hear you sing sometime, I bet you have a wonderful voice.”

“See you both later,” Phoenix said with a special sneer just for me.

Inez smiled.

Forest squeezed out a circus like dissonant chord from his accordion. He, Phoenix, and the Chef, laughed.

“Weren’t they wonderful?” Inez asked. “I loved the way he played that accordion; God, all this music is driving me wild!”

Inez’s heels clomped on the cobblestones.

The plaza bubbled and overflowed with music and sounds. The gypsy drummers jammed in a tight circle and they flailed their hands at blurring speeds, translucent, airplane propeller hands against the drum skin; wild wailing drum thrashing maniacs.

The lead drummer, about 20, attacked his jambe, it hung from a colorful strap around his neck, with fury; his rhythms pulsed strong and deep, from the underworld; incredibly skilled, the beats and tones matched even some of the most accomplished and experienced drummers from the barrios back home, some of the best drummers in the world.

He sweated like mad, unrelenting, and wailed while the other drummers battled to keep up with him; the mighty boom of the bass drum and then another creature played a mid range supporting rhythm; and a thick, dark, girl entered the interior of their thumping circle and danced in tribal African inspired movements, entranced by the music.

The plaza was packed with creatures, some listening, some deeply involved in their own ruminations and conversations, shrieking to have their ideas and quips heard. Almost too many bodies, too thick to cross through; and everyone already high tailed and tingled; and probably countless others on skittles, too; I tried to count the heads, but couldn't keep track; numbers too high and too many fresh arrivals ruining the calculation. Every hand gripped a beer, faces exuberant, and many complimented their beer with cigarette.

I saw the teenage kid with the Roman candles and giant sparklers.

“Oye! Venga!”

I called him over.

“Cuanto cuestan?” I asked.

“Cada diez pesos,” he said adamantly.

I bought two sparklers

“Check this out,” I said to Inez.

I held a lighter beneath the tip of the sparkler; it took some time, but it finally started to crackle, shimmer, and shed tiny bits of lightening; smoke poured off of it with that delicious sparkler smell that smells like every Fourth of July picnic I ever went to as a kid, chicken and pie; it lit up Inez's face and I could see the universe in her eyes.

I held the other sparkler to the first and it quickly lit and I handed it to Inez. She twirled it about in front of her like a magician. People backed away from the crazy sparkler worshippers.

“En garde!” Inez called out a duel.

The sparklers snapped and snagged and flared dangerously as we swung them about and against one another. People shouted, they loved it, or they simply were drunk and didn't care. They laughed and called out with every clash of our swords and every big eruption of sparks.

After the dramatic battle, the sparklers burned out. We called a truce and dropped our swords to the ground; I splashed some beer on them and the sword corpses sizzled in the liquid.

“Hey, I want to buy some Roman candles,” I said.

The teenager was still close by; I walked up to him and bought the homemade pyrotechnic toys.

I turned to show Inez the fireworks, she was gone; a glossy faced Mexican man in his thirties stood next to me instead, waiting to buy sparklers.

“Hola.”

I heard howls and screams, loud enough to break through the already booming raucous.

In the center of the drum circle, Inez clomped her heels and snapped her fingers over her head and across her chest, elegantly erect, thrusting her bust out, chin up. Shit, I had forgotten all about her flamenco lessons.

The crowd erupted as she stamped her heels down in a rapid machine gun fire staccato rhythm, and then spun in a gradual and dramatic circle, gazing superiorly over everyone’s head.

Nevertheless, in spite of her focus on presentation, it was clear to me, as to everyone, the thrust and inspiration for this display of passionate traditional dance. Inez, enthralled by the lead drummer, snapped her heels and thrust her arms up, mesmerized like a moth to light; she danced madly for him, she danced deliriously for him, she danced religiously for him, she danced for his seed, she danced for his birth, she danced for his death; and then shuffled in closer, a fraction of an inch from his face, her sweat dripping on his rapid fire hands and evaporating by the heat of his attack, she worshipped every pulse of blood in his body and every pulse of rhythm in his drum. She captivated the plaza- in that moment, Inez embodied every agony and triumph of the Spanish people, she channeled the Punic War, the conquest of the moors, the crusades, the Spanish Civil War, every note ever sung by El Loco Mateo, every tear ever shed in Seville, Andalucía, and Granada combined. The drummer bent deeper into his expression, sweat flailing, rhythm accelerating, slaps more beautifully violent and crisp, enraptured eyes trained on Inez the whole time.

I shuffled into the circle displaying my own, retarded, version of the flamenco, just long enough to grab Inez and drag her out. The crowd hissed and booed, cursed at me “Putá Pendojo! Piche Retardado!”

The drummer gave me an angry look; someone threw a beer can at my head. I pulled Inez through the crowd into a small pocket of space.

“What the fuck are you doing?!” she yelled, “You ruined my dance!”

“Baby, it was beautiful, I could tell that you had reached the apex of your performance, and so I timed it perfectly to escort you off of the stage at the absolute peak of the frenzied energy.”

“Fucking shit,” she cursed. “I’m going to make that drummer, you mark my words.”

“How many pills did you take?” I was eager to change the subject.

“Fuck, I don’t know. What difference does it make?”

“Just curious,” I said, “It seems like you could use a few more.”

I had a handful ready, mega downers, Oxycodones, Xanax, Rohypnol, and Valium.

“She’ll forget about that drummer soon enough,” I thought.

She took the pills and swallowed them with the last of my beer. Nevertheless, even while downing the drugs, she never withdrew her attention from the direction of the drummer. Even though he was hardly visible through the density of the crowd, it didn’t matter. Most importantly, his music still sliced through.

I took her hand and gently pulled her toward the perimeter of the plaza but she resisted, fixated on the drumming sound and eagerly searching for a glimpse of its master. Then, a second later, I could feel her grip relax, the pills were working, I looked at her and watched the tension in her neck ease, the pressure in her jugular retreat.

I gently nudged, “Come on; let’s get some beers at the tienda.”

She didn’t resist as I pulled her by the hand and we pushed our way through the crowd. I caught a glimpse of the thinning perimeter of the mob; we were almost there. I figured we could get to the tienda, get down to the beach, drink a few beers, and forget this whole fiesta fiasco.

I still had the two roman candles in my pockets.

“Better save those for later,” I thought.

The crowd diluted gradually as we got closer to the tienda. Men on horseback watched the party from the edge, sitting up high on their noble animals with dignified expressions, proud in their expensive rancho outfits, ten gallon hats, and glimmering belt buckles; tourists took their picture and petted the horses, previously accustomed to such large animals only in zoos.

The horses looked a little uneasy with the noise and crowd, but the experienced rancheros kept them under control, having communed untold psychic hours with the animal, together as one beneath sky.

I let go of Inez’s hand for a second to climb up onto the high ledge of a tall and crumbly sidewalk; I turned to help Inez scale the obstacle. She was already headed back the other direction, drifting with a bit of a pill swagger, toward the center of the plaza. I started after her but hesitated,

“Fuck it, I’ll just get the beers and meet up with her in a second, she’ll only be at the drum circle.”

The tienda clamored with people as they bought cigarettes, dug in a cooler for the right flavor of ice cream, stocked up on tequila and beers.

Still, in spite of all this action, the tienda was barely a bigger version of the others I’d seen; same muggy and rotten staleness, just with slightly larger proportions.

I impatiently stood in line, suddenly worried I might not find Inez in the crowd; drunken revelers clumsily counted their pesos to pay for their booze and candy. They forgot their count and started again. It took years but when my turn came, I hurriedly paid for two big bottles of Pacifico and hustled back into the sweat and throngs of the fiesta.

Incredibly, thanks to her fire red dress, I found Inez immediately. She wasn't with the drummer after all, but stood among a crowd circled around a shirtless tribal hippy, his blond dreadlocks tied up into a ball on his head, his face and body stained with henna tattoos, both ears pierced, wooden necklaces draped on his tan chest as he sat cross legged on the stone ground, and blew into a dark wooden didgeridoo; hollow, sacred sounds pulsating out in a mystic hypnotic techno beat; Inez bounced her head like a somnambulant to the rhythm.

"Here's the beer," I said.

"Thanks baby. Wow, this music is dreamy."

I cracked open the beers with my cigarette lighter, a trick I learned long ago; just lever your forefinger in the right spot beneath the beer top and then dig in with the edge of the lighter, the bottle cap pops right off.

"Did the Iraqi know that trick?" I wondered.

Some beer overflowed onto my fingers. I licked them, they tasted good. I started to relax a little; Inez was good and high, no surprise there, and seemed to be under control. The hippy was in another world, blowing out his whiskey-jug-didgeridoo music, eyes closed and, as far as I could tell, didn't have any deliberate designs on Inez.

Still, it was hard to ignore all the weird energy and wandering eyes. The girls were either hypnotized by some musician or distracted by every call and whistle coming from the crowd. In the meantime, all the men shouted and whistled in huge Mexican rooster calls; it felt cruel to the ears, and tasteless, like a bad Hendrix cover.

I held Inez close,

I sung out a few notes, "Besame... Besame Mucho... como si fuera esta noche ultima vez..."

Inez giggled, turned, and gave me a sensual kiss. She took part of my tongue in her mouth and nibbled gently. She leaned over and kissed my neck. I held her body up close to mine and felt myself bulge in my pants. I laughed and hummed in her ear.

Suddenly, the crowd erupted in cheers and lurched toward the stage. Pow! The charro dressed musicians that hovered around the stage earlier let it rip in full force; trumpets, tubas, saxophones, drum crashes, even a flute; they wailed out a rollicking Mexican song as they filed, in all of their satin shirt and silver studded glory, onto the stage and into uneven rows.

People flooded in from everywhere now, pushed up against Inez and me, and roughly shoved us closer toward the stage, screaming with excitement; whistling, using their pinkies to generate that deafeningly high, ear piercing NYC taxi cab whistle.

I looked behind me, an ocean of creatures chirped and buzzed, everyone swaying or freaking out dancing, either watching the band or one another. To my side, three attractive Mexican women in their early twenties, salsa danced in place in their tight jeans and watched the men in the band with huge eyes.

The band hit a triumphant final chord and, for some reason, the audience lurched forward again, sandwiching Inez and I in even deeper. Still holding my beer, I let Inez stand in front of me and held her waist from behind, rubbing my loins into her ass.

The band stepped back and an emcee, a well dressed gentleman in his early fifties with thick dark hair, walked to the center of the stage. The crowd exploded in cheers, he must have been some sort of Mexican celebrity; he smiled with big white teeth, a stark contrast to his dark tan, waived, took the microphone, and introduced himself though, judging from the cheers, no introduction was necessary.

He said a few things and the crowd applauded and howled. I don't know how anyone understood a thing; the sound system sounded like an angry megaphone on steroids.

A lovely girl, about eighteen, in a tight green dress, walked onto stage. She smiled at the celebrity, he handed her the mic, and she nervously made a small speech, smiled, then walked to the other end of the stage.

I guess he must have announced the beginning of a beauty pageant, perhaps to crown the queen of the festival. No wonder everyone was mobbing to the front.

The next girl, about sixteen, came center stage; her body was still immature and awkward, not to mention, from a judge's perspective, rather wide and stocky. She took the mic and also made a short speech and then stepped off to the side to join the first girl. This pattern continued for another five girls.

After all the contestants were up there, the emcee materialized, to the joy and astonishment of the crowd, an envelope from his sleeve, a wonderful magic trick; he opened it, took out a pink card, and announced a name. It was the first girl, my favorite.

She squealed out a shriek of delight, everyone laughed, and the band let out a raucous and joyous chord. The other girls tried to look dignified and applauded for her, but two of them already had tears steaming down their cheeks.

The emcee placed a crown on the fiesta Queen's head, everyone applauded, and the band let loose into more wild music, this time marching as they played, following the Queen as she walked down the stage steps and into the crowd.

"Oh look, baby," Inez cried, "They're bringing the party to us!"

A group of young guys in matching t-shirts and jeans lifted the queen onto their shoulders and began tramping around the plaza. Everyone cheered and danced behind the marching band, the newly crowned queen at its head.

Revelers threw beads and confetti and splashed beer from second floor bar balconies onto the dancing swarm as everyone merged together and marched exuberantly around the square.

I looked up and admired a string of colored lanterns drooping over the square in their soft and pretty glow; also the obtuse oversized Hello Kitty piñata, it had been smashed wide open. Children scrambled to pick up pieces of its guts- candies and coins scattered everywhere beneath it.

Everyone joyously marched around the plaza, jam-packed into the sweat of one another, swaying with the band.

Inez danced a sort of samba step and I shuffled in time and screamed my lungs out, “Awooooooo!” I had gone mad and everyone merrily mad; the thick sounds of the horde all droning together, deafening, nearly unbearable to withstand all of the hollers and music and whistling and cries all blended into one gigantic frequency and Inez shivered, trembled in a hysterical frenzy.

“Did she pop some uppers?” I wondered.

A bestial, barely contained, vibration quaked in her eyes that I’d never witnessed before. She was a wrathful and rapturous goddess returned from heaven to redress the bane of all mortals, an angel of redemption quivering on the edge of some sort of orgasmic rapture.

I grinded up behind her, tighter than ever, my sex about to explode by virtue of every curve of her fertile body.

As we rounded a corner, still dancing among the mob, we were bumped and pushed and shoved into different couples and dancers and revelers and men bumped into Inez and I bumped into Inez and the music was louder and more raucous and the fireworks blew up on the street and also up above us in the air and roisterers were pouring gallons of beer from the balconies as we all shrieked together in throngs of laughter. And someone pushed me from the back, some one had fallen over and I turned around and leaned down to offer a hand, a joyous man with a big drunk smile and laughing,

“Arriba!”

I lifted him up and he took my shoulder for support, laughed, and kissed me on the cheek.

I turned around; a few feet separated Inez and me, a distance that may as well have been a mile in that crowd.

“Inez!” I screamed, “Inez!!!”

I could still catch glimpses of her red dress and brown hair with the chopsticks skewered through; I moved closer and got pushed to the side; I tried again and got pushed the other way by a laughing corpulent woman.

“Inez!” I bawled.

She was slipping farther away, closer to the outside of the procession. She seemed to effortlessly flow out of it.

“Inez!”

I felt trapped in a tsunami, heaved to one side and then tugged to the other; a group of sweaty whooping revelers shoved me in unison. I tripped and fell into the sweaty back of a big guy in front of me. I regained my balance.

“Inez!” I screamed with every last bit of everything I ever believed in. My voice cracked.

“Inez!”

She was already to the outside of the procession and I was trapped inside of it, thrust forward by the waves of the crowd. I turned to try and find her. I could still catch a glimpse.

She appeared perfectly relaxed, walked on, never looked back. And just next to her, with solid broad shoulders, a man in colorful clothes looking carefree and happy, strumming his guitar, dancing around her, and singing into her ear.

Phoenix.

She laughed giddily and even from the distance I saw the easy luster in her face. Not far off, sitting on a rock wall, Forest, with his merry prankster mischievous eyes, squeezed on his accordion, paused, swigged on a bottle of tequila, and then squeezed the accordion again; he howled out with merriment; just drunk and squeezing out any notes he could find for the thrill of it.

“Inez!” I screamed.

She couldn’t hear or didn’t want to.

“Inez, wait!”

I tried to push through again; I got shoved to the other side and lost sight of her. I jumped up and looked out. I thought I caught sight of her walking down a street; I got sucked in and forced to round another corner with the jumping and celebrating crowd.

I clawed, summoned every last bit of force inside of myself to push my way through. My beer bottle fell and shattered on the cobblestones. No one cared; they just raucously crushed the glass with their marching feet and pushed forward. I heaved as hard as I could and, with one last push and rush, I popped out of the insane crowd, heaving.

“Where is she?” I wheezed.

I stumbled down the dark and narrow street where I had spotted her. Vines dangled from trees like boas and the cobblestones were made of shadows; all the windows of the cinderblock houses were perfectly black. A big banana leaf dipped down and tickled my shoulder.

“Hah!”

I swatted it away with a Karate chop.

The street was dead empty except for an old man, smoking a cigarette, Pall Mall, in a rocking chair on his dark porch. The heavy wrinkles of his eyes illumined when he dragged his cigarette; he had hints of old time sombrero tilted over eyes, legs folded up tight, in a doorway, long lost dusty Mexico lore.

The street smelled rancid, as if the sewer were bubbling up. I looked down and in the moonlight could see that the cobblestones were wet; the wet stones caught hints and reflections of the festival and of renegade roman candle flares soaring through the air from every direction.

Music tunneled down the street, spilling over from the fiesta. I looked back, I could see a window frame slice view; a layer of smoke hovered above the mob, laughter, lights, colors, and howls churned inside the dense nucleus of the village; equally absurd density

to the moments before the big bang; beer bottles crashed, m-80's exploded, firecrackers cracked like gun fire.

Individuals popped out one snapshot at a time; a man dressed in a colorful suit, mouth wide open in a big shout; a woman with scarves and ribbons twirled in her hair, squinting and her eyeglass are tilted; a teenage boy in a fine button down shirt, shuffling his feet and moving his pelvis; a trumpet player with horn tilted to the sky, cheeks puffed out, satin shirt soaked in sweat.

Two figures leaned against a tree, entangled in one another.

“That could be Inez,” I thought, “scratching to disengage herself from that vicious animal, Phoenix.”

I ran in their direction, but as I approached, I saw it was only two Mexican teenagers, the boy humming in the young girl's ear and feeling her up.

They seemed clumsy, the type to get their braces locked together, but enthusiastically horny and curious. I stood and stared for a moment, like a dirty old man, I'm surprised I didn't unzip my pants and whip it out; the girl suddenly noticed me and her breath halted, terror in her eyes. She pulled the boys hand out of her underwear. He seemed dazed. I snapped out of it and retreated into the darkness of the street.

The beer and pills had gone to my head; my vision was bleary, I couldn't think straight. Was this just a matter of eventuality or was it implicit in my testosterone-depraved soul to hunt her down and rescue her from that ex-soldier, that guitar plucking, finger necklace wearing, psycho, motherfucker?

I lunged into a run, as though hot on the trail, and then abruptly stopped. I had no idea where to look; the shadows were overpowering. The town was like a black mask except for the plaza that was like the Vegas strip with its circus-like explosions of light. I felt blind. All I could do was listen to the exuberant music spilling over from the square, feel the humid, thick air condense and drool in streaks of sweat on my temple, bear witness to the pills and booze boxing out my coherence, sniff the awful urinal stench of the wet street.

I came onto a T-shaped intersection. On one of the corners was a gutted out shop, like a victim of arson, or like a bakery you might see in pictures of the Gaza strip after the Israelis have blown the shit out of it, or after a Palestinian suicide bomber blew up some arbitrary cafe.

There seemed to be some will to rebuild it, piles of lime and concrete were stacked up out front. It had a weird corrugated tin roof, what was left of it; maybe it was a fruit stand at one time, or a machine gun turret, or both.

The other street led up a steep hill. There were a few dogs hanging out with their head down, but certainly no sign of Inez or Phoenix.

I stumbled up a few feet in front of a tall house and tried to look in some of the dark crevices; a washing machine on the porch, a birdcage, a bundle of steel poles, an old sprite bottle, an old coke bottle, some cheap plastic toys littered about.

The house had an immense verticality to it, like a strange cubist house with odd childlike storybook dimensions. The windows and doors were oddly small, the height of the floors also miniaturized, and vines dangled off the roof over the top floor balcony like bangs of hair. All the windows, like everywhere else were black. I assumed an elf and his extended family lived in there.

The small pack of dogs sauntered among bits of roadside trash. One of them, a wandering white frumpy one, barked at me. I started to head back to the original street, no sign of elves or Inez and no use sticking around with these loser dogs. But the white dog got surly, snarled at me, picking a fight, growled, showed his vicious fangs, and barked more ferociously; within seconds, every mangy homeless dog in the neighborhood was barking up at me, all teaming up and hungry for blood. I threw kicks at them as I descended the road backwards, prepared to kick some mangy mutt ass.

They scattered when I got down to the other road but, and I promised myself this, if I ever saw that white dog again I would make it wish it were never born.

I followed the road past the gutted out shop, away from the revelries of the fiesta and, though it had become vague, still in the general direction of where I saw Inez skip off. This road merged onto the main street of the village, but about two hundred meters north of the plaza. I walked a little further north and crossed over the dusty bridge; it was dead quiet, not even any sign of the Mexican Van Gogh.

Instead of taking the same main road back to the Posada Amor, I veered course and followed a subsidiary road that split off to the left- a new route, a hunch, and a raffle ticket bet that I could find Inez somehow. The road started to open up into shadowy expanses of hills and jungle, a deep black hole chasm of darkness in every direction.

A cat dashed across the street.

“Where did he come from?”

It was pure jungle night; no sign of civilization except for the distant buzz of the fiesta that, though still clearly audible, evaporated thinner with every second.

Pretty soon, I began to hear the crash of waves to the left. The beach wasn't so far off, and I told myself that if I got lost I could always find my way home by following the sound of the waves to the beach and then north until I rediscovered the Posada Amor.

This was drugged out, drunk reasoning, because as I well knew, the bay ended in a dramatic wall of rocks and waves. If I cut down to the beach too soon, I wouldn't find the inn, only a close encounter with some razor sharp boulders and remorseless surf, perhaps some bloodthirsty banditos.

I could follow the beach north to the inn, just so long as I made it, at the very least, to the southern most tip of our bay, the next one up.

But what about Inez, wasn't it my duty to find her and save her? Although she hadn't exactly screamed in fright or flailed her arms in the universal sign of distress, scratched at her assailant, shrieked like a banshee for me to rescue her.

“She had eyes for that guy from the beginning,” I thought, “wanted to perform a personal strip tease for him as he accompanied her seductions on guitar.”

“No, man,” I changed my mind, “she’s just drunk and will regret her decision at the last moment; she’s praying that you’ll arrive to save her from his grimy clutches, beat him up, slap some sense into her, redeem her virtue; you’ll be a big hero and she’ll profess her love and, in an act of unprecedented gratitude and appreciation, impart upon you an honorable new number; number one thousand.”

The pills, obviously, were really corrupting the reasoning center of my brain. My logic was about as stable as a house of cards; my sense of denial, a runaway locomotive; I could fuzzily see the flimsy cards, the queen of hearts, faintly smell the coal smoke and hear the rumbling but, somehow, was perfectly oblivious to all of it.

The sound of the fiesta disappeared into a gossamer whisper, like a pale childhood memory. My throat felt dry, I wished I hadn’t dropped my beer in that futile effort to rescue Inez.

Rescue, that’s funny; she’s probably rescuing Phoenix right now, saving him from neglect and the cruel prison of his zipper; Inez the hero, Inez the freedom fighter.

I let one foot flop in front of the other, meaningless uninspired steps. I felt like I could walk this way forever. I felt like had walked this way forever. I regretted that I was walking north. It would feel so much better to head south; a pure shot through Guatemala, the snaky rivers of Nicaragua, the narrow strip of Panama, stumble through Costa Rica and eventually into the highlands of Colombia, Chili, slide through Patagonia and gaze out onto the bottom of the world from a freezing ledge on the furthest-most tip of Tierra del Fuego.

Instead, I just had the forlorn reprise of Guasave, Navojoa, Hermosillo, Nogales, and Tijuana ahead of me; after that, even worse, the oblivion of the American strip mall nightmare.

A dirt road opened up on the left.

“What the hell,” I thought.

I followed it around. I could hear the hum of the shore and knew that it most likely fed onto the beach. I slapped a mosquito on my neck; they were fierce out here in the moist interior of the jungle, I could feel the welt where the mosquito bitch had taken its share of my blood, it itched like hell. The weird insects rattled their insect breaths and parts and creaked and croaked and called out. Rapid-fire crickets chirped like on meth; breathy high-pitched sounds, buzzes and rattles.

Suddenly, fear sent a chill deep inside of me, and I got a burning sense for how isolated I was in the middle of this pitch black scorpion road in the lawless jungle. I picked up my pace, tried to walk with conviction, suddenly gripped by dread; a cheetah could be stalking me right then; in a savage instant, it might pounce on me and rip out a chunk of my neck with its ferocious jaws and feed on my entrails for a snack, the giant ants and centipedes stealing their share of my insides as well.

And what if, god forbid, I did happen upon Inez and that creep? What if he were making her right there on the side of the road in the mud, dark, and humid dew? What if he were violating her angelic womb with his grim dark snake, Inez moaning with thoughts of gardens?

Phoenix was no wimp; he could plant his seed in her and rip my head off all at the same time. Hell, he wore an index finger of one dead man around his neck already; why not add a pinky or a thumb to the collection?

I, unfortunately, would not stand a fighting chance against that guy, a trained killer; out muscled, out psychopathed. Is it any wonder that he is the one to plunder Inez's precious treasure?

Shit, at this point, the best I could hope for was a relatively uneventful trip down to the beach, free of any anacondas or cougars, a depressing walk home, and some relief in the stash of pills waiting for me in the luggage.

I knew better, there was no need to worry about Inez. Wherever she was, she was there gladly and willingly. And as much as I didn't stand a chance against that Iraqi killing madman, he lacked as much chance against her. Suddenly I felt a tinge of compassion for the guy.

I started to brighten up. Hell, things aren't so bad. The air is clean, I'm down in Mexico, and I've got some pills and cheap booze. I had already made Inez countless times. Christ, that's more than most men could ever hope for. It was high time I stopped counting my blessings.

"Shit," I chuckled to myself.

I liked the way it sounded.

"Shit."

It sounded fresh and pure and encouraging and untainted, unlike everything else leading up to this point. It felt like the first thing since the afternoon that wasn't a rip off, a scalp, jacked up in price, a manipulation, a bill of goods, or a scam.

I chuckled some more, "Fuck them, Fuck them all."

It helped. I felt in my pocket. I still had the two roman candles and my cigarette lighter. And, how about that, a Dexedrine, too, I could tell immediately by the oblong shape. Things were definitely looking up. Now the real party was about to start. I popped the pill, fixed my hair, and pushed forward. Now that the jungle blues had chilled out, I wasn't feeling so thirsty and sleepy anymore.

"See, amigo, so much of it is in your mind. You got to get over your macabre predispositions; it's psychology, envision a positive outcome and all of a sudden things aren't so dreary, man. Focus on the positive, quit being so grim and nihilistic. Express some appreciation for a change; appreciation appreciates; the hippy girl told you."

The cool breeze of the ocean and its distinctive smell of salt, sea anemone, and shipwrecks got stronger with every step. The ringing of the waves welcomed me and I was eager to feel the sand in my toes and lay my head back and just look up,

"Yeah man, you're getting the hang of it, just look up, not down."

I began to hum a little, "Summertime." It was stuck in my head from that disastrous dinner at the fish taco restaurant.

The road veered off and a few candles flickered on a table inside an open cement room, red stone floor. A statue of the Virgin Mary, on a cement altar, seemed to weep in the candlelight, little drops of gold tears trickling down her face.

I liked how holy the Mexicans were; in spite of their overall hopeless plight, or maybe because of it, their faith remained devout; building little altars in every corner, crevice, and tunnel. I stared into the loving eyes of the Virgin Mary. And in the flickering candlelight I realized the altar bespoke of a solemn wisdom of a people, a truth so timeless I couldn't understand, a beatitude that betrayed the false authenticity of everything else that I'd ever experienced up to that point, save for the holy fishermen.

I stayed for a moment, hoping to soak up some of the sanctity, none stuck. I couldn't think of any prayers so I just bowed my head in a kind of reverent way, felt shitty, and resumed on the path against the breeze.

A few lights cut between the microscopic slits in the jungle. I walked past an old baby blue VW Rabbit parked on the side of the road; and as I continued closer I could see a cluster of RV campers all huddled up within a spotted field of tall palm trees. They all had American license plates, Alaska, Colorado, California, Oregon, Utah.

Most were lit up, but abandoned in favor of the fiesta. Some had red jalapeño Christmas lights dangling; one had astro turf grass and a rocking chair; most of them had barbecues, hammocks, bicycles, and big colorful lights of some kind or another. I felt like I was in a suburban backyard on Memorial Day weekend in 1957, it felt comforting.

Another one had a dragon print cloth tied to it that enclosed an area beneath the RV's canopy. Colorful lanterns glowed inside of the space, oriental paper lanterns with flowers on them.

Some were Winnebago's with sheer, snub, flat fronts, incredibly poor aerodynamics, full of suburban amenities like Oster blenders and color televisions; some Air Stream; some were simply camper shells on the back of a pickup unceremoniously parked to the side. Each camper was a private universe with motorcycles, hula-hoops, and plastic lawn chairs in its orbit.

I hummed along and smiled. A door on one of the trailers, an Air Stream with Utah plates, opened up. An inviting and pretty American girl in jean shorts stood in the doorway; she had beautiful tan legs and fire engine red painted toenails; she bit into a crisp apple.

"Was that you singing?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"You have a pretty voice. Will you come inside and sing to me?"

Her dark eyes had sacred summer afternoons in them; golden hills baked in sun, a swing beneath an oak tree. I followed her bare feet up her smooth lean calves to the curve of her knees to the juice of her thighs and then to the white strands of jean that frizzled at the bottom of her cut off shorts.

She wore a loose tank top and her breasts called out like home after a war. On her left arm, starting on her milky white shoulder, a tattoo of dark ivy drifted down and

around the softness of her upper arm. Her dark hair brought out the soft, attractive, and classic features of her face; she had a dreamy, sleep in late, come hither quality to her smile.

I slipped out of my sandals and followed her up the aluminum steps into the trailer.

“Nice place.”

“Thanks, Do you like apples?”

“Sure.”

She handed me the apple she was chewing and I took a bite. She stood up close, I felt her breath, she watched me chew it, and drifted in close to my face. She wrapped her arms around me and dug her sharp nails into my back; pulled me in to the softness of her lips, mouth, and tongue.

Her mouth tasted like apple, like jasmine in the morning, apple pie, applesauce, apple tart, and tender sips of steaming cider while it snows.

She pulled back just far enough to ask, “Another bite?”

The apple was crisp and we chewed it together, the juices streaming between the two of us, nocturnal juices of jasmine sugar flowing between our soft mouths.

Her body was dripping with sweat; the trailer was broiling, but felt utterly inviting. Tiny vents on the ceiling were propped open and I could see slices of the sky, slivers of stars.

Life magazines from the fifties ordained a small wooden table bolted to the floor in the living room. One of them was open to an article about B-52 bombers, others with a larger than life cover photo of Ernie Kovacs, Richard Nixon, Audrey Hepburn, all stamped with that big, bold, Life Magazine logo, so embedded in my American psyche, only to find itself wheeled down here to the strange horrors of roads and jungles to the glooms of restless Mexican bandito night.

One of them, May 13, 1957 cover article said, “Great Adventures III, The Discovery of Mushrooms that Cause Strange Visions.”

A zebra print rug lay on the floor and felt soft on my feet after hours of marching on cobblestones and hard packed dirt. I liked the elusive elegance of the décor, especially their choice of pattern for the couch, leopard print with plush matching pillows.

I wondered why she wasn't at the fiesta but didn't care to ask. She looked tremendous and virile eating that apple, her mischievous smile, and her eyes locked into mine begging for every instinctive truth.

On the far end of the couch was a cabinet, a stack of records piled on top, and inside the cabinet, an old record player. It became clear to me; I had fallen back in time with an American unicorn from the fifties.

Her supple chest pressed against mine, her nipples popping out like tender religious nubs. She rubbed her hands up and down my back, breathing breath hot sighs into my ear.

I lifted the bottom of her shirt and she raised her arms so it could slip off. I tossed the shirt on the couch and we stood separated for a moment; I beheld her precious body, registered the blessing of her being; she smiled and returned it to me, locked her arms around my shoulders and neck. I ran my hands along the slick of her back and rubbed my fingers deep into the contours of her tender, fawn-like skin.

I picked her up by the waist, she shrieked and giggled as I lifted her to the couch and laid her down. I leaned in on top of her as she propped her right leg up on the table full of Life Magazines; her barefoot sliding over covers and advertisements for cigarettes and scotch, ads with tuxedoed gentlemen and elegant women in ball gowns.

I placed my hand on her belly, felt her naval, inched my fingers down to her waist, the ridge of her skin tight jean shorts; explored with my fingers, found the front, button fly, and unhooked it, starting at the top, each button one by one, slowly and deliberately, cherishing every release of tension on the fabric as not to rush this one ultimate mortal joy.

I could feel her soft, cotton panties, the moist heat from between her legs. She helped me pull my jeans off, around my ankles, and onto the floor. She ran her hands up my leg and gripped my pride with hunger. She slipped her apple sweet mouth onto me, her tongue deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize, and I found paradise in the softness of her hair.

And to say nothing of finger tips and sighs and tremendous delicacies and ice cream on pie, savannah Georgia July twilight, and hallelujahs coming from pastors of grace, and hallelujahs coming from the grace of heart, and climbing up and tumbling with fresh smells and innocent eyes; warm pudding, the cries of truths and fleshs and interior salvations and intrepid communions and the union of breath in simultaneous universe, juices, and elation.

And outside the tender night rattled with cricket wands and vine creaks and our own animal music melded with the universal music in the magnum opus of the world.

We collapsed into each other and felt ourselves, the dripping of creation. She smelled ripe, pure pungent unapologetic woman in the decadent heat of night, the raw earthiness and wisdom of uncensored pheromones.

Embedded in her was the soft center of history and humanity; and futures of philosophers and heroes of future's realm, and wars, and supplications for peace among all men.

Our hearts pounded, beats of ceremonial drums in unison, and I hummed to her and she sighed with pleasure; slid her leg from the table, Life Magazines fluttering to the floor.

She rolled on her side, purred, and I lay behind her in the inviting warmth; we lay there a long time. She was asleep. I quietly pulled away from her, got up, nude as a gorilla, opened the refrigerator, and helped myself to a beer; Budweiser, an American beer.

I pulled up my shorts and buckled my belt, retrieved my shirt, leaned over, kissed her on the forehead, unlatched the trailer door, cracked open my Bud, slipped my feet in my sandals, and resumed my walk toward the waves.

The beer was nice and cold. I had been yearning for that beer; hell I earned that beer. It tasted like a bottled slice of heaven after that doomed trek through the furious and morbid jungle, after the exerting, though blissful, tussle in the dove pure rapture of the girl.

A narrow path led me into bumpy blankets of sand, the water in its entire black expanse commanding the distance. I took off my sandals, picked them up, and walked to the shore.

The water rushed up with big tongues of white foam churning and crossing in every direction, one rabid tongue over another, an orgy of incestuous French kisses; tongue tips lapping and twittering, stretching up the slope of the wet sand, then retreating and evaporating, leaving a dark, saturated stain.

I let the water run over my feet, it felt cool and clean; I shoved my beer in the sand, sloshed my hands in the tide, and inhaled deeply. The ocean air had flavor to it, specific to that particular slice of beach as specific as the DNA in anybody's cells; an aroma as complex as Wine Spectator's most sophisticated recommendation- hints of Mediterranean, Atlantic, touch of Caribbean, hurricane, dolphin, oil tanker, typhoon.

I looked north; a jungle thick hill covered in snakes and spider webs loomed imperiously. I hadn't gone far enough to reach the other bay.

Ah fuck it, I started following the beach south, back toward the town and the fiesta, figured I could navigate my way onto the main road from there and follow it back the way I came at the start of the evening.

There was an inherent security about the beach. The jungle, full of its chattering buzzes and arrogant rattles, respected its boundary.

Husks of coconuts spotted the sand, as did driftwood from fallen trees that dated back to the crusades; resurrected at long last in raging storms by the hands of Poseidon and Neptune; lost cities of Atlantis thousand foot wave typhoons of fury; washed up again after lifetimes underwater, reunited with world; deathly gray and aged, like all life one day will, even the ancient sea turtle and stars; the pallid gray that awaits the world, either at once, or in increments; of the soul gone away, of quiet impartiality, of equanimity.

And the horrors of the sea, the sharks and sting rays and giant jelly fish in globs wiggling their tentacles of terrifying stings; man eating whales and great white sharks of insatiable predatorial hunger and savagery; the swirls of tides and the crashing upon rocks and the limitless depths to sink to sink to sink.

All these treacherous forces find their end at the shore, no jurisdiction, where they are impotent and unwanted, forbidden and excommunicated, thrust out.

And so, except for the scared crab that scurries away and kicks up ancient pebbles of sand with too many to count legs, giant elegant home of shell on back, the beach is a tender place of safety for weary and bedraggled, be-damned, souls like me.

I sipped my beer as I walked and felt glad. The moon glowed in the sky, crisp in the absence of all clouds, the stars muted by its bold luster.

I wondered where Inez was. I felt sorry for Phoenix; he would probably fall in love with her. Despite his aggression he surely has a mother and gentle feelings of human hope and sorrow and yearning embedded inside of him.

The Roman candles rubbed against my side. I suddenly felt empty and weary. I took a break, sat in the sand, and gazed out into the darkness of the ocean. In spite of all its threats of horrors and maelstroms it still, ironically, had a sense of peace to it. How can something so awful be so comforting? I felt drawn to it, in love.

I pulled a roman candle from my pocket, jammed it in the sand, flicked my lighter, lit the firework, and watched the fuse sizzle. I leaned back as the gunpowder stick swallowed the burning fuse and spewed a tiny fountain of smoke and sparks until whoop!

A red flaming ball shot in the sky; then whoop, a green one. They were meager arcs, and burned out quickly, but still a thrilling alchemy, the curious science and spectacle, an assertion of command over the elements. I planted the other one in the sand and lit it, too. The fuse burned into the cylinder, hissed, and then died; a dud.

I finished my beer and chucked the bottle into the ocean, a little invisible SOS note for the prophets to find and heed my call. It splashed like a sailor's beer bottle tossed off in some Norway, no message, like mine; just a group of boisterous sailors and a beer finished and tossed and subsequently a fresh beer to be had; and slammed by the great forces of the ocean gurgling and swishing from one continent to the next, eternally toppling in tides, eventually crashing against the shore, maybe fifty years ago, fifty years from now, frosty, a light brown, and smooth, ever so smooth.

So, if nothing else, a destiny of redemption in the form of genteel sea glass, the little jewels that wash up, so silky, almost soft, sand buffed and wave polished to perfection, treasures to collect in hands and show friends.

I noticed flickers further south, weird spinning expressions of light and figures blocking the light momentarily then blending into the heavy black of night again.

Percussive rumblings boomed, the shadow figures of drummers and their flailing hands; thump, thump, thump, thump the bass my new reality subsequent to soft lullabies, hush of water, swish of sand between toes, and breath from nose.

The warlocks, sorcerers, and wizards of the fiesta had migrated for their own pagan gathering; they summoned every ambassador of darkness, an amalgamation of sinister spirits offering themselves as sacrificial conduits to the forces of black magic.

I recognized the drummer; it was the gypsy genius from earlier in the evening. He had come to reunite with his people, all encamped in withered tents beneath a canopy of palms. He noticed me as I approached their bonfire, the fool guero flamenco dancer trying to tame the wild woman in red; he smirked at me, not confrontationally, but victoriously. A sinking, sick, feeling jabbed me in the gut.

A Mexican teenage boy twirled fireballs of poi in circles, to his side, and beneath his legs with lightening quickness and warrior ferocity; a tribal girl, twenty years old, twirled thick sticks like feather batons, the ends ignited in flames; a woman, big boned, nappy

hair, blond with very dark tan, howled Goddess chants into the fire; and a stilt walker with bracelets clanging and dangling danced a strange inhuman marionette dance.

She wore a leather dress with frills on the end and had intense tribal tattoos, pagan symbols, piercings through her eyebrow, septum, and lip. I looked at her. She saw me.

“Hiiiiiiiiissssssssssssssss!”

Creatures danced, in a trance, to the heavy and deep tribal rhythms of the precocious gypsy driving it all, sweat flying off his brow and steaming into the bonfire.

Girls gyrated madly, possessed by voodoo; clouds of marijuana wafted everywhere, magic perfume. Another gypsy, sculpted torso rippling with muscles, blew fire from his mouth like a fierce dragon from the orient. He had a sweet and beautiful dark cherry of a girl with him; her eyes glowed in adoration with every blow of the flame.

Other creatures violently shook rattles and tambourines; the visceral buzz, the fury of the blaze impossible to endure, scorching hot when approached, an invisible lethal line between warm enjoyment and searing burning of flesh.

Another gypsy wailed on his harmonica while creatures with tequila writhed together in their own goo. They howled and spit tequila into the bonfire, crazed; then more logs, insanely flammable palm fronds, the hungry flames heartily slurped up each offering.

A girl with serpentine movements twirled her hands in an adaptation of the belly dance; her soft stomach undulated like a fleshly miracle.

Radically lean hippy, long red dreadlocks slapped against his back, dark tanned skin, no shoes, and linen white pants; twirled on the sand and kicked out, alternated from side to side, another gypsy joined in and they kicked over each other's head and under their feet, jumped, an acrobatic hand stand; they circled each other, faced off, two runaway slave capoeira masters.

Every man with his woman; and everybody adorned tribal necklaces with feathers and strange stones full of energetic properties; wild dogs wandered aimlessly or sat nearby or sniffed black lumps of pungent seaweed and debris that clumped up and splattered on the shore.

Chattering, wailing, buzzing; and the splash of a naked group in the ocean, tumbling all over each other with blow hole laughter and dolphin splashes onto each other's face; dives and misses, naked girls, boys, women, men all goofing with mischievous delight.

A girl, nearby, ate a sample from a bag of treats circling around, a perfect magic mushroom, her face brightened. The wandering dark prophets ambled in from every continent and galaxy; laying tent on sand and colliding in sacred shared rhythms of an archaic revival; interlocking, reconnecting, and also a sinister underbelly of thievery and betrayal; alliances, enemies, a façade of honor among thieves.

And orbiting all around, smaller satellite fires with little sparks that twinkled and danced into the sky; and creatures convening in campfire summits, the firelight flickered on their bodies spectrally; they shared supernatural whispers of innermost feelings, phobias, best wishes, high ideals, and also undercutting one another with refined passive aggressive technique; philosophical conversations, cosmic musings, battles of wits.

Two radical mohawk tribal fire hippies sat cross-legged facing one another in a meditative exchange of kundalini, colorful Tibetan prints strung from their tent to palm tree; another tent had ragged clothes draped from a rope, hanging to dry; three dark girls, giggling in short leather skirts, no tops; snuggled together in a tent.

Palm fronds, jet black against the night, silhouetted against the sky like scary witch doctor hair; leant an ear out to sea with great drooping coconut clusters; ribbed trunks lean, tall, and elegant like giraffe's necks; others, still young and squat, cast ominous coconut tree shadows, illumined by fires, an upward projection, their trunks glazed in orange and also the underside of the wide fronds where hints of green perished.

And always, the persistent booming of waves, folding onto one another and when they crested, they captured starlight in horizontal streaks; white foam crashing like an avalanche.

Hills of soaking black cotton on either side of the bay; dense, impenetrable, jungle black behind the tents; the sand, organically textured patterns from natural wind swoops, from tide sweeps, from dancers' feet.

Vicious bark, snarl, and growl- two dogs lunge at each other, deadly expression of instinct; an instinct that every animal shares in common, even the deadly instinct of plants to suffocate other plants; the ferocious growls of these animals dated back to the dinosaurs; saliva flew, they snapped at each other's tense throats; the gypsies, in alignment with their pacifist Mahatma Gandhi surface ethos of peace, hastily broke up the duel and reprimanded the dogs for their violent unenlightened behavior with solid whaps on nose.

Then I heard a familiar sound, a sound so familiar to me yet so foreign to the Mexican palate; I walked to it and sure enough, Forest, sitting on a log, squeezed and plucked the keys of his accordion; two lovely Mexican gypsy girls, entranced, watched him, cross-legged on the sand, and listened intently with bedtime story eyes.

"Forest"

"Yes"

He didn't recognize me.

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh, just joining in the festivities, yass, yass', the festivities, the lovely festivities."

"How long have you been here?"

"A-while now and everything is fine, came sailing in here, after all these years of slaving and earning and now spending my time in the comfort of this overall general paradise."

"Have you seen Inez?"

"Inez?"

"The girl I was with, red dress?"

His face grew sober for the quickest instant in the moment of recognition of who I was and how I related to his night.

“Oh lovely, Inez; No, no, not at all, not at all.”

“How about Phoenix?”

“No, not at all, he’s just back from I-RAQ, got a bit of a wild streak in him, could be anywhere. Sit down, make yourself at home, I’m playing some music, some old Texas honky-tonk melodies.”

“Maybe later.”

I walked off and heard his accordion kick in again and merge with the sounds of the drum and rattles and the crackle of fires and the howls of the women and the dogs growling and barking together and girls giggling; it all amalgamated into one, giant, cacophonous wall of noise.

I ventured back to the big bonfire, thought I’d stay another couple of minutes, admire the wild gypsy children of freedom’s bosom run about in their lustful and tainted liberation; then find my way back to the main road, hike through the jungle of killers, back to the room, look beneath the bed for monsters, provided there are none eat some pills, crawl in bed, and pull sheets over face.

A shell caught my eye in front of the fire, small but neatly shaped, had interesting gradations of colors that told long oral histories of the Odyssey imbedded in its spirals, I wanted to run a phonograph needle over it and listen to its tale.

I picked it up and tapped it against another shell; it made a soft but interesting sound. I experimented, found variations, and finally settled on a catchy rhythm that fit with the music of the furious drummers; surrendered to it and let my body sway in a collective trance.

An attractive, familiar looking, blond offered me some of her marijuana joint. I toked it and invited the ancient, wise, smoke into the deep voids of my soul. I handed it back to her and with a second look, realized who she was, the girl of powerful tattoos and blazing piercings that absorbed the red intricacies of the bonfire, the one who had hissed at me. She was barefoot in the sand now, no stilts.

She took the joint and toked it with a smile. I returned to my shell rhythm, felt relaxed, and undulated with the powerful pulse of the beat.

I was in my skin, finally natural, a conduit, my senses absorbing infinite whispers of information recalibrated to new conclusions, synaptical integration, subsequent insights and tinier thoughts that twinkled in my head like a star flooded sky.

“I need to use my left hand more,” I thought, “I’ve neglected it in favor of my right.”

I also began to understand the secret language of dogs as they growled, howled, and barked; every sound had a clearly communicated idea and meaning, in spite of the absence of symbolism; they compensated by developing an articulate palate of intonations with sophisticated variations.

I realized that sunsets are alive; they emerge gradually, like the first hints of flower blossoms, grow in intensity and gloriously peak as they wage wars and triumphs in the sky when all breath is rushed out from its innermost need to express its sole meaning and purpose; bleeding peaches shredded across tatters of clouds, deep lavenders converging

into robin egg blue; then slowly fade and disappear into more muted expressions of color, gradually surrender to the shuddering shivers of black; and, periodically, Venus, like a white laser, pierces the sky.

The blond inhaled her smoke and leaned into me, placed her lips on mine, and blew the smoke into my mouth and lungs, almost a forceful act, nearly rape-like; but my lungs welcomed it and it zoomed into my head and I passed it back to her in that same fashion of mouth-to-mouth Buddha CPR.

Yet, I still rattled my rhythm on the shell, never missed a beat, and she, sensually, rubbed her body and scent all over mine; then, almost imperceptibly, took my hand and we entered a deeper state of allegiance; without resistance, I followed her into the tattered tent village of secret wonders and goddess spells.

And all around, I heard love noises, sighs and cries seeping from every direction, and sometimes multiple love noises all from the same tent; and then a gypsy couple outside on a mat, naked, the gypsy man inserting himself into the girl's honey nectar as I watched; she sees that I'm captivated, smiles with satisfaction.

Several couples copulated on one wide blanket; each sweaty body rubbing against multiple others; and a dark haired girl with fair skin cried out, cried out, in orgasmic shouts of glory; and another girl balanced on her hands and knees, head bowed to the ground, hair falling over her face while a dark skinned boy with necklace gyrated behind her in the sensual dance of penetration, other creatures stood closely by to observe; a tall girl in string panties dipped over and thrust her tight ass out, pleasurably begging for more snaps of a little leather lasso whip from a man in a rubber mask; a fierce muscular man inserted glistening fingers into a woman, spread her legs further apart for further explorations; two girls toppled upon each other with voracious tongues and grinding of pelvis; a hammock wobbled violently in the inventive love poses of three more; and others had hands on genitals and in anuses exploring their own personal excitements, full of moans and cries, visible by the arbitrary flickers of campfires.

I followed the girl; she unzipped a tall tent and pulled me in to a plush lounge of soft matting, cushions, pillows, a blanket.

A man, wearing a loincloth, held a wide balloon in there. He offered it to her and she inhaled the contents with an incredibly deep breath; and even in the darkness of the tent, I can still see her lips and face turn to blue.

Using a metal canister, he inserted a new balloon onto its valve, twisted a knob on the canister, the balloon inflated, red, and he handed it to me. I inhaled it deep, went to another dimension; all my previous conceptions and inner understandings exposed, crystallized, and then shattered in a giant barrage of pure light; followed by no thoughts, just simple happiness culminating in tension release and relaxation.

His manhood stood out as she unbuckled my pants. He filled another balloon and inhaled it; she spread her mouth around my blood hard joy while he massaged the underside of my sex; then she took the balloon and I climbed on top of her as she inhaled fully; and then I inhaled and he had his fingers and mouth everywhere and around me; I implanted myself on her and recognized blue lips and vacant eyes in the high of the balloon; haze and halos, I inhaled more, and the light overtook me again and I howled in

the cries of love juice release; the balloon twittered within my neurons and I had lost my body, speechless.

And then the balloon man climbed on top of her, inhaling his magic as she moaned and squirmed beneath him. I felt for my pants, found them, put my legs through them while he buried himself into her; I zipped my fly and stumbled out of the tent and back into the buzz of the gypsy village, full of orgasmic cries and rhythms; I tumbled onto the sand; the gas, sex, pills, and beer had collectively instigated a heavy delirium and radical sense of disorientation.

Sand slipped beneath my feet. I stumbled south.

The smoke of the bonfire glowed a spooky orange as it blew spectral wafts of light and smoke into the hills; I could smell it as I ran, coconut sweet; a shadow lump on the sand, a long-haired hippy boy humped his girl.

As I tumbled down the beach, I cried to the ocean, tears streaming like rain down my face. I cried to the sky. I cried to the jungle and ran for my life, suddenly terrified, suddenly feeling exhausted, suddenly feeling so much weaker than ever before. I ran and I tumbled and tumbled and ran and I found a road and through pure blackness and dread sprinted for eternities, although the eternities passed like seconds until the posada, magically from nowhere, stood before me. I clamored up the stairs and found the door to the room and tumbled in and lay panting on the bed and I was alone.

Roosters bellowed out in the first bugles of dawn; shades of pink and taupe tamed the utter blackness of the hills; the sound of waves undulated softly over sand, then the balcony, and then in through the posada window.

An extreme density of stillness hung in the air, the village suspended in its Sunday morning coma. A giant wave crashed against the south point of the bay, detonated in an enormous white explosion. A pack of birds, some kind of seabird with jagged long bat shaped wings, five of them, circled the hills, just gliding none of them dived or changed altitude, just gently hovered and soared over the emerging hills in the morning.

I heard the door unlock. Through the blur of my eyes, I saw a foggy figure sweep into the bathroom and close the door. The light flicked on in the bathroom; I saw a slice of light pour from beneath the crack of the door. The toilet flushed, the sound muffled by the closed door, and I hear the shower turn on. I could tell by the way the timbre of the water changed that she had stepped inside.

I got up, cracked open a beer and stepped on the balcony; it tasted crisp with the purity of dawn.

A couple of fishermen, most of the others slept in and took the day off, released their boats into the shallow water, pushed them out with strong arms, and fired up the motors to harvest the day's bounty.

I don't know how long I was asleep for, probably not for long; I don't know if I slept at all.

When I squinted my eyes, the birds circling the hills looked like kites; strange, living, dragon kites. I wished I could attach them to a string and have a bouquet of them.

I would fly one, tie it up, and then fly another, tie it up, then fly another, until I had a tiny tribe of them bouncing in the sunshine breeze of a leisure day.

It was still rather dark in the room when Inez came out from the bathroom, a beer in hand, too. She wore a black silk nightgown; one I had bought for her last year. She flicked off the bathroom light, walked up to the dresser, placed her beer down, looked in the dresser mirror, pulled the skin beneath her eyes as if trying to stretch out the puffiness, sighed, and brushed her shower wet hair.

“How was it?” I asked.

“Thrilling, baby, thrilling.”

Her voice sounded uncharacteristically raspy, tired, yet with a sense of accomplishment. Delicate hints of booze and cigarettes were embedded in it, and the scratchy joys of last night’s moans and screams.

She picked out another brush from her vanity bag and began to run it through her hair, tilting her head to one side as the tension of the strokes pulled against her scalp. The brush looked hand carved, some exotic acquisition of hers, or maybe a gift from a weird Aztecan or Wiccan admirer.

She brushed her hair very evenly, rhythmically, with the faintest sound of a silk swish. The swishes blended in with the soft purr of the ocean. She switched sides and held the other end of her hair with one hand and made twin image brush swipes on the new side.

She picked up a yellow Mexican matchbook, wooden matches, from the top of the dresser, pulled one out, and dragged it across the striking surface. The match flared up with a puff of smoke and she held it to the wick of the Jesus candle. The wick ignited, she blew out the match, looked at herself in the mirror, and resumed her brushing.

I stepped from the balcony back into the room, lay on the bed, leaned over and tried to flip on the bedside lamp. The switch was on the other side of the lamp and I clumsily reached around it with an awkward shift of weight, the bed creaked, I maneuvered my wrist, found the small metal switch, and turned the lamp on. I opened up my sketchbook.

Inez paused her brushing and turned to me with a grave expression, “Baby, please close the window, the breeze is sending chills over my shoulders.”

I looked at the sliding window and past the balcony at the dawn opening up outside in the giant world and suddenly the room felt very small. In the translucent reflection of the window glass I saw hints of Inez and little jagged flickers of the Jesus candle. I even saw myself, faintly, in my underwear, like an ethereal me, a ghost. I felt very exposed, I thought of my corduroy jacket, and the liquor store by Aardvarks.

I could see Inez watching me, waiting for me to close it. For some reason I realized that I hadn’t paid yet for another night; it’s something I should do by noon, probably sooner.

I put down my notebook, took a sip of my beer, walked to the balcony window, and with a forceful shove slid the tall window shut.

“It’s a beautiful morning,” I said. “The light adds new intensity to the mysterious hints of crimson that wash the cobblestones and there’s a smashed pack of cigarettes as flat as foil conforming to every precise contour of the road.”

I returned back to the bed, picked up the notebook, and started flipping through the sketches. Inez resumed brushing her hair and looked at herself wonderingly in the mirror, delicately touched the skin of her face.

“Baby, you know I’m pregnant?” she said.

The pictures had strange dimensions to them. Weird, spooky, square clown faces with no neck; a queer looking man with blue lips, orange face, and no top to his head; four storm clouds furiously scrawled and colored outside the lines, blue, red, yellow, black; odd shapes overlapping a cone smoking with fire, a tube suspended in space with super string threaded through it; a family of tongue depressors with two dark eyes, green, brown, blue, and red, a hurricane of muddy crayon hatches ragingly scrawled behind them.

I closed the notebook and put it back on the bedside table. I leaned over and turned off the lamp, more successfully this time, familiar with the switch; stood up, and walked to the bathroom. I paused at the door.

“What are you going to do?”

The words felt like they belonged to someone else. They seemed submerged in ash, unearthed from Pompeii, or like dry pencil shavings stuck at the bottom, for years, of a hand crank pencil sharpener; the words rushed out of my mouth at an unnatural speed, hurried and insistent, though masked in a transparent façade of indifference or calm rationality.

Inez resumed brushing her hair. All the tangles were gone and the brush glided smoothly down the silky slope of her formidably mane, only inhibited by the density of it, like running a spoon through pudding.

“I wonder if it’s yours,” she said.

“Who else’s could it be?”

“Well, perhaps number 89, I doubt number 86, the pharmacist, remember?”

She pondered this question seriously, reliving each encounter, with a sharp instinct of each lover’s virility; smiles swished across her face, a side glance, she bit her lip in concentration.

“It could be any of the revelers from last night, 87 through 92.”

“87 through 92? Jesus, a gangbang?”

“Baby, it was a party.”

“Six guys in one night?”

“Gilbert from New Mexico, we met up after all; Caesar, the cute waiter, the Mexican fisherman with great arms; the gorgeous gypsy drummer boy, I prophesized that one you’ll recall; one of the desperados that hung out on the low rock walls in the plaza...”

She paused, closed her eyes, and took a deep breath.

“92; yes, it is number 92.”

“92?”

She turned her soft shoulder toward me, glanced up at an angle.

“The accordion player.”

“Oh God.”

I felt nauseas.

“How can you possibly already know that you’re pregnant? This must have been only hours ago.”

“About an hour and a half; a woman knows these things. You boys can never fathom the depth of intuition a woman has; the way you rattle on with all your vague and esoteric understandings and quandaries of wars and the universe but, baby, you’ve got it all wrong, the center of it all is right here, in my womb. It’s the golden Buddha, the Holy Grail, and the sorcerer’s stone all rolled into one. It’s a simple resonance with the frequency of the universe that I doubt you will ever comprehend. Yes, baby, I am sure; I’m pregnant, I’m cum filled and fertilized.”

She plucked out a couple of eyebrow hairs with a pair of tweezers, opened a bottle of Vicodin, tossed them down her throat, opened up some orange pills and threw a couple of those down, too.

“Do you want to hear me sing a song?” I asked.

“No baby, not really, I’m brushing my hair.”

I went into the bathroom and pushed the door shut. The door, swollen from the humidity of Inez’s shower, hit the door frame and rested open a crack.

The bathroom smelled of Inez; sweet, earthy, youthful. The mirror was still steamed up from her shower and the smell of soap lingered. I tried to look at myself in the mirror; it was too fogged up. I pressed my finger against the wet surface, dragged my finger over it slowly and wrote, “8-1”

Water condensed at the bottom of the numbers and dribbled down the mirror, giving them a weird, scary font. I turned on the faucet and waited for the water to warm up. I glanced over the contents of the bathroom counter. Some expensive moisturizers, Inez’s pink toothbrush, my green toothbrush, nail clippers, lipstick, blue mouthwash, some pills, a bar of soap, my razor, some empty bottles of beer, winter-mint toothpaste; the tube squeezed in an uneven and lumpy way.

Her red dress rested clumped up on top of the towel rack. I took it and held it with both hands, my arms extended, so it tumbled down like a matador’s cape. Beer and wine blotches stained it, a bit of sand spilled out; the back of the dress was imbedded with dirt and dust; there was a long rip at the front.

Her light blue panties rested on the tiles of the floor. I didn’t have the heart to pick them up. There was a beer cap in the sink. I flipped it like a coin, tossed it in the toilet, pissed on it, and flushed.

I sank my hands beneath the running water and scrubbed them for a moment before cupping them, captured little warm pools, and splashed the water over my face. I picked up the bar of soap and lathered it up in my hands and spread it over my chin and cheeks. I discreetly pushed the door open a crack further and began shaving.

Inez was passed out on the bed like an angelic, knocked up, kitten. Her body gently rose and fell in the smooth rhythm of her purrs. I finished shaving the rest of my face, rinsed the razor; whiskers stuck to the sides of the sink. I wiped my cheeks and neck with a towel, squeezed out some of the moisturizer on the counter, rubbed it on my skin, and joined Inez in the bed.

She was out cold; that snack of Vicodin definitely did the trick. I curled up next to her and watched the rotation of the fan as it cut the air just beneath the ceiling like helicopter blades.

“Maybe we’ll take off,” I thought. “Maybe we’ll fly away.”

The fan had a peculiar, orbital whoosh. It rotated with an unstable danger about the base; like a bent wheel on my old dirt bike after taking a kamikaze jump.

I smelled her clean hair and remembered a story she told me.

“I was in high school and I met him at a bar, he was a little bit skinny but daring. We smoked cigarettes together and he sang me soft songs and danced in a weird lithe-like way on the dance floor to Richie Valens. I liked his leather jacket and gritty attitude. He once snagged three bottles of whiskey from behind the bar and shoved them in my bag.

So one afternoon, after sucking him off, I decided to get some cash together and buy him a motorcycle he’d been talking about since I met him. It was a rusted old Honda sitting in the driveway of some guy in the neighborhood with wild, huge, hair and enormous overalls.

At the time, I had this soul sucking job at a juice stand in a strip mall complete with endless parking lot, Tower Records, 31 flavors ice cream, multiplex movie theater, Radio Shack, the Gap, etc. Well, I wasted countless hours of my precious life as customers trickled in with their shopping bags and hot dogs and watched my ass as I squeezed them carrot juice, celery juice, orange juice, beet juice, wheatgrass, you name it.

The owner was this pale, queer, bitter hobbit of a man who unlocked the door in the morning, left, and returned at night to count the register. I swear to God, sometimes hours would pass without a single customer. I would stare out those big windows onto the empty parking lot, an occasional skater speeding by, always sipping a juice for myself, apple celery, or some combination like that; and watch the patter of rain some days, the way it came down in short fluttery swishes against the window and I dreamed about getting that Honda and riding away.

Other days, I have no idea why, we would be slammed with customers out the door; maybe the ice cream shop was closed. I couldn’t squeeze those damn carrots and oranges fast enough, though I tried. On days like that, we’d have about 350\$ in the till.

The big guy with the motorcycle was asking \$300. It needed some work but my guy said he knew how to fix bikes.

So it was one of those busy days but things tapered off and got quiet again; and see, there were no cameras in this shop, no security whatsoever. So when the coast was clear, I emptied the till and shoved all the money into one of those large Styrofoam juice cups. Then I threw some change on the counter and floor and then finally when a customer came in I was bawling and in hysterics. I told him, 'We've just been robbed!' And he was extremely concerned for my well being and asking very sympathetic questions, 'Are you alright, did he have a gun, what happened?' And I told him that two colored men in their thirties came in with flannel shirts on and his hand in his pocket like maybe one had a gun and panty hose on their face and they used very forceful and ugly language that I can't repeat and told me he had a gun and to empty the till into a paper bag. 'God, I was terrified,' I said, 'my hands were shaking like mad.'

And I called the boss and he came looking queer and confused and the cops came, a couple of handsome guys and they acted very professional asking similar questions but mostly concerned for my well-being. As it so happened, there were a string of crimes in the neighborhood in the same vein at that time and the crooks who robbed me perfectly fit the description.

So the boys in blue walked me to my car, and I had my Styrofoam juice cup with me, and a straw sticking out the top of it, and I kept my head to the ground in a steady stream of tears.

The shop closed down soon after but I had the money and as planned I rang the doorbell of the big guy and he came down through his metal gate and I gave him the \$300. He said he didn't want to sell it to a girl; it was a man's bike, plain and simple. I told him it was a gift for my boyfriend and I had only planned to ride on the back. He told me to send my boyfriend and he would give him the key.

Well, I did, and he fixed the bike and he'd pick me up at lunch from school drive me all kinds of places, though mostly to the river where we'd make it beneath the juniper trees, number 29, but once he took me to the aquarium and this is why I even brought up this story to you, baby, because it is of critical importance and relevance to the understanding of our relationship."

"What?" I asked.

"He brought me to the aquarium and they were showing an educational film about the life cycle of seahorses. Sea horses; do you realize seahorses are probably the only animal in nature's entire kingdom that the male carries the babies? Besides sea dragons, pipefish, marsupial frogs; they carry around the fertilized eggs in a cozy little pouch on its belly. They showed a video. The male horse was twitching and writhing in agony on the ocean floor as he squirted out, in bursts, little litters of microscopic seahorses. Most of them get devoured before maturity by other seahorses but some survive. Can you imagine baby, how beautiful, the male squirts out the baby. Wouldn't you like that?"

"No."

"And then my boyfriend made me in a utility closet filled with fish food and parts for the filtration system."

The fan swirled and swirled. How long had I been there for? The sun was in the sky and pouring through the window with potent floods of light. Every so often I raised my

shoulder to look outside, but because my leg was caught under Inez's, I couldn't prop myself up in the right way to get a good guess of the time. But judging from the intensity of the light spilling in the room, it had to be at least eleven, maybe later.

And the ceiling fan swirled, swirled, swirled, in giant fan blade rotations, a chain dangling from the fixture and jiggling with an old strand of spider web attached to it.

As I watched it wobble, paranoia filled me; suddenly sure that while I'm deep in slumber and comfort dreams, filled with naïve good feelings of safety, the fan will unscrew itself from the ceiling and scalp me or Inez like a Sioux chief; safe away from the suburban nightmare quicksand bog only to be tomahawked by a rickety Mexican ceiling fan.

A gecko scurried across the roof, completely upside down. It scurried and then came to a halt, like as if I hadn't seen it. I looked at it hard with ghetto attitude like,

"Hey man, don't think you can fool me, I may be whacked out on pills but I still see you; I got your number, I know your sly intentions to get from one room to the next, take a sneaky sip out of my beer."

The fan twirled, twirled, twirled. Inez purred next to me, curled up; the pills kept her in a deep, warm slumber. I, however, incorrigibly awake, could only watch the fan and the longer I watched the less of a fan it became and more of a cartoon windmill and whooshes and all of the fan blades like samurai fan blades blended together and I saw smoke rise up inside of it like a crystal ball.

With a silk scarf around my head; the sun rushed in and in combination with the crystal fan shared with me all of its mystical secrets of black fevers and raging dusty roads, of crash of wave and futile thrashings of sinking sailors; tales of emperors and buzzing of trees, juices flowing through the streets of suburbia, sweet root juices full of water and sugar like a melted otter pop, running like a marble through 'Hungry, Hungry Hippo,' the saccharine streets of suburban cocoons.

Houses like shells discarded and fathers and baby strollers wander the afternoon streets with no street lights and the stop signs illuminated in nowhere paint, blank canvas, and new houses, shells of houses, furnished and accommodating houses, abandoned nuclear winter houses full of snapshots of parades, holidays, and graduation speeches.

The fan was filled with strange patterns of Hungarian light and tea leaves inside of its globe, strange Mediterranean whispers inside the swish of blades, murmurs of mariners in deep Atlantic typhoons, drunken fools tossed in galleys by eighty foot waves.

Scrying into the crystal ball I gazed events of other worlds like charcoal masterpiece drawings grinded into the paper holding charcoal with whole fist, no shapes to be alarmed. The crystal ball brings forth all shapes, mariners shapes, the language of dogs as they bark into the night and converse in magic dog language shape, brush of leaf against leg shape, spider with its deep web trap waiting to entangle all its victims shape, and the smell of smoke rising up from bundles of burning brush.

Shapes of parallelograms, round squares, stars, circles, octagons, circle square octagons, curious unnamed and undefined shapes that compose the puzzle of the universe; puzzles in eighteen dimension god shapes, Jesus shapes, negro shapes, free jazz

shapes, sand shapes, fresh cookie sweet smell shapes, marijuana smoke everywhere in the jacuzzi of time shapes.

Shapes for memories and shapes for language and shapes for tales woven by Greek philosophers and hipster philosophers at cafés; and the bus driving shape singing out shapes of anecdotal evidence shape; it's all simple, perfectly carved in one's head shape and tattoo shape.

Church bells rang. I counted twenty-eight rings then a pause until one extremely punctuated emphatic final ring. The ringing seemed to come at the most random times, no rhythm; and the bell itself had a horrible sound to it like a hammer pounding a hubcap.

I extricated myself from the tangle of Inez's leg, went to the dresser, popped a few blues, took a leak, and then slipped under the sheets again and watched the fan some more, waiting for gentle sleep to take hold. I hummed a little. Inez didn't even stir.

I started to sweat. I pulled down the quilt, but even that wasn't enough, Inez was like a radiator and the late morning heat was turning our room into a furnace.

I threw back the bed sheets and twisted them in my fingers, wiped my face and chest until they felt dry, then reached to the nightstand, grabbed my beer, and took a sip of it. The beer was warm, but better than nothing.

"Jesus, I hope she doesn't die of heat stroke," I thought.

The sounds of the pueblo trickled into our room like a colorful myriad of Mexican sound clip streamers, spinning and twirling.

"Fruta! Melons!"

"Pescado, Mariscos!"

"Pinas!"

The sound of donkey hoofs on cobblestone.

I slowly turned over and worked myself closer to Inez. Her back was toward me and I scooted in until the line of her nightgown touched my chest. I just lay there, holding her and feeling her breath, matching my breath with hers, my hand wrapped around her shoulder and cupping her breast.

My other hand slid down beneath the bottom of her nightgown and lightly touched the prickles of hair below. It felt strange, like stealing a piece of something that once belonged to you, the familiarity rushing back. I slowly withdrew my hand, gently slipped out of bed, put on a pair of tan shorts that I'd acquired at some Salvation Army or yard sale, a pair of sunglasses shoplifted from an outlet store, stood on the balcony, and sipped my warm beer.

It was huge outside, the way the beach stretched in its vast expanse and the ocean commanded my gaze to its endless reaches. On one side of the balcony I could see the source of all the activity I had heard, fruit vendors, fisherman, dogs barking; on the other side, pure immensity.

Elegant pelicans, with majestic wings glided along the crest of incoming waves moments before wave crash, effortlessly elevating at the last instant and then swooped

around again. They flew up and dive-bombed down at incredible velocities, filling their elastic mouths with tiny silver fish that swarmed in schools around the shallow waters of the bay.

A caballero, on horse, guiding another horse, slowly rode along the beach toward the pueblo. Homeless, ruffian, mutt dogs barked and harassed the beautiful animals. These abrasive small jackals spooked the horses and the caballero yanked the reins firmly to keep them focused and calm.

When the caballero came to one of the creeks on the beach, a trickling creek like rain water on a drizzly day, the trailing horse bucked and turned, terrified like a cat at the sight of water. The caballero retained control and insisted.

Still the horse resisted and turned away, kicking its legs. The jackal dogs snapped and barked. The caballero pulled the horse again with force to face the creek and yanked hard on his reins. The horse stepped into the water, accelerated to a trot, and then returned to a calm walk once it had crossed the creek. The caballero, on his grand horse, majestically strutted through. The jackal dogs remained behind.

I stepped back into the room and pulled a piece of paper from my notebook. I took a dark purple crayon and wrote,

“Baby, going for a swim and some lunch, will be back shortly.”

I put the note on the dresser next to her hairbrush, the Jesus candle, and the pills. I quietly slipped out.

I felt like something cold to drink before my swim. I walked through the lobby onto the street, past the fruit vendor; the street was still packed with cars and I noticed mine was boxed in as much, if not more, than before. I turned the corner and made my way to the local tienda.

A rickety bus, kicking up dust, squeaked to a stop at the corner. A few people got off, carrying odd shaped boxes, and then some new people got on. A man leaned out the door, stuck his pinkies to his lips, and then let loose with a screaming high whistle. He waited, no one stirred, then nodded at the driver who placed his hand on the machine’s giant gear stick, wrenched it, and the bus lurched into motion with a heave to carry on through town and into the next; the whistler man held on with one arm hanging out the door.

The tienda, like most structures in the town was built of cinderblocks; concrete Lego’s stacked together, cement squished between the sections like frosting. A large industrial metal gate was drawn over the tienda’s entrance; closed on Sundays.

I stared at the gate a minute, discouraged, and was ready to walk away when I heard a man’s voice, in Spanish,

“Do you need something?”

“Just a drink.”

“Come in, I can sell you one drink.”

He pulled out a heavy ring full of jangling keys, leaned down, and unlocked the metal gate. He lifted it halfway and invited me inside the store; I ducked underneath the gate and entered.

It was dark inside the store, uneven shelves filled with dusty cans of tuna, beans, and bottles of hot sauce. I had to slide through there carefully, everything stacked on one another and ready to tumble. A broom was lying out; a roll of plastic bags sat on the concrete floor.

“We ran out of olive oil,” he said, “my wife sent me to get some.”

“Lucky for me,” I said.

“Yes, lucky for you, I’m never open on Sundays.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“You’re welcome, just don’t tell my wife,” he smiled.

He spoke gently, earnestly and with a touch of anachronistic optimism, like every grandpa should; it was encouraging.

I opened up a cooler filled with boxes of papaya juice, pineapple juice, and beers. I sifted curiously through the bottles and marveled at the exotic labels, felt like a kid at the flea market again excavating through an old chest full of trinkets and junk looking for a prized comic book; I noticed a green, bulbous shaped bottle tucked in the back corner.

I reached my hands in and pulled it out. The label was corroded and the top was rusted, but it was unmistakably, albeit ancient, a bottle of Perrier. It looked like something unearthed along with the Dead Sea scrolls, or buried underneath the Lexington Hotel inside Al Capone’s vault.

The Old Man was patiently waiting for me. He already had his bottle of olive oil and was ready to go. I brought him the Perrier.

He looked at the bottle, slightly mystified, turned it around and examined it, clearly unsure of its origin. He accepted this fact and calmly took out a towel and started to wipe away the dirt and grime, not embarrassed or ashamed at all. He polished it in smooth motions and even rang up the total on the cash register, 12 pesos.

I paid him and he pulled out a bottle opener and cracked open the top of my Perrier, I thanked him, and stepped outside. He followed shortly after me and locked the gate and smiled. I walked toward the plaza and he walked the other direction.

Suddenly a wild blare of trumpets exploded across the pueblo.

“Another fiesta?” I thought.

I followed the racket, it grew louder with every step, past a taco restaurant full of good smells and overflowing with people, and came to a church at the center of the village. A marching band, full of tubas, trumpets, and piccolos, stood in loose formation, all with white shirts, hand-me-down khakis, and cheeks puffed like blowfish, wailing off-key wildly arranged and energetic flea circus Mexican melodies.

A sweet voiced tenor bellowed above the ringing of brass, no microphone, and soared in the music that sounded like the soundtrack to a galloping chase scene in a Mexican Spaghetti Western.

In the meantime, a dapper group of boys in white suits with well-combed dark hair stood outside the entrance of the church with their hands folded in front of their belts. A middle-aged gentleman, a caballero, held his hat and waited solemnly among the boys.

After the song was over, a girl, about fifteen, with pure brown skin, lean, delicate steps, exited the church wearing a dramatic blue gown, a strange aquatic Mexican blue, with matching plastic blue flowers, and matching blue paper fan that she waved on herself to tame the midday heat.

The band erupted again and an eager photographer danced about, vigorously taking snapshots of her, the family, the band, her, the church. A passer by, a wandering cowboy in tall leather boots and big hat who happened to be enjoying a Sunday afternoon stroll only to stumble on this calamitous party, casually turned his head to see what the commotion was. He noticed the celebration without interest and walked on.

The girl, musicians, and others huddled beneath a tree, lingering for some reason. I took a sip of my Perrier. It had a strange taste to it, as though the minerals in it had somehow changed or magnified in the aging process of that refrigerator, soaked up bits of Freon, inherited CO2 leaking out from various other beers with cracked tops.

Alerted by some mysterious cue, the girl approached the church door as the musicians, boys, and assorted men and women filed along behind her. A priest in a long white robe appeared in the doorway, lifted his arm and flicked out droplets from the tip of his scepter onto the group in three general and uninspired swings. Everyone, now blessed, entered the church; a moment later, a lingering woman holding a baby hurried in.

The band retreated and dispersed, found various seats beneath the shade of palm trees and shared cigarettes; suddenly, a toddler girl, wearing a white tutu and a blouse with the same weird blue color as the older girl, scurried from the church across the village plaza.

I looked at the sun; it was probably about 2pm. The Perrier felt fresh and cool on my lips like keen and pure glaciers turned to icicle drips in Mexican sunlight, heat, and sweat; momentarily tempering the heat stroke vicissitudes of life and flaming boxes of appropriated world shackled in brain.

Without any warning, a barefooted man with a strange silvery complexion appeared a few feet away from me. He stood calmly with his hands on his hips and apathetically observed the street. He had thick dense red dreadlocks piled on top of his head, dressed in cotton white pants, and fashioned an extraordinarily dark tan for a Caucasian. Gradually, He scooted in closer to me, but I resisted acknowledging him in any way. After a few minutes, he scooted in even nearer and finally said,

“Quite an afternoon.”

“Sure is,” I said.

He said, “Have I asked you for money, yet?”

“No,” I said.

“I could sure use some money to eat, maybe ten pesos for some pan and avocado.”

I took out my change. I kept my coins in a little plastic Ziploc bag that used to hold samples of ginseng vitamin pills; I got the Chinese panacea from my friend who swiped them from a health food store that he worked at. Luckily, there were only three pesos in there.

“I’ve only got a few pesos,” I said.

“That’s fine,” he said, “if I could only get ten pesos then I could actually get something to eat.”

He took the three pesos and I put the Ziploc bag back in my pocket.

“Do you need that bag?” he asked.

“No, I guess not,” I said.

I gave him the bag.

“That’s a good idea,” he said, “to keep your change in a bag.”

“Keeps me from losing my change,” I said.

I noticed a nine-volt battery tied to the front of his pants.

“What’s the battery for?” I asked.

“I’m taking very high levels of colloidal silver right now, near toxic levels, I’m in a heavy detox.”

“What’s colloidal silver?” I asked

“It’s ions of silver attached to water molecules. You run an electrical current from a silver wire into distilled water and the silver dissolves into it, and then you drink the solution. It’ll cure you of anything, cancer, all viruses, HIV, you name it; you’ll never get sick again. Heavy metals and radiation; in fact, I’m so seriously detoxing right now that I have a build up toxins concentrated at the top of my spine, if I move my head the wrong way I get a headache.”

“Is it a new technology?” I asked.

“To the contrary, it’s a very old technology, been around for over a century.”

“Where do you get the solution?”

“I make it. Or you can buy it at health food stores.”

“How come I haven’t heard about it?”

“Why would you? It makes your body completely alkaline; it’s something that cures you of all disease. Do you think the corrupt powers that run the world would like you to have that knowledge?”

“No, I guess not.”

A hippy girl, about 19 years old, came up; she completely ignored me.

“Hey there,” he said.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said.

“That’s okay, I’ve just been relaxing here.”

“Cool.”

“I made you some colloidal but I gave it to my dog. Which is okay because I can just make you some more.”

She had terrible sores on her legs, looked strung out, and haggard.

“See you later,” I said.

They ignored me.

I turned to the beach where the breeze seemed forgiving and the gentle idea of toes in water compelled me to take an innocent stroll.

Unrelenting light assaulted every corner of existence; I felt amazed that the buildings and inhabitants could exist under such extreme exposures. Then I realized all the strange watered down colors of buildings and the mystical temperament of people was in fact the stripped away, pure, evaporated, and distilled essence of this carbon life.

I walked onto the beach, took off my sandals, and buried them; an old trick I learned after having a pair thieved from me. The sand was painfully hot so I rushed to the cool relief of the shallow water and let the little waves tickle my feet with love messages of the sea.

The beach was filled with well-dressed Mexican families having Sunday picnics; and with left over tourists from last’s night festival nursing their angry hangovers.

A guy walked from blanket to blanket carrying a platter of sweet buns, a few pesos a piece; an angelic obese Mexican man in a dark Sunday church outfit walked forlornly along the water, his shirt sweat soaked and also the butt of his black slacks sand caked; a Mexican dad splashed in the waves in long swim shorts and tight wife beater, he frolicked with his down syndrome handicapped daughter; two renegade fishermen, maybe no family, stood like flamingos atop sea worn rocks at the far end of the bay and cast their lines, sun and salt punished them, relentlessly reckoning them for the will of man.

An Indian woman, dressed in a white shirt and long skirt, slowly walked toward me. I kneeled by a palm tree and watched her lumbering stride; heavily weighed down by a bundle of big wooden salad spoons, different sauce bowls- some shaped like dolphins, and all of them clanking together in a pretty wooden wind chime way. Also, she balanced big thick cutting boards on her head, a human countertop; and two big wooden salad bowls in her left hand.

“Quiere?”

“No gracias,” I said.

She didn’t stop to ask; just came to an almost imperceptible slowness, that subtle place in between movement and becoming stationary, like the way glass imperceptibly melts over centuries.

She smiled shyly and carried on, the wood clanking as she took deep steps in the hot sand; her cast iron laborious stride weighed down by thoughts of her children, duty to her husband, and love of Jesus.

She moved in the direction of a blond woman, clearly a tourist, perhaps a refugee from the previous night's festivities. The blond woman bent to the sand and picked up a shell and showed it to her tiny daughter waddling nearby wearing a little pink hat. Then she put it in her left hand and continued to shell scour the beach with gaze focused down; picking up shells with her right hand and filling them in the palm of her left hand curled like a cup.

And down just before where the rocks jutted out and the sand became soft again, a little genius kid, skinny with a large head, ran in the shallow water and commanded it with clenched fists opening up his fingers quickly like he were a wizard. The he ran the other way and commanded the next wave, a pre school Mexican Merlin.

His dad, nearby, laid in the shallow water like a male version of a Sports Illustrated swimsuit model, letting the thin currents of water run over him. Except, instead of being a blond Czechoslovakian bombshell, he was an ordinary overweight Mexican dad, friendly, fun looking; and had a plastic cup of beer in his hand; his face was beat red from the fierce sunlight and booze.

The genius Merlin kid took a time out from commanding the waves to climb on his dad like a jungle gym. He started at the back and up the shoulders and had dexterous arms like a spider; but the clowning caused his dad to almost spill his beer and so the dad gently pushed him off. The kid took his Merlin stance to his dad but his dad wouldn't have any of it and yelled,

“Agua!”

He scooped up some ocean water and playfully splashed the genius kid in the face. The kid laughed happily and ran in circles and tossed seaweed into the water; a young Dali, “en garde,” to the ocean; he threw punches at it, stuck his index fingers out and thumbs up like twin pistols and took potshots. I expected him to drag a dead cow along the beach next, or hatch from an enormous egg.

I walked further north along the beach, away from the crowds; marveled at the density of the jungle, seemingly impenetrable, a sponge painting in varying degrees of green and black; quaking with hideous animal mystery.

I walked up to the first creek where I had seen the horse buck earlier in the day; the jackal dogs were gone, not even a pile of shit, and the morning felt like a dream, like time had played a trick on me or given me a free token to the cosmic peepshow. I balanced like a tightrope walker on a log positioned across the creek, an impromptu bridge.

A strange rock planted in the sand, a natural austere solitary rock garden, covered in seaweed. As I approached it with Zen respect, it shivered and broke apart before me. A wing broken pelican, a noble archetype of beauty and here trapped in the sand, gazed up with imploring and sparkling eyes. In fear and instinct, it raised one wing and flapped it in an attempt to flee; it couldn't move an inch.

It seemed incredulous of the new reality of its body. At such times before, always, the movement and intention produced soaring flight and freedom from threat. But today, instead, the pelican trembled pasted to the ground, dismayed, disabled by wing, and vulnerable to world.

“Where is your tribe, Pelican?”

None of the others were to be seen. He had been left abandoned, a poor old penniless Joe Louis of pelicans now victim to wandering dog or, as far as I could tell, rising tide. The impartial ocean tugged and pulled at him. The pelican feebly struggled. I could sense he had been fighting for a long time, probably longer than he could remember. It was no use; the ocean was going to take him away shortly.

“Oh noble pelican, I’ve see you glide like magic over the shimmering surface of ocean, the ocean fed you, and gave you home. Now the ocean seeks retribution and will claim you as one of its own. And I can see in your eyes you have no concept of your dilemma. No concept of yesterday or tomorrow. No sad human idea of duality of birth and death. Dear pelican I can see in your eyes that the calling of nature is embedded in your spirit. There is futility in resistance but it is requisite that you must try. And in spite of your handicap, there’s nobility and grace to your being. I mourn for you but also, inevitably, will join you and wish you well.”

The tide pulled at it more strongly. The pelican looked at me as if to say,

“Don’t let me die, it is only Sunday.”

The first wave inched him closer, the next wave came and reclaimed him deeper. The pelican surrendered and let the waves pull him, drag him, digest him. The ocean gradually swallowed and devoured the pelican like flames of a pyre. It meant only respect in its solemn duty.

I returned in the direction of the posada. As I walked back, something caught my eye at the edge of the jungle; a man leaned against a palm tree and urinated into a plastic water bottle. He finished his piss, shook his willy, buttoned his pants, and brought the bottle full of intense yellow liquid to his mouth. He drank it all back like it was a cold 7-Up. The man had heavy red dreadlocks piled on his head, the same colloidal hippy from the plaza with the 9-volt battery tied to his pants, but this time wearing jeans with bleach spots, a small flannel shirt with the front open, a silver bracelet, and a far out hippy necklace; in his other hand he carried a bottle of hot sauce.

He screwed the cap back onto the empty piss jug and twinkle-toed out onto the beach.

“What do you have there?” I asked.

“Hot sauce.”

“Put a little zip in your step.”

“Oh it’s wicked stuff, let me see...” He starts reading the label, “Chilies, water, spices and condiments, and 1%, no 1/10 of a percent of sodium benzo... benzodorite, benzoate 1/1000 of a percent. That’s the stuff that mutates genetic material, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Maybe I am a mutant already. Or maybe if I didn’t eat this stuff I would be a six foot six gorilla of a linebacker.”

“Maybe,” I said.

“I’ve got to go!”

He turned and ran off ahead of me.

I entered into the simple lobby of the posada. The senorita was behind the desk reading a book. I told her that I’d like to pay for one more night. She looked at me strangely. I placed the money on the counter, she reluctantly took it, and thanked me.

The hallway felt very quiet.

“Inez must still be asleep,” I thought.

I leaned my ear up against the door; silence. I quietly slipped the key into the lock and turned the door handle.

The bed was well made and all the towels were exchanged. Apparently the senorita had been in while I was out. But where was Inez?

“She must be eating lunch somewhere,” I thought.

All my things were arranged neatly on the dresser; my books, super-eight camera, good luck potions, potpourri, Mother Mary air freshener, Jesus candle, bottles and blister packs of pills.

“Christ, no wonder the senorita looked at me funny,” I thought.

There was a piece of paper, folded up neatly on the dresser with a lipstick kiss on it. I opened it.

“Baby, telepathy is the nearest and most accurate form of communication; direct transmission of neural impulses from my mind to yours. It would be ignoble and sinful to put any of this into words. What’s ineffable must always remain pure, immaculate, and above all else, ineffable. Best Wishes, Inez.”

I put the letter back down and took a closer look at my collection of articles. Sure enough, the keys to my car were gone. I stepped outside, leaned over the balcony, and looked down at the street. I didn’t need to do this, I knew what I’d find; nothing, the car was gone.

“How did she do that?” I wondered, “The car was totally boxed in.”

Sure enough, even though the street was still jammed packed with parked cars, mine was missing; she pulled it off.

Oh well, she was right, as usual. I don’t know if it was telepathy or instinct, but it somehow seemed like a clear and sensible decision. She woke up, listened to her feminine impulse, the telegrams of her fertilized body, picked out a dress, packed her belongings, composed the short yet affectionate note, took my keys, lifted up her bag, wished the senorita a goodbye, somehow extricated the car from that nasty tangle of gridlock, popped some pills, hit the road, and sped away like a bat out of hell toward some beacon that only she could follow.

Somehow, now that I stood there, at last concretely alone; it became obvious to me that this was fate, if you wanted to call it that; more specifically it was her premonition and prophesy come true. She didn't break any promises. She didn't lie to me. She just, above all else, embodied her being and instincts. I knew this day, eventually, would have to come.

I lit the Jesus candle. Inez once told me,

“Someday, baby, my candle will no longer flicker for you. But there may be other candles. Or there may just be a gentle and understanding calm of black.”

It was useless to try and understand. The bed was there but she was gone. The mirror was there but her reflection had vanished.

I walked to the bed and tried to smell her scent in the sheets.

“Fresh sheets.”

I stepped back onto the balcony and looked down again. I didn't need to. I don't know why I did; the car was still gone. I cracked open a warm beer, took off my shirt, and let the sun soak into me.

I held the beer in one hand and my shirt in the other, a blue Christian Dior shirt I had scored from a lost and found at a bar I used to frequent. I asked the bartender, a hot-tempered but usually nice guy with tattoos,

“How do you lose a shirt here?”

“Man, you would not believe the shit we find.”

He was kind enough to let me have it and it quickly became one of my favorites, a soft and becoming pale blue smock for my brush strokes onto the world. An expensive shirt, probably; maybe bought in New York City, perhaps in fashion at one time although it fit me rather small and had a dark stain; I sometimes wondered if it was a woman's shirt.

“Who is Inez?” I wondered.

How well did I know her? How well can anyone know anyone? Shit, I didn't even know who I was, let alone any other creature.

I had never been married, but I felt like I'd been engaged and divorced to Inez a thousand times. Marriage is a phenomenon of nuance. It's only in the finest nuance that two souls can ever really lock into a place of one another and truly be married. In this case, nuance is another word for redemption, even as ephemeral as it may be.

I couldn't help but wonder if it would have been different if she carried my baby. Would she have consulted with me, taken my opinion into consideration? Would she have asked me to take a break from mowing the lawn in order to drive her to the supermarket?

Why would she have to? She can drive. My job was done, number 81. Number 89, Forest, the accordion player; his job was done.

And as I stood there, preoccupied and ruminating over everything that should have been, squandering precious fractions of my life, she was blazing across Mexican

highways and peyote junctions with top down, beers (actually cold ones on the passenger seat), pills in her head, baby in her belly, hair flipping in the wind, jungle vines surrendering to cactus flower, top gear, smoking weed, jamming without apologies into pure indefatigable, abstract, and glorious truth.

I sipped my beer. Damn.

I put my shirt back on, rolled up the sleeves, and wore it with pride in spite of the stain, in spite of its awkward size, in spite of the fact it was missing three top buttons. I pinched the collar and brought it to my nose. The shirt had a strong smell. Even though it had been packed deep in my bag, there were still hints of incense, sweat, gasoline, and Inez embedded in it; a touch of beer, some smoke, gunpowder, and various elusive flavors of trace paraphernalia. And because of the missing buttons, the top was always open; so I pretended like this was a designer's choice and pushed out my chest out in the void of fabric.

I went back into the room and reclined on the bed. I felt a little drugged out, partially paralyzed. The covers and the pillowcases smelled fresh and it felt nice to rest. I lay on my back and watched the fan swirl, swirl, swirl.

All I could do, it seemed, at that particular moment, was lie on my back and look up at the ceiling. That's all we can ever really do at any particular moment. For the first time, I really understood this.

The ceiling was made out of ceramic tiles, evenly placed, and concaved in sections making room for a series of three support arches. The tiles, as similar as they all seemed, each had an individual trademark. A bit of lime crusting up at the edge, a blotch like a Joan Miro blotch, a Jackson Pollock splatter, little chips and veins webbing over the surface; some of the tiles had tiny names carved in them like a mischievous workman snuck out a pen knife and scratched in his name or his girl's name, or maybe just dirty Spanish words as a prank or revenge for his slave wages.

I leaned over and picked up my crayons and sketchpad from the bedside table. I pulled out a purple crayon and opened up the notebook to a fresh piece of paper.

I closed my eyes and thought of Inez and focused on the neural firings crackling between the synapses in my brain. Without opening my eyes, I laid the crayon on the page and dug it in, a swipe here, a smudge there, a circle.

Here was the great modernist portrait of Inez, a masterpiece, as prophesized. I opened my eyes and looked at the result. It was full of radical purple scribbles, some misplaced shapes, and some hacks of wax; it looked like something a retarded monkey might draw, but lacked the curious animal psychological depth.

Whoever sees this notebook will see the scratching of a sad and challenged primate.

I took inventory of the pills. Inez had raided them pretty good, taken most of the speed; for the drive I guess. She left me most of my favorite downers and a few Ritalin and Dexedrine, just out of consideration; I put those to the side.

I opened every other bottle or package and took two pills out from each. I had a handful of about ten serious tranquilizers and painkillers. I closed my eyes, threw them in my mouth, and washed them back with my beer.

And there, in the final apocalypse of my existence, I was a dog, simple, blank. My face, eroded like the sphinx, my hand reached out and clutched air with a phantom limb, my voice was broken, paralyzed by billions of castigations, begging for breath; in my mind I desperately erected an altar of tiny corpses, snapshots from third grade and beyond, for the battered future of my soul.

Inez once said,

“It is open for everybody to view in the caverns of madness. Added up, the nth degree. There’s no branch or twisted length of oak anchored in grand salvation, roots clutching to starvation with violence and benevolent deceit. Appetite for the apocalypse’s fuel: pasty saliva, yellow eyes, exhaustion, fusing, like the sun, in extraordinary blasts of brilliance until collapse, billions of stars smashed together, like an infinite waterfall, cloaked and golden, a ripple forever, and in our case, the end.”

“Was there an invitation?” I asked, “Delivery confirmed? Did it arrive with a smile, carnations, an exponential bouquet, offered by the white-gloved hand of a pressed and clean postman? Was he kind, receptive of idle chat and innuendo?”

I undressed and lay on top of the covers of the bed. The fan swirled, swirled, swirled; it sliced the air in strange ways that told stories. Tales of pirates and banditos, tales of drug dealers in the sixties kidnapping a man and taking him to the hills, cut him open, and lit a fire inside of his rib cage.

“That is the solution,” I thought, “Cover it in plastic or light in on fire, burn everything.”

It didn’t take long, the room turned black.

Somewhere something rattled.

Knock, knock, knock.

Something was pounding, louder this time.

I tried to open my eyes, they felt glued shut; I opened my mouth to speak, it was pure Mojave.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Esta?” It was a woman’s voice; the senorita from downstairs.

I closed my eyes.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Si?” I called, my voice dry and raspy.

She spoke through the door, “Would you like to stay one more night?”

“What time is it?”

“12 noon.”

“What day is it?”

“Monday.”

“Yes, I would like to stay, thank you; I’ll come out and pay you in a few moments.”

“No rush, señor, at your convenience.”

I could hear her footsteps fade as she walked down the stairs beneath the crucifix. I pictured her picturing me naked with mosquito welts, drugged out, and hung-over.

My body felt like a lead weight, every movement condemned to an ocean of mud before reaching its destination. I stumbled to the dresser and grabbed the spare Ritalin, wrenched open the bottle and washed a few down with the last bit of flat beer in my bottle.

They came on quick; complete with their requisite repository of information and paranoia’s, a coffer filled with fanatic wisdom and cultish indoctrinations. I looked at myself in the dresser mirror; my eyeballs were dilated to the size of a basketball. I felt alive again.

“Cool,” I said.

The pills command the subtle body and, eventually, as I confronted the reflection of my eyes in the mirror, no recognition was possible. But then I realized that recognition was never possible, my identity of self was only ever an assumption and a hunch.

I put my swim trunks on, counted out the money for the room, and went downstairs. The señorita was behind the desk in the lobby.

“Hola,” I said, trying to sound sober.

She knew the score. I smiled and put the room fee on her desk. She let it sit there.

She had witnessed Inez leave yesterday morning. She had seen the voodoo and the pills in our room. She had heard me through the door a few minutes earlier. She stared deep into my soul and in an instantaneous assessment figured out all truths that ever were and ever could be about my life.

I felt like I should feel guilty somehow, but didn’t. She didn’t seem to care, no judgment, just pure recognition. I felt like I should say something, like a man should always have something, ideally the last thing, to say at any given moment.

My mouth was dry and all words were blank.

Blank words, fragile words; any words fail at the most critical moments. At one of my life’s most profound and cinematic scenes I felt reduced, more or less, to reading a line from a cliché of a script.

I was about to say, “It’s okay.”

I didn’t.

The señorita was silent, too. She knew the harsh ways of nature, the harsh truths of life. The harsh reality, that there is no solace for someone who has been left behind.

Does God help? Maybe; perhaps that’s why everyone seemed to have a crucifix dangling one place or another; she knew, in spite of my macho inner reasoning’s that somewhere in the heart of my soul, being left behind, whether by a beloved’s death or by Inez, is life’s worst feeling.

Was there an intention to any of it? Did the universe have some kind of master plan; did Inez know? Did Inez try to teach me and I simply failed to get it? Did the senorita know?

Or was everything really as accidental and chaotic as it seemed? Unless, of course, the random, chaotic, and accidental may, in fact, from the proper magnification, be part of the grand scheme, is there a difference?

Who can say? It was like that blank moment with the senorita; the futility of trying to use human words, human language, or human thought to describe the indescribable and superhuman; it was all utterly and profoundly ineffable.

She smiled sympathetically; I nodded and left the lobby.

A Mexican man laid sprawled out in the sand in jeans and a long sleeve shirt. His body position resembled the repose of a masochistic contortionist or a cruel yogi; legs flailed out in a way only Martha Graham could appreciate. Passed out, drunk; the sun relentlessly pounded his dark face.

A large but emaciated dog, equally passed out, its ribs showing, shorthaired, also lay crookedly on the sand beside the drunk, as ragged looking as the man in its own animal way. Perhaps the dog had been hitting the sauce, too?

I wondered where Inez was.

The hills as usual, looked ominous, and the town, somehow, felt very empty. Maybe this was how it was supposed to be; things had returned to their normal pace now that the fiesta was over.

The tide was very low and a crop of jagged and dark rocks, normally underwater, exposed their razor sharp contours; a couple of fishermen balanced on the dangerous rocks and threw out wishful fishing lines.

There were also some fishermen in wife beaters, carrying buckets, wading in the shallow tide pools harvesting some kind of crustacean. They waited motionless, patiently, dutifully, looking carefully with intent eyes into the folds of the ocean floor until suddenly they swooped down with nets and pull up their bounty.

I walked to the rocks, the thick sand sliding and shifting beneath my feet, crouched, and took a closer look. The sun had already dried the tips of the rocks, some other rocks were coated in slimy green algae; red tinted and yellow striped rocks were still submerged beneath the water.

Nearby, a long thin-necked snow-white bird with a yellow mohawk, seemed stoned, looked out to nowhere.

A flock of seagulls, strange Mexican seagulls in dramatic feather shades of black and white, commanded a further outcropping of rocks, cawing and claiming their turf.

The onshore breeze combed the shallow tide pools, gentle ripples on a temporary pond; sardines breached the surface like mini marlins and splashed and shimmered and caught the sunlight with their silver scale bodies; also tiny crabs crawled across the underwater universe, scurried quickly with their cumbersome shells on their back; an

anemone's tentacles quivered; and curious underground rivers trickled from within the low sand and into the tide pool.

I left the little saltwater pond and walked along the beach to where I had seen the injured pelican the day before. The sun blasted my face from directly above and a sudden delirium crashed into my head like a landslide, maybe because of the day's heat or simply the aftermath of decadent days of pills. I squinted my eyes and tried to shake it off, opened them wide, blinked again.

"A mirage."

A flurry of brown light sprinted in circles; a barefooted Mexican boy, about sixteen, in tan shorts, a red t-shirt; held one end of a rope with a sure and tight grip, though with a sense of ownership and relaxed ease. The rope was attached to the bridle of a strong and wild running horse. Its muscles rippled through its brown hide and it kicked up sand into the air as the boy led it one way, then instinctively switched to the next.

He watched the horse with complete concentration, his eyes matching the brown color and intensity of the stallion; controlling the horse's every move. The horse leaped over a log of driftwood, then the boy quickly reversed, and it hopped over it again.

As I walked closer, the force of the animal became palpable, steaming exhaust spewed from its nostrils, its hooves powerfully thudded against the sand sending shockwaves through the earth and into my feet.

I looked for any sign of the pelican. Waves splashed in and out, no sign.

"Fancy seeing a mirage out here," I thought, "should take a dip in the water, clear my head."

I took off my shirt, left it by a distinctive rock, and walked into the shallow of the water. The ocean coolness collided drastically with the heat of my skin; I shivered and inched in even further, until the clear saltwater was up to my knees.

My feet carefully balanced on the underwater floor as small waves crashed against my thighs; I took another step and the wet sand came alive; a sting ray, minding its own daily business but perturbed by the invasion of my foot, glided away; its big soft wings flapping like an underwater condor, a scary barbed tail trailing behind it like Beelzebub's.

Thundering splash, an aquatic locomotive, I whipped my head and the horse exploded into the water with fierce bounds, less than a hair from where I stood. It thrust mountains of water into the air like fireworks and I, stunned, shifted my body every so slightly so that it could pass me without knock down collision subsequent concussion or death.

The boy sprinted the horse into the waves; and the waves rose to the occasion and crashed against the broad side of the horse with massive aggression, and I could see the horse momentarily stunned, his nostrils heaving even more violently.

The boy ran the stallion in circles again, this time with water exploding everywhere and waves crashing relentlessly on them both. He still had his red t-shirt on, now soaking wet and tightly gripping his body, and his arm muscles flexed as he clenched the wet rope close to his core. His youthful muscles rippled in conjunction with the horse's powerful

body, he pulled and tugged on the thick rope, flexed his arms, back, legs, and torso to maintain mastery of the creature.

The sun sparkled and glittered through the million drops of water launched into the air by the commotion of the bodies; a display of symphonic physical force.

The horse began to show signs of fatigue, stumbled against the power of the waves and water. The boy sensed this and realigned his trajectory back onto shore. He ran ahead, leading the horse to the beach, and then onto a dusty road that disappeared into the thick bowels of the jungle.

I immersed myself in the water and swam a few strokes. The salt made the water buoyant and easy to swim in. Once past the breakers, the water was perfectly calm and quiet. I floated on my back with a direct upside down bird's eye view and watched clouds tumble around the sky. The blazing sun, a John Coltrane "Acknowledgment" sun; and if I tilted my head slightly, the protruding hills at either end of the bay.

The hills were closer now and didn't simply look like a mass of green menace anymore. I could actually see details, make out the living limbs of the uppermost trees; like the ocean, experienced so differently up close.

One of the trees was shaped like a tyrannosaurus Rex; vertical and growling out of the ground with its giant jaws splayed apart devouring a kangaroo.

I thought about Inez, about the horse, about the boy. There was something so organic, pure, and beautiful about how he handled the animal; total confidence in his conquest of nature, but also in complete harmony with it.

I wished I were the boy and Inez the horse. I wish I had mastered the eloquent art and science of her untamable motives and desires. I wished I had broken her wild gallops as wild and powerful as that horse in the water, beautiful, capricious, gloriously feral in the universe.

I swam back to the shore, retrieved my shirt, and let myself drip dry in the sun.

A swarm of flies buzzed around a lump in the sand. The majestic pelican had returned, reduced to a corpse. The eye sockets were empty; all the feathers were matted down, like a wet cat. There was now a tinge of blue to its feathers. Oh ocean, did I misjudge your honor?

I turned my back to the pelican and walked along the beach toward the rocks, past the unconscious drunk and his alcoholic dog, and back to the hotel.

I felt hungry after the swim. I popped a few pills, put my pants on, and walked toward the tienda where I had seen the crowded taco restaurant yesterday.

A sweet smiling middle-aged Mayan angel with ponytail served me a beer and three tacos, fine fresh fish fried to perfection and topped with salsa and a squeeze of lime.

It was a humble restaurant, very quiet; a stark contrast to the buzz of activity surrounding it yesterday. I ate my tacos at a table on the sidewalk and could see the ocean from where I sat. A woman swept the steps nearby, and I watched little boats, as if I were at a puppet show or in a model shop; they inched whimsically to shore in the

afternoon serenity; and then eventually into the soft dream end of day bay; the fishermen home from harvests of undersea with tired faces and calloused hands.

As I finished my last taco and sipped my beer, a dark man with coarse hair and a universe of necklaces around his neck materialized and stuck his left hand in my face; his shirt sleeve drooped around his wrist and the edge was dust tattered and street torn; I gave him 10 pesos; he raised his arms like a life size Corcovado Christ and yelled,

“Panama, Panama!”

The woman sweeping the steps, sweet, washed out eyes, slightly crossed, in an effort to practice her English said,

“He lives on street, and does little jobs, but always ‘Panama;’ so young boy say, ‘Nicaragua!’ and he go loco!”

“Nicaragua,” she yelled, “Nicaragua!”

“Aye!!!” the man howled.

The woman laughed heartily and resumed her sweeping.

He bowed cordially to me, a real aristocrat, let out a choked and delirious, though good natured, if not a bit maniacal, titter of a laugh; and danced to leave the restaurant in order to find new wisdoms and promises at the next tequila corner,

“...Panama! Panama!”

I finished my beer, thanked the Mayan woman and the sweeper, and crossed the street to the tienda.

The kind faced old man, the one who sold me the Perrier yesterday, sleepily and droopily sat behind the register. He appeared to be in a deep Buddhist meditation in his quiet store, the days all so similar, the absence of seasons; the fisherman coming in after their burdens to buy and drink their cerveza, share whisper secrets of the sea.

He heard my footsteps and snapped out of his zazen. There was a little deli case next to the register. It had some pale looking cheeses in there and some sausage and bacon. He had a small block of cheese out next to him and cut a thin slice for himself. He gave me a gentle smile.

“Buenas Dias”

“Buenas Dias,” he said.

“Como esta?”

“Bien, como siempre,” he smiled.

He didn’t recognize me at all.

I pulled out a Pacifico from the cooler and the old man wiped my beer, just as he had done with my Perrier, and cracked it open. I looked up at the cigarette display case hanging from the crumbly ceiling. The plastic was scratched and hard to see through in the same way that vending machines at interstate rest stops are always vandalized, gouged, cloudy, and impossible to see in. I could make out a few dark red packs of cigarettes, some Mexican brand I’d never heard of.

“Gracias,” I said and paid him.

“A ti,” he said.

I stepped from the tienda into the dust and decided to walk to the plaza. It was a short walk, though I opted, on a whim, to take a secondary road that led to it from the rear. I circled around the taco restaurant and commenced up the road.

It started off at a steep grade and smoke billowed up on just the other side of the incline. I came over the top of the hill to the source of the giant smokestack puffs. A boy in a dirt lot, with an old man supervising, quietly and dutifully poured some kind of liquid onto a pile of smoldering brush. The liquid concentrated the smoke so that it rose up like massive fluffy cumulus clouds. A neighbor’s wall on one side of the lot, hand painted in large uneven block letters, said,

“Se Vende Este Tereno.”

The boy and the old man had their eyes fixed against the low concrete support wall that pushed against the earth on the side of the road.

I asked the man, “What is it?”

“A beehive,” he said.

Bees scrambled everywhere, probably rushing to grab their tiny bee diaries, tiny bee stamp collections; not to mention scurrying to save themselves and their infant bee babies through an unmarked emergency exit into the smoky safety of the unknown world.

The titanic was sinking, the towers were collapsing, and a fireball had entered their sanctuary, home, and universe like the fireball of our own exploding sun one day will.

And then where will we go?

Where will we keep our stamp collections and diaries with our spacecraft home incinerated? Will science transport us to new paradises? I watched for a moment, the way the bees, disoriented, fluttered about in confusion, skeptical, apprehensive, and in a clear state of bee denial about aforementioned tragedy of home.

Bawling, “No,” in tiny bee voices about the hours they’ve spent and the lives they’ve built. Oh where, angelic bee, of sweet nectar and industriousness, shall you build your new honeycomb?

I could see the ocean from the top of the incline; a great spurt of water shot into the sky and then a splash. A whale breached and then dived beneath the aqua marine waters to his underwater wanderings, his boxcar driftings, his migrations and duties. He is a nomad, a rootless hobo, and he calls his siren whale call and the train-whistle blows.

The inner workings of the yards, the cinderblock and corrugated tin village; heavy-set women bustled to scrub the concrete floor, wring the laundry; they dutifully rounded up their children, sometimes hit them, I could hear the whap and the ensuing scream.

Clothesline dangled like silkworm strings and quivered in the breeze with frequencies that only alien dolphins can hear; tightrope walking spiders, caterpillars with fuzzy backs, secret internal thoughts of Buddha and haikus, soul galaxies of stars and

insect pantheons of gods. A blue towel, ragged with holes in it, hung like the curtain from a monk's cave, a vow of silence. It had endured a thousand wipes of body, soaks on floor, and washes in machine. Now the sun dried it fresh again for further utility.

A woman carried big basket on shoulders, full of fresh wet items of rags and cloths and handkerchiefs soaked in tears and memories; she strained to carry them all, nevertheless didn't drop one, clipped them to the laundry line. Lifetimes, without relief, of laundry on shoulders has hunched her back, made her face stern; like indigenous peoples, generations carrying the oral burdens of family and village, drudging forth from teepee to campfire to mortar and pestle to birthing tent; listening intently to the cry of the birds to the season's change and the fluctuation of breeze.

One end of the line is tied to a jungle tree, its trunk gnarled to such extremes that Doctor Seuss would flinch; vines dangled from it like New Orleans tinsel, secret venomous creatures and hobbits burrowed inside with peace pipes and magic mushroom chocolates. The other end is attached to a wooden post jammed into the soil where startling green weeds sprung from its base and a green garden hose, like a fearsome snake, slithered by.

And a child in little blue tank top wandered from miniature circus to tiny wonderlands and his wide, full bodied, mother called out to him, the ring leader, in Spanish, and yanked the rock from his hands. He cried out, somewhere in his shriek he said,

“But that is my rock and joy, my trinket of escape and eternity, this rock is a castle for all of my friends I keep in my pocket, and a tumbling boulder for the automobiles parked beside the dog food bowl.”

But she took it from him and sat him staring at the wall full of new transcriptions and fairy tales, new Nayarit Alices and Looking Glasses to whisper mischief into his happy, subversive, heart. And she, with water soaked hands, overwhelmed by the burden and weight of everyday scrubbing against rough washboard ridges to try and rediscover some sense of immaculate, some sense of cleanliness, repentantly squeezed soap into sink.

And a little girl, the little boy's counterpart, nemesis, and ally; with brown hair tumbling on shoulders, chin dripping with mango juice, stains on her pink shirt, no underwear. Is this how Inez tiptoed as youth, in barefooted impulses and whims? Did she tiptoe to the knowledge imbedded inside her cells that flooded her heart with shuddering waves of existence?

Is she now dressed in pink shirt and barefoot again, no underwear, laying on back the birth of a child to crawl in the ground and suffer through innumerable pangs of growth and discovery, recycling the destiny of life?

Where did Inez fly to in the tempest night? Does the day feel shorter? Are all of the world's children sent to the suburban troughs to feed on the juices of television? Where have the parents gone, into the wind, into shells of themselves, into carcasses?

An adolescent dog, like a reverse Dalmatian; I say reverse because she is spotted white dots on predominantly black fur, a black and white film negative. She lies and watches the woman scrub clothes, then alerted to some other phenomenon turns her head and stares in the direction of the waves.

The waves, the constant soundtrack along with breeze, heartbeat, and bird chatter. The waves eventually call to everyone, ask the pelican. If unprepared, the waves sound haunted, foreboding, and sinister; but when ready, the soft twinkle of music box at grandma's house.

If they were absent, then what would it mean? If the sea dried to salt then what, what would the dog have to compare its life or lift its radar ears to?

But for now, the dog lay calmly on her belly, feeling her tits soft against the soil. But then a white puppy came tumbling by with glee and pounced on her, and the reverse Dalmatian popped up and the two dogs smiling big and the reverse Dalmatian dog playfully growled and whapped the puppy with a lighthearted "Swap!"

The puppy dog, with its little discoveries, its little prophecies and epiphanies, gave a miniature growl and leapt back onto the reverse Dalmatian dog. And enthusiastic, even though the puppy has a handicap, somewhat encumbered because someone forgot to take off its leash, so the little white puppy has a long black leash dangling behind it like an extra tale, but it doesn't matter, it's all tumbles and fun.

Where will these dogs be in a thousand years? Is there really a heaven for dogs? Is there really a heaven for all creatures that smile? And what of the creatures that smile but simply in a different, perhaps stoic or reserved kind of way, do they get angel's wings and harps, too? And if the reverse Dalmatian is not around, the puppy plays with a moth or a butterfly, swiping its playful paw. Does a butterfly have feelings?

Weather beaten plastic bucket with dried mud caked on the side, tilted in a precarious way and jammed between some bricks, filled with jars of rusty lids and bits of metal.

The bucket is the noble scribe of the seasons, observing the rises and falls, the calamities and particulars of the world beyond the fourth wall. Requisite, though taken for granted, forgotten in everybody's heads, the jars and bits of metal become one with it, barometers, cemented and unified.

And colorful tiles, bits of tile, chips of tile, light colors, light green and beige and baby blue; ceramic earthen colored tiles, also a lampshade, weird containers, unnamed, other containers cut in half and once used for some specialty purpose; no longer Clorox bleach but rather some ingenious identity of its own, a new invention for a temporary solution. No need for mass consumption.

And a house fan blade lay from a fallen house on its side and faced the sky like a big childlike flower. Childlike in the way children draw flowers, with a circle in the middle and five even petals around it, the instinct accurate, smudging yellow crayon, the Fibonacci sequence.

"How many rotations remain for the wobbly fan blade?" I wondered.

I carried on walking to the plaza, every step filled with a new waft of burning leaves, fumes from some yard, other old men with variations of wise old faces, their grandsons with tender soft faces, with beer and girls on their mind, lift branches and rake piles of leaves to light and smolder into ash, The teepee trail of smoke lifting into the sky and spiders flee for safety, an exodus, and it drifts across the indifferent jungle sentinels who simply stand and watch with dignity.

I sat down in the plaza on a concrete bench colored orange as though melted crayons had been slopped on it with five gallon buckets; now polished and chipped by time into different gradations of color; bits of army green showed through scratches in the paint, dating back to unknown generations.

Strange trees planted in the plaza; branches merge into a bumpy glob at the base, close to the soil, and then congeal together to form a lumpy trunk. The roots, almost like natural extensions of the branches, bulged like veins into the ground and extended out with their boney fingers.

I thought of the church service I saw yesterday and the young girl in the blue dress. Inez was probably packing her things right about then, snagging all the speed, hesitating, thoughtfully leaving me some, and taking the rest for herself.

Simultaneously, I lingered around the plaza and dumbly drank my ancient Perrier, never even hearing the rev of my own car as she drove away into holy oblivion.

Inez; angel of my heart.

The plaza felt different, more desolate; I felt different, everything was different. It was a new day, I was a new person, the fish caught in nets and on lines were brand new, the whispers around the houses were new, new explosions in the sun, new breezes, new molecules, new reasons, new excuses, new plans for eternity.

Birds, a black flock of them, others pure white, whole clusters, suddenly swooped in circles around the plaza, a little white feather fell from the sky onto the red brick ground.

A pudgy dark woman came from the side of the plaza, approached the humble adobe church with strong and deliberate steps, and untied a rope that drooped down to a hook by the church entrance. She gripped the rope, stepped back to remove any slack, and swung the rope back and forth with flexed woman muscles, the other end attached to a chunky church bell; vibrations, as if hitting the side of a steel street lamp with a crowbar. A dog howled with every percussive strike.

Ring. Howl! Ring. Howl! Ring. Howl! etc.

Twenty Eight times; she paused, still in the moment, the world on edge, and then gave one more, swift, stark, yank to the rope to make a final, punctuated, bell decree.

A simple bell, like an oversized version of the bell on the desk at the posada; and it hung heavy in its arch, at times co-opted and appropriated of its birthright Franciscan stoicism by bell ringers without any real, visceral, personal God experience.

The humble adobe church, wandering missionaries brought white god to dark, soulless people, primitives; painted white, had a simple brick arch entrance; a wooden adornment above the doors with trumpeted angels carved into it, two care free angels from heaven in long wooden robes, a mirror image of one another, holding their trumpets to their mouths, barefoot, curly hair, feathered wings sprouting out their back; but really looked like two fish, from a distance, pointed at each other; homage to the providence of the ocean and its harvesters.

A couple of posters brown masking taped, a tiny band aid strip crossing every corner, onto the adobe side of the church next to the brick framed entrance. One of the posters

had a picture of Christ alongside a man in a nice blue shirt holding a mysterious instrument. It was cheap paper and colorful,

“Recital Eucaristico.”

Big blue and red writing and a color-coded chart of the dates of the performance.

And then to the left, a green sheet of paper, a third of the size of the other, with big block handwriting in black marker, was taped to the adobe with the same brown tape; writing lessons for children between 4 and 13 years old.

I waited to see if any parishioners would materialize, none. Twenty eights bell rings; what does it mean?

Beneath the glaring hot sun, a mean spirited wrinkled gypsy lady hunched over a table nearby with a deck of tarot cards spread; she glared at me as though I were trying to steal a freebee of her privileged clairvoyance.

Reprise of colloidal hippy; barefooted, scraggly red beard, nappy dreads, dark shorts, open shirt, tan with a led glaze, gray-blue all over his body like the silver surfer; high as a kite, paused and stood in the center of the square, stared out, smoked a cigarette contemplatively; integrated structures.

A lone, renegade, Taxi driver in white shirt left the door open of his cab. He contently let everything go and sat beneath the shade in the plaza, no rush for customers, a couple of amigos nearby; one of them with glasses and a paper in his hand, spit onto the plaza ground. Another, a younger one, drank from a bottle of coke and snacked from a cylindrical bag of cookies, one after another, a chain cookie eater; the goof of the bunch, he wore a goatee, smiled, and talked while the other guys gave occasional nods or grunts.

Besides these specters, the plaza felt eerily calm and ordinary, save for some artifacts dragged in from the fiesta, probably on somebody’s shoe: bits of sparkler, fire cracker confetti, gold strands of piñata.

A prevailing stillness almost complete except in subtle ways like a slight trembling of banana leaf, a fly on my foot, an old man drifting and leaning into a metal railing on a second floor balcony, motorcycle engine buzzing stacked with crates and boxes, and nervous looking man creeping over cobblestones.

A beat old pickup truck, packed to the max with mattresses in the back, different mattresses, queen sized, king sized, kid’s mattresses with bright cartoon characters on them. The driver with cowboy hat drove deathly slow, shouted into a microphone that blasted out of a megaphone on top of the steel cab of his truck,

“Colchon! Colchon gigante! Colchon clasificado reina! Colchon!”

Still, even he couldn’t break the silence.

It was too dark to see inside the church, like midnight compared to the glaring midday sun. A white man, seemed like a queer or an artist, a crew cut like a 5th grade boy, tan, reading glasses, very white teeth, a refugee from the fiesta, with wooden cane, examined the interior of the church from the doorway, but too timid to enter. He felt reserved, excluded, because of the draconian opinions of the cloth regarding his sexual pleasures.

A reverent Mexican man with a big wide white hat and dark leather sandals stepped into the church for a quick prayer and blessing, he's playing cards with the boys later, held his hat in his hand and bowed his head.

I took my turn and entered the holy space, a simple church, rich smells of flowers, like childhood somewhere; an ironic sense of safety, marble stained tiles like marble fudge.

I sat in a pew; they were all empty, and prayed for an answer. Some of the pews had names carved in them, Trujilio or Rodriguez, the important familias of the pueblo. Still, only simple wooden pews, from 1912, the year my grandma was born, like pews James Joyce used to stand and kneel from in cold Dublin mornings and assemble divine prose through his head with sore, chastised, knees.

The stain on the pews, uneven, scratched, a true peasants church, the most holy, cherished, and devoted of all of Christ's churches.

A dark woman, all in white, blessed herself, entered the church, blessed herself again, stepped onto the predella, and approached a green tabernacle behind the altar, fish and a basket of bread engraved into it with gold. She knelt down onto the floor and prayed, knees on cold hard marble, with tear soaked eyes.

Jesus solemnly hung, face full of forgiveness, on the crucifix above the tabernacle, Caucasian from Africa with long dark hair and beard, head tilted to the ground, knees scraped, stigmata bleeding, a fragrant bouquet of flowers on the mantle beneath him.

To the left was a dark painting of him on his knees praying to the sky, a yellow halo around his head in the simpler times before crucifixion. And on the right was Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, the classic full body image of her in shawl with a golden aura all around her while she floats in space.

A thick, beeswax, altar candle rested erect in its wooden holder, polished and carved; another colorful representation of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, this time as an embellishment embroidered on the edge of the corporal.

And further to the right were two prie-dieu, all wood, no cushion, for maximum pain on knees and repentance; a place of prayer for weather beaten hearts and tortured souls, hands clasped, knuckles white, and forehead into knuckles, sometimes with tears; hopes and supplications, a prayer for a reprieve from the suffering, a prayer for a moment of calm and simple contentment.

And to the right of those was a wooden case with a glass front, a three foot Jesus statue in white toga, ribs protruding and six pack abdomen, defined arms, one raised up, the stigmata already bleeding, again long dark hair and beard, looking skyward, the reverent and vibrant Jesus before Judas, thorns, crosses in desert, dying for sins, soul rising to heaven.

At the base of the wooden case was the real prize, ceramic bowls with soil in them and picture perfect peyote buttons; the sacrament and source of deep Jesus visions and authentic communion with God; three to a container, and three containers in the case, 20 peso bills offered to them, the holy trilogy, the body of God.

The peyote was encouraging but still, I felt nervous, somehow, as if I didn't belong, kind of like the queer artist with cane; even though I must be one of God's children, I would guess, but perhaps I'm not because of the scruff of my beard, pills in my blood, years of masturbation, the hangovers I've endured.

I bet the fans there wobbled too; they dangled low, unmoving, from the ceiling. Somber hooks clamped shut dark wooden shutters that restrained sunlight; electrical wiring dripped down the wall into a rough beige outlet.

Incredibly bright outside, heavenly, and when people walked by the open door of the church, they broke the flood beam of light that swatted the pews with a slant of gold.

Childhood Sundays in mass, stained glass window glowing St Joseph, the pews filled to the back; mom always late getting the kids out of bed, no time for waffles; I, sister, mom, stood in the back, tired feet, along with all the other sheepish and disheveled stragglers.

Maybe too far back, the words never reached me. They seemed jumbled and made of confetti, spilling everywhere and nowhere at once.

I dreamed of explosions through the windows, my missiles launched out of St Francis's skull to explode the evil Russians' missiles before they destroyed me, destroyed my true holy mother and sister in an atomic flash, no more hall full of echoes, reverence, or holiness.

And then I'd shoot another missile through a different stained glass window, St Luke, this one blue stained glass next to St Anthony; and launched a direct strike to blow up the Russians and their St Luke window while they prayed in a red Ruskie version of my church in Moscow, or St. Petersburg, or in great wide Siberia and my tanks rolled through, unchallenged, blowing up houses on the hills.

I never understood why we wasted our Sunday mornings there, so many cooler places to be; BMX track, Denny's, mall, arcade; at least my favorite cartoons weren't interrupted; but why were there no cartoons on Sunday, a punishment?

Luckily, every once in awhile, we'd miss church for one reason or another, mom too exhausted from long week of working all day every day to drag thankless kids kicking and screaming to a holy place of worship; too long on phone with relatives from Chicago, Aunt Marian, Uncle Paul, Grandpa Tom; maybe sister in Colorado has new cancer no one has ever heard of yet. Maybe the church hall gossip has gotten too close for comfort.

Hallelujah! And I ate Eggo waffles, smothered in butter, and filled each waffle pit with a fat pool of syrup; lay back on couch in pajamas and flipped through the channels looking for a good cartoon but it was all creepy arena-sized televangelist church services.

Scary looking preachers in colossal auditorium, full of zombie parishioners, singing, raccoon eyeliner on zealous woman; microphone clipped to big purple robe and redeemed man fainting; weird, spooky, big production lights and sounds; everything always creepy, even in my own home-team freaky church full of Christ bleeding everywhere and also the peculiar smell of old women's flowery perfume.

And the Mexican woman near the altar on her knees stroked the pillar that supported the tabernacle, kissed it, on an ordinary Monday, overcome with religious ecstasy of

Christ pillar and Eucharist. I wonder if she had eaten the peyote and was having a personal conversation with the source.

While she fervently prayed, a frumpy Mexican woman came in, simple, ragged, maid-like peasant clothes. She crossed herself and kneeled at a pew in the back, praying for an end to her miseries.

I'm the only one who hasn't crossed myself, yet. I couldn't bring myself to do it. The woman by the altar had already crossed herself three times in the last five minutes. I didn't see any holy water, maybe if I had some holy water.

Saint Francis of Assisi, St Matthew, St Cecilia, St Valentine, even St Joan of Arc; and my personal favorite, St Kateri Tekakwitha, the beautiful and holy Indian child of God from New York.

Inez.

St Inez, a virgin martyr; the patron saint of chastity, girls, and virgins.

Inez delivered me, in a round about way, at least to that church, absolved me of all history and future, and redeemed me, at least temporarily; 36 hours of drugs, sex, and rock n roll.

A virgin martyr; virginity is so many things.

Saints teach people virtue. Yes, I learned virtue from Inez, mostly about sublimation and eternity, about the inherent power of woman and her womb.

Inez taught me the impotence of man against the waves of time and mystery; about accepting the caprice of the universe; she taught me that saints come and go, youth comes and goes, old age comes and goes, everything comes and goes at one time or another.

And where is baby Jesus, now? All grown up and gone to heaven? Where is Inez now? Redeemed with baby Jesus?

I, unfortunately, was ill equipped to immerse myself in the miracle of giving birth; so I had to find other avenues of redemption. What kind of baby could I have; how could I give birth? Having a baby would redeem anybody. Everybody loves a baby. Part of the genius of Christianity was having the baby. Who could resist that? The baby as god; the baby is god.

The cement pillars, painted a pale yellow; little smudges from tiny, dirty fingers of pick nose, play in dirt, and wrestle with dog kids.

And man in robe, in this instance, Spanish and praying and reading cryptic passages and they fall on ears eager for chewing gum, comic book talk, soccer scores.

And after church, the sweet glazed donuts, a glaze twist, a rainbow sprinkle; and a raffle with donated prizes and the bright sunlight poured into 11 a.m. church hall full of well dressed ladies and my mom commiserated and gossiped; and I, with my sister, ate donuts and then some more with custard filling and chocolate dough.

And also, sad church of funeral, my father placed at front, the church mostly empty, except for childhood pal Peter Moore and his sweet holy mom, superstitious and Irish catholic like mine, trying to instill medieval values in Peter; and a few tears shed, just for

atmosphere, even though my dad was a terrible bastard, and the pungent musky smoke of the priest's chain dangling thurible, not good smelling like Jamaican head shops; but rather scary genie-like smoke in the church that my grandmother used to walk to on Sundays and also past on weekdays when she lugged groceries and in other years I rode past on bicycle to get to school, 4th grade, and it was connected to a street that was an interesting shortcut to Brandon Anderson's house.

And I rode past it quickly on lonely, sunshine filled, after school days when everyone else seemed to have some enriching activity to engage in; and I rode home lost, full of despair, to scary house; and engaged in my first forays with militant emptiness and atheism, renunciation of evidence-less creationist myths.

I always liked the idea of heaven, though; when my time comes, a big reunion at the pearly gates, hemming and hawing about old times, chewing the fat with some long lost pals in a palace of white eternity, beautiful women.

We'll see; I felt like another beer.

"Shit," I thought, "maybe we simply don't know, maybe it's beyond us; maybe the mystery at the core of life and of creation is worthy of some kind of honor and respect."

Churches, blah; Inez was all the religion I ever needed.

I got up, no crossing myself, and walked back into the extreme light of the plaza. The town felt even emptier, no caballeros, no taxi waiting, no mattress truck; like aliens had silently abducted all of them; or maybe it was time for everyone's siesta.

I stopped in at the Posada to pop a few more pills. The senorita was nowhere in sight. The money I left for that night's room fee was still on the lobby desk, right where I had given it to her.

I picked up the bell and rang it, nothing. I rang it again, nothing.

"What the hell?" I thought, and put the money in my pocket.

I looked at the wall where she kept the room keys, they were all there; the posada was completely empty except for me.

I took my key out and went into my room; everything was how I left it, perfectly still and untouched. I looked over the dresser and at my things in the bathroom, somehow expecting at least something to be different, my toothbrush on the wrong side of the sink, my Jesus candle at a different angle on the dresser. Everything was completely, and eerily, the same.

A queasy feeling trickled into my gut; I threw back an extra Xanax just to be safe, the pervading silence was getting to me.

I walked down to the beach; the drunk was still there, at least, snoring with his dog. I actually felt reassured by this. I turned around and went back to the plaza, still empty, got on the main road, and followed it south.

"There must be a turnoff before the bridge," I thought, "How else would all the RV's get there?"

I felt confident that I'd recognize it when I saw it. I kept my eyes on the right, and after about a mile, found what I was looking for; a dusty road that spit out in the direction of the beach. It looked well used and the ground was engraved with wide tire tracks. I picked up my pace to a jog and ran along it.

The road emptied out into an empty dirt lot and then, just ahead, onto the beach. No barbecues, no bikes, no lanterns, no hula-hoop's, no Winnebago's, no airstreams, no beautiful girl from Utah; just tire marks dug into the dust and sand. I stood in the center of the parking lot and sang,

“Summertime, when the livin' is easy...”

My words faded into nowhere.

“Fish are jumpin', and the cotton is high...”

The song blended in with the increasing chatter of the late afternoon jungle, bird chirps, gecko calls, insect scratches.

“Hush little baby, don't you cry...”

The emptiness knocked the wind out of me; I curled over, put my hands on my knees, and stared at the dirt floor of the empty lot. I could've stayed there forever and just stared, catching my breath. I was scared but, ironically, something about the emptiness compelled me, somehow invited me to become one with it.

The ocean crashed, it looked like there was bit of a swell coming in. The waves curled up high and slammed against the shore with fearsome strength, exploded and blasted mist in the air, foam troopers screaming up onto the sand; the tide rising.

The sun drooped; it wouldn't be long until sunset; though the moon was already up high. Had all the fishermen returned for the day? I didn't see any boats on the water. I started walking south on the beach.

Birds screeched and called in the trees, different whistles and songs, chattering like a symphony of exotic ornithological instruments.

Giant pelicans glided down the coast and dove in, swooping up mouthfuls of water and gobbling the yummy fish; and then another one dove. They calmly waited, motionless, then raised their massive wings and with a thud of a flap, took flight and sailed over the shallow waters for a dive bomb dinner.

The sun sank faster now and started to flash the sky with its exotic colors. I looked down at the sand; it was charred and scorched. The distance of the hills felt familiar and at the inside of the beach there was a natural cove cut out of a thick grove of palm trees.

I started singing,

“Besame, besame mucho, como si fuera esta noche ultima vez...” Besame, besame mucho, que tengo miedo a perderte, perederte despues...”

I sang it louder,

“Besame, besame mucho, que tengo miedo a perderte, perederte despues...”

There wasn't even a tent spike, or a cigarette butt, a beer bottle, anything. I listened carefully, only waves smashing and birds chattering. I ran my hands through the sand, kicked it up, only more sand. I picked up a handful and let it run through my fingers, only dust remained.

"I better get back to town, maybe get a taco," I thought.

I turned around and walked north, back through the empty trailer lot and toward the posada. The sky was lit up like a Christmas tree, with new variations of stripes and blotches of color that I'd never experienced.

I thought,

"Sunsets are alive. They grow with splendor and burst in a climatic moment with their own vivid signature, then fade to darkness. Some are more endearing than others."

Tonight's was especially endearing. It made everything in the world seem worthwhile, intrinsically meaningful.

The sun sunk deeper into the depths of the ocean and the sky dissolved into darkness as I came closer to town. There were still a few lights on, but I didn't see anyone about, not even the Panama guy, not even the colloidal hippy, not even the drunk or his dog.

I entered the lobby of the posada, nobody at the desk, though the lights were on. I knocked on the senorita's door, my knocks echo-bounced around the lobby like ping pong balls, no answer. I walked up the stairs, beneath the crucifix, and then down the quiet hallway; my feet felt heavy, made of stone, and thumped like billiard balls against a cathedral floor.

I unlocked the door, entered the room, lit the Jesus candle, and popped some pills. I opened the sliding window of the balcony. The jungle buzzed full throttle; the moon glowed above the opaque ink ocean.

I lay in my bed; figured I'd rest for a few minutes and then make my way to the taco shop.

"Easy enough," I thought.

I turned off the light and just let the moonbeams pour in. I started having weird pill thoughts in the violent stillness of the room.

"Women are like a box of chocolates. They always look better than they taste. Still, depending on your will power, it is tempting to consume the entire box, upon which sickness is inevitable."

"I neglect my left hand."

"Moonlight pours into my room, and dogs bark throughout the night. I'm beginning to understand their conversations."

How come there weren't any cars rumbling, bells ringing, or trucks rattling? Had the town been totally evacuated and I was left behind as the lone welcome committee for a nuclear fallout? The senorita could've at least left a note,

"Dear Senor, Big Nuclear War, no es bueno. Good Luck. The Management."

I once watched a special on TV about how quickly nature will reclaim the earth as soon as man is gone; concrete gives way to plants, vines split through kitchen tiles, coyotes rule the streets of Manhattan; all within a matter of weeks.

Outside of the disconcerting sense of desolation, at least it was peaceful. I felt like, for once, I was purely integrated and essential to the world.

Then I heard it; a squawk, a screech. I could hear the first soft notes slip through my window. At first, I thought it was just the subtle frequencies from someone's radio running loose. I got up from the bed, walked onto the balcony, and held my breath.

"Black Orpheus," the distinct haunting melody, spooky in the way it slid and slinked through the thick air; practically stuck to my skin.

The night possessed the pueblo; unshakeable drastic shadows entrenched everywhere. The jungle blacks conquered any real light. Only surreal light survived, a flicker of the imagination, either from the moon or a leak of nude light bulb dripping out of maniacal adobe window squares onto cobblestone.

The pueblo, on any normal day, was full of medieval sensibilities, with daily events concentrated around the simple church and plaza; fruit vendors, Indian artisans, roasted corn; a timeless way of life and now, a feeling of anachronism. The Bossa nova melody resembled that of the piper playing a lullaby or hymn, infected with the witchcraft of the jungle, casting a spell on the village; and with the moon up high, on top of a simple cinder block house, the silhouette of a saxophone player.

With the hills at such a steep incline, the adobe or cinderblock houses nuzzled into them with a pure sense of verticality. And this particular house, like most others, had spidery bits of rebar sticking vertically from its perimeter on the roof, just in case the owner decided to stack another floor; sometimes it became a competition between neighbors to build a tower of Babel; they build until their cinderblock home is in the clouds and eventually crumbles upon its own merits.

The saxophone player improvised. His melodic lines were spooky and soft, and at the end of every phrase he added a breathy, squeaky flourish. I could only assume that he had accidentally listened to some Eric Dolphy or late Coltrane and mistakenly come to believe that all modern phrasing must end with some reedy avant-garde gesture.

He was on the edge of the roof, leaning toward the center of the peaceful pueblo, intent on making a statement to the village; perhaps something along the lines of, "A great artist is among you."

I appreciated the rare moments when he turned toward the hills. It felt more authentic, playing to the nighttime toads, crickets, and plants like he was in heavenly communion and speaking some secret language of nature.

Those were his best melodies. The others, too contrived, like some kind of hippy mating call. I hope, for the dignity of the female gender, it did not work.

Still, at least someone was still around, even if it was just a shitty saxophone player. I lay back down on my bed and watched the fan some more.

The way the moonlight came in the window it sliced right across the fan, creating squares and parallelograms. In one of the squares of light I could see a gecko, motionless, glued to the ceiling and hanging upside down.

How could he hang upside down like that? Or was I the one who was hanging upside down?

I spoke to him,

“Copernicus gecko, you are upside down,” I said. “You just don’t realize that you’re upside down as we speak; that the earth is at this moment tipped topsy-turvy and though you think the ceiling is the floor, it is in fact the ceiling, and when you think you’re standing straight up, if you were to ever abandon your heliocentric pigheadedness, you would see that you are dangling upside down like a lizard chandelier and only thinking that the ceiling was the floor.”

He stuck there, frozen in time.

The square of moon-lick shifted ever so slowly across the ceiling, I watched it creep over the edge of a brick. The gecko disappeared into the shadow. Time cramped in my gut and ached in my skull; every second became a visceral tick of a heartbeat clock.

“I need to get out of this fucking place,” I thought.

I turned on the lamp, grabbed the bottle of Valium, and threw a few down my throat; pulled out my small green army duffle bag and began packing my things.

“Hell,” I thought, “I can just keep driving south until I get to Acapulco. Sing some songs, meet some girls, and dive off the cliffs into a triple reverse back flip somersault.”

I folded up my pants, tucked the Super 8 camera in, my Jesus candle, Santeria potpourri; in the bathroom I grabbed my razor, toothpaste, floss; then it hit me.

Shit. With what car? The pills had me delirious for a minute. I didn’t have a god damn car anymore. Inez had either sold it by now, abandoned it, given it away, or was still blazing across the highway night.

“Fuck it,” I said, “I’ll take a bus to Acapulco.”

I buckled my bag.

“And forget the girls when I get there, just some cold beers, good music, and a little marijuana will be fine.”

I grabbed my bag, walked through the ghostly abandoned lobby, and threw my key on the desk; walked out the door and to the corner where I saw the bus kick up dust and skid to a stop yesterday.

I passed a patio of a restaurant situated on the first corner from the posada.

“Funny,” I thought, “I never noticed that place before.”

An old pale white couple dined in there, silently eating, the only customers in the restaurant.

They had a desolate American gothic sensibility to them; austere Midwestern golden year adventurers looking for cheap food and good margaritas; and now that they found it, they had nothing to say.

The man slowly lifted a bite of beef fajita to his mouth, staring down at his plate; the woman ate a spoonful of rice, staring down at her plate.

A Mexican waiter, his right arm folded in front of him in an L-shape, a pressed white towel draped over it, stood stoically erect just beyond the edge of the patio, literally on the corner of the dusty street.

He followed me with his eyes as I walked by, kept his body rigid and straight, and cracked the faintest shadow of a smile. A canopy of jungle leaves overhead covered the sky and within the buzzing and humming, I heard the meek sound of a fork clink against a plate as Missouri grandpa cut a new piece of meat.

The street was deserted, no sign of any traffic, let alone a bus. I shifted trajectory and crossed over the plaza to the taco restaurant where I had eaten lunch.

“I’ll ask the Mayan lady, she’ll tell me what’s going on.”

I quickened my pace. A few dogs still lingered around, heads bent down, and one trotted along the dusty street with me. A black one flinched as I came close and ran to the other side of the street.

The bright lights of the taco stand were blazing, 150-watt bulbs dangling on a live wire illuminating the patio and tables, the white plastic surfaces blown out by the force of the light, like an overexposed piece of film.

The tables outside were empty; but I could smell tacos and hear the grill fat crackling and meat sizzling. I entered the restaurant, no one was there. The lights were on and the menu on the wall was still lit, meat frying on the grill, there were even fresh limes sliced open on the cutting board.

“What the fuck?”

I stepped back onto the sidewalk and crossed the street toward the tienda. Even though it was dark, boxes of fruit were stacked up high on the sidewalk, a light bulb poking out from the wall like an electric clown’s nose glowed on the pineapples.

I ran in; the old man sat behind the register, a chunk of cheese on a woodblock next to him. He nodded his head forward and back, humming a soft melody. He looked doped out, as if he popped too many Oxycodone. I rushed up to him.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

He vaguely looked up with glassy eyes, hardly registered that I was there, and gave a soft and distant grunt, bobbed his head back, and continued to hum.

“Oye!” I yelled, “Can you hear me?”

“Si, si, si...”

His head bobbed back and forth.

“Where is everyone?!” I yelled.

“Si, si, si...”

“Where is everyone?!” I yanked him by the shirt.

“No se, I don’t know, I don’t know...”

“Are the buses running? Have you seen any busses today?”

“Si, si, si...”

He bobbed his head back and forth, all alone in his collared shirt behind the counter on a tall stool, packages of coffee and cans of beans on the crowded shelves behind his head.

“toda bien, como siempre.”

Everything is fine, as always.

I put my bag down, walked to the cooler, grabbed a big bottle of beer, cut a slice of cheese, took a lighter from the counter, grabbed my bag, and walked out.

“A bunch of maniacs,” I thought.

I crossed over to the bus stop. No one was there. The moonlight filled the abandoned street with a silver glow.

I sipped my beer and waited, figured I’d give it ten minutes. I heard a faint whistling. I couldn’t pinpoint from which direction; just a slow, piercing, and melodic whistle of a stranger. It grew in volume, seemed close enough to touch, and then elusive; it gradually faded away.

I looked down the road in the direction where I thought the bus ran. It led into the thick buzz and black of the jungle, nothing more.

“Fuck it, I thought, “I’ll drink my beer on the beach and ride out the night, things will be normal again tomorrow.”

As I stepped onto the street a black figure whooshed by me. I turned and saw an Indian man, wearing a dark shirt, on a cheap mountain bike racing down the dusty road out of town. I could hear the sounds of his gears rattle and evaporate as he disappeared into the opaque of the vibrating unknown.

I retraced my steps back toward the posada and came upon the restaurant where I had seen the American gothic couple. Their table was cleared, they were gone, but the waiter still stood on the corner with his rigid posture.

What did he expect from the night? The town was broken like a smashed clock. The senorita, the fishermen, the taco lady, all gone; yeah, the man at the tienda was still there, try talking to him, or the saxophone player, wherever he went.

Inez was gone, Gilbert, Phoenix, Forest, numbers 90 and 91 whoever they were. The young drummer didn’t say goodbye, not that he needed to; he just left. The usual taxi drivers and desperados who lingered around on rock walls were gone, too, even though the electric lights in the plaza still glowed.

Maybe the creepy waiter knew. The sadistic bastard enjoyed watching me, knowing that I didn’t. Maybe he knew I wasn’t going to join him for dinner. Maybe he knew that

no one was joining him for dinner. He looked dignified, stood erect, his apron pressed, cloth draped over his arm and clean. The adobe oven burned with a small but emphatic blaze.

The air stuck to my skin like Vaseline as I stepped over the cobblestones. The waiter watched me expectantly from his empty restaurant, the tables set with silverware, plates, and glasses. Candles flickered in little red jars and the pink light cast kaleidoscope fractals on the tablecloth. I avoided looking in his direction as not to give the impression that I might dine with him tonight.

I simply focused on the strange contours of the cobblestones and how the moon soaked them in its milk and inflicted them with the burden of mercury drips of life. Scratchy Mexican music floated around, a romantic Spanish voice bellowed out above trumpets, tubas, and bugles; it was peppy and felt incongruent to the grave still of the night.

I looked around to see if I could locate the source of the music. A room glowed on the second floor of a concrete building; the entrance of the building was very narrow and the door, wedged open, led directly to a flight of stairs. A small sign hung on the door, "Rooms by the day." I wondered what that meant. Where were the hookers? Where was Inez?

The walls of the room were a bold orange, the kind of orange you only ever find on concrete walls in jungle bunkers. It was the orange of earth and the orange of equatorial sunsets, certain iguana's tails, Sunny Delight, and the orange of venomous insects. There was no use for that kind of color on walls in America.

There was no glass on the window, no need, only rickety dark wood shutters that clipped shut in case of hurricane or for privacy. For now, they were propped open and revealed the room- completely bare, just the luminous light bulb glow reflecting from the wall to the weary expanse out the window; the ethereal orange.

The music was the same music I heard as a kid at fabric stores, car washes, and used tire yards; also, back in high school, at Mario Hurtado's house. The gang and I used to sit around a fire pit in his dark backyard in the Mexican part of town smoking cigarettes, drinking beers, waxing poetic. And a spectral light always glowed from Mario's grandpa's room.

"What does he do in there?"

"I don't know, read, I guess."

And the tinny Mexican radio poured out his grandpa's window and I wondered why all the songs always had the same scratchiness, as if it were dragged through gravel and then into the radio. Even if I found a station myself, it still had that same itchy quality, the sound trickling in from an auto garage.

His grandpa repaired lawn mowers by day. He rarely came out when we were there, but every once in awhile he shuffled through his tools, said something to Mario in Spanish, and walked back in his room.

He had a kind face, seemed like it was filled with wisdom, though it probably wasn't. He just fixed lawn mowers and read the Mexican newspaper and listened to tinny

Spanish songs. That doesn't necessarily make you wise. But he looked wise, like I imagined the Old Man from "Old Man and the Sea."

Mario's garage, which doubled as his grandpa's workshop, was filled with splintered shelves of motor oil, oddly shaped parts, rusted bits and pieces, greasy tools. They were scattered about in different shoeboxes, mayonnaise jars, and plastic containers; piled on themselves like drip castles of salvaged parts.

My gang and I never really talked about much those nights, just general high school punk rock bullshit. Maybe one of our friends was in jail, or we speculated about some girl who supposedly put out. Then we'd try to call her but she'd never answer.

We talked about Vespas and Lambrettas, about Operation Ivy; about railroads, engines, malt liquor, bass guitars, and about whether we saw cheerleader Kristi Hutchins's VW parked in history teacher Mr. Moretti's driveway last Tuesday.

And that radio kept pouring out long-lost Spanish canciones that all live in the same tin can somewhere in the universe. I swear; it wouldn't surprise me if I saw a string attached to any one of those radios.

At the entrance of the beach, a solitary mad cutout piece of space in the path, as if incised from the fabric of existence. All that was there was a deep black space where a man had once been. It was beyond a silhouette, it was a gouge out of creation. He leaned his fist on his chin like a migrant-worker version of The Thinker; had a baseball cap on, a tucked in shirt, and corduroy pants. He sat motionless on a block of cement and faced the ocean in the classic and dignified Rodin pose.

As I approached to pass, I noticed that his eyes were open only the tiniest slit. I'm sure he noticed me, but it didn't register anywhere. He seemed like a fossil, a petrified stone, or a nuclear shadow.

My feet sunk into the sand; the dry sand that baked in the sun all day, the sand that surrenders to your feet as you step in it and twirl your toes; the sand that clings to your body after a wrestling match with your brother or diving Frisbee catch.

The sand that was once a mountain, once a coral continent, once submerged in water, and now, in its old age, is simply a chuckling old monk, bending yet refusing to break, a little Bruce Lee of the elements.

The same sand that a crab comes out of with one dangling eye looking toward you with fear and morbid interest; a swarm of them will devour you if they smell a hint of blood.

The sand that slips from glass into glass of hourglass on Socrates' desk as he watched the end draw near; the sand of the Tibetan monks who sculpt incredible intricate Mandalas and blow them away with a heave of their breath like the Big Bad Wolf. And where are the Three Little Pigs tonight, where is Red Riding Hood?

My head felt cloudy, like the pills were all dammed up in my brain; their sweet sorcery, their little chemical bonds and psychedelic patterns, the wild eyed chemist with his beakers and vials, test tubes and measuring devices, Bunsen burners and scales; white lab coat frayed at the bottom, a button loose, and one pant leg longer than the other, his gym shoes untied; hair flailing out and thin from innumerable chemical exposures, kind

of like the thin hair on the China lady who dry cleaned my shirt, or of the Thai woman who I watched, her back hunched in pain, painting the fingernails of a suburban mom in a manicure shop- bent over with piercing attention to detail, disenfranchised from Springs and Summers of rice, erotic jasmine blossom, bountiful fields thriving in lagoons of perfectly fresh water, water snakes slithering through them.

The pills lingered in their own peculiar way. In some ways, it was an added bonus, an extended buzz, in another way it was a punishment, a detention of the mind without joy; sent to the principal's office and forced to stare into the corner with a dunce cap.

Whilst the principal, beaten down by his wife and the world, commands us with severe words and authority; his awful pale face, stern and harsh, deprived of the sense of humanity and touch from a kind woman in farmer's dress hugging his side in the naked flesh of morning.

The pills traced a history of the map inside my meek neurology, tried one corridor, then the next, marching like merry pranksters and disengaged harlequins, disregarding the holy treasures of past lives.

Voyeurs to the memories as child of wandering the crooked streets at dusk negotiating to buy a switchblade, the memories of splashing in the pool and tackling my golden retriever; voyeurs of the memory of plastic melting on my leg and burning a hole in my skin, a scar still visible today, the memories of the new scars, prominent and long, the dark blurry opening of eyes after operation, cruel silence.

The tormented memories of Inez, in her cold addiction to instinct, devouring the soft heart of my soul, the tender marrow sucked to emptiness.

The scars of ridicules by friends and heroes, the denials of entrance, the exclusion from tribe; the scars of attempt and failure, reaching up and amputations of spirit so it closes over with that pink tissue; scar tissue in some ways stronger though ever so noticeable and cursed with numbness.

To open that wound you must enlist use of a scalpel, operate, and undergo the pains of arduous open-ended recovery. The failed attempt to see your friends before death, the failed attempt to say the words you meant to lovers on the brink of deafness, the chance to build a fire in your mother's hearth and make her bread.

The intricate memories take the form of complex fractal images, crossing over one another and influencing the next and the last; the psychic electrical storm filling the skies of your mind like lightening. Play Benjamin Franklin; hold up a kite with a key tied to the end of the string, see if there's any megavoltage behind that lightening bolt.

The thunder of the waves shook my chest. I could feel the shockwaves of the ocean rumble through my intestines, kidneys, pancreas, and liver. The blast of air from the crashing waves forced itself into my lungs. It felt good, like my breath and heart was given a free pump.

Mist fluttered up, ejected from the water by the crash. It hovered, cast out, wandering like a spirit in an unknown medium, dispossessed and looking for a home. The ocean looked like an eternity of jet black ink and the crash of the waves could be heard, and felt, but their essence was a mystery; defiant of all modes of inquiry.

In the daylight, everything is recognizable. The ocean has all the qualities of water; you splash in it like bath when child, you swim in it, you dunk head in it; you see ripples in the sand and bits of shell.

It is something fish live in and people swim in; tight swirls of foam appear and disappear with every new infantry attack of waves; still a vast and mysterious sea, full of danger and awe, but defined, understood, familiar.

At night, it becomes Mr. Hyde. Rock landmines, piranhas, shell cobras; sharks, commanders of the black sea undulate their fearsome tail patrolling the dark water for intruders and prey.

Though the sand was warm, it still sent menacing chills through my legs. I hesitated taking another step. I wanted to drink my beer and watch the ocean, but I felt like it had designs, wanted something more from me.

I felt drawn to the water, I could benefit from a swim, something to clear my head; but also shivered with foreboding apprehension. Everything was so utterly quiet and still, even in spite of the rabid buzzing, the jungle; full of vibrations, varying degrees of decay and rigor mortis, all movement impaired by thickness of air and narcotic fragrance of strange trees, flowers, and fan leaves overgrown that poured from steep hills like a flash flood about to swallow the village.

The spiders and crickets thrive off of the narcotic smell, it makes them sing and crawl; they also emit their own odors, build webs and cricket homes. Stay in the jungle long enough and you become one of them, singing discordant tunes, growing eight arms and stalk for prey like a tarantula.

Palm trees took swipes at the clouds in retaliation as the breeze swatted them at their whim. The fronds imitated bird wings but were anchored in the thick foundation of trunk, root, and sand, no flight; fluttered, whispered, and conspired against the wind.

The contour of the hills undulated softly and rolled with organic lines like readings on a hospital monitor- the way they squiggle and trail with the vital signs of life, until flat.

Though a tenderness, too; a blanket that you carried around in your infancy, blue if boy, pink if girl, and slept on the floor while your parents watched the nightly news; a blanket that when strapped around your neck became a cape for a superhero to fly away, save the world, like anyone should. Only much later did you realize the world was the only one capable of offering any salvation; and there wasn't enough to go around.

The blanket was the atmosphere of a world of dinosaurs that spoke in personal languages to you. They fought fierce battles of survival and mauled each other beneath the blanket sky while you hunched over, god like, and commanded their duel. There were waterfalls and spacecraft hidden in the stitches of the blanket and animal friends like wolves and dolphins. The blanket was tender on the cheek and tasted familiar and safe when nibbled.

And sometimes the deep stillness of the blanket could be felt, as if it were only waiting to be folded over the face of a dead car crash victim.

A few dogs, much fewer than before, barked in the night, traded their night time legends, speaking as usual, in perfect, articulate, sentences and responded to each other in their own manner of tradition. The language was basic, yet eloquent.

I stepped forward onto the sand. Yes, in spite of the fact that the sun had dropped hours ago, millions of pebbles still felt warm, alive, radiated heat deep beneath the surface. I felt it slipping through my toes as if my foot were an hourglass and each grain represented a thought or moment experienced someplace at some time over the course of history.

Each grain represented a cry and howl from some mother or child. Every grain represented the lost dream of a man howling inside. The sand reinvents itself daily, the water rushes up to sift and maneuver each layer into a fresh, miraculous, and unprecedented delicacy.

Each grain of sand was different, different in its decibel levels of laughter, decibel levels of brilliant insight. Each grain of sand was different, but not that different. And all of them eventually would get washed out to sea and dragged away.

The pelican knew that; the pelican welcomed that.

Renegade birds defied the night and glided overhead, catching something, a glimpse, in the corner of their eye. It saw a spirit, or a mistake in the universe, or a simple hallucination that took shape and vanished. Its birdbrain reacted and dove, turned back and forgot what initiated the reaction. It returned to its comrades to fly in formation, five red barons swooping through the war torn night of stillness and oblivion; talking to one another, as the dogs do, in their simple language of calls and haikus.

The pelicans hid away, with scanning eyes, someplace secret and quiet; huddled in a cave. During the day they grazed the surface of the water with radar eyes, their wings expanded out miles wide. They flapped the giant wings and chugged their bodies into weightless flight, kamikaze dive, and scooped the water with long mouths.

I couldn't tell what a thought was. I couldn't tell if I was thinking. Maybe something about the sunset, or the way my body reacted to the uneven contours of the beach, or Elvis at Graceland. I probably thought of my sister, mother, and grandmother, who far away, somewhere, were having thoughts of their own in their son-less world. Years of abandonment, death, and neglect; I wondered if they needed my prideful wanderings for their well being, if I offered a sense of hope that a victorious man someday would return. Or had they simply given up on all of my saccharine ideas?

I almost turned back. The flat line still of the warm night felt like a bandit in wait; the dark rooms in the posada seemed to hide some kind of dark and ominous secret like x-ray slides of the fearsome sharks that circled the bay.

At the interior edge of the sand, beneath the palm trees, tall brush bushes leaped up on either side and undulated like voodoo dancers in the breeze and reached for you to grab you in and devour you for to nourish its plant juices.

The air was rich; the oxygen content exceptionally high, and even more important, the level of jungle gases in their trademark recipe; the Duncan Heinz or Sara Lee bakery of chocolate cake and frosting smothered across landscapes and microcosms of insects.

I had no idea where I was, floating on some island in the middle of time and the universe. I had an idea of the extent of eternity but no way to comprehend it or touch it in any meaningful way. The hallucinations of my youth took me to fantastic places of color and imagery, but none of them now provided any solace. The waves crashed with immutable force, punishing the sand. The hills hissed and recoiled, held a cape up over their face like Count Dracula. The ocean could stab them with a wooden stake and swallow them, too.

I followed an invisible path as it wended through a complicated maze of directions; organized the labyrinth in my head, tried to equate some kind of shape with it, dug through my growing vocabulary of forms to inject some meaning and understanding to the route I found myself on, spirits and monkeys chattered in my head, the accuracy of my path never in doubt, it was as easy to follow as interstate 5.

I knew my way back, but that was superfluous information. I checked in with my head to see if it had any particular insights to the moment at hand. It said nothing, waited quietly with me, anticipated instructions as well. I could hear the entreaties of my past urging me to some kind of repetition of self, but the magnetism of the path trumped all meager strands of reprise or resistance.

The waves scooped up in gestures like claw hands, like big bulldozers strip mining in Nevada, like angry bleeding fang waves of a Japanese print, ready to rip you across radical razor sharp rocks of tide pools, teaming with little tentacled aliens feeding, orbiting their universe in silent conversations of their own. I leaned back against a rock and listened to the whispers of the sand.

It told me of conquistadors landing with clipper ships and horses; hooped beasts barging upon soil and men with tall spears jabbing children in the reeds. Somewhere, it won't say, a chest of gold, buried with Spanish coins and secret incantations of immortality from fifteenth century mystics. The sand mocks the fifteenth century as if it were an awkward moment less than a second ago.

Shining armor knights in my head wandered the seven seas, relentlessly searched for El Dorado, destroyed all paper tigers in their path. I circled to exhaustion the globes of my mind seeking the riches I already held in my hands. It didn't matter. I was on the sand, as if I had always been. The waves rose and fell like mechanical performers at a tin arcade game. If I had a bee bee gun- I shoot them down one by one.

I was north of the posada. I didn't keep following the invisible path the whole way, didn't need too. I leaned against the rock in the sand with my beer, crossed my legs, and finally felt relaxed.

I took a sip of the beer. Suddenly it tasted foul, like it had turned, or like it was somehow related to that ancient bottle of Perrier, infused with too many strange gaseous compounds. Strange, it had tasted fine a minute ago.

I stood up and launched it into the water, a streamer of beer spilling from its mouth as it flipped around in the air, my eyes glued on the bottle with pure instinct.

It landed in the water and dissolved into the black ink. I remained standing, it felt good. My body felt good, my muscles were loose and strong. I shook my shoulders and

neck and let out the tension I had buried in there. I felt like a master boxer before a title match, threw out a few shadow punches.

Not much tension. In spite of the freaky town, in spite of Inez stealing my car, I actually somehow felt peaceful, somehow calm. Maybe it was just the pills talking.

The waves pushed foamy water up the slope of the beach, supernatural in the moonlight and then it disappeared again in the well of the sea.

Like a game, I chased the water as it pulled back to its source.

“Hey Ocean!” I yelled, “You’re drunk on my cerveza!”

The ocean laughed.

“The sound of waves is nothing but laughter.”

“There’s a joke being told, can’t you hear?”

“And now in my solitude I’m having conversations with myself.”

“You always were.”

“Was I, who are you to say?”

“It is the plight of your male mind. You project everything onto the universe and call yourself God. But do you think in the ultimate moment of humility that you will be God?”

“It depends who you ask.”

“If time were actually your pet, then the entire universe would belong to you; but you are the pet of time.”

As a child, I was swept away by the playful and dangerous ocean, abducted, tucked under its shirt, an awful kidnapper, the water being a windowless van, sitcoms like ‘Different Strokes,’ it happened to Arnold, later addressed the gravity of the social scourge.

Sitcoms so terrifying that they ingrained paranoia inside of me until I fled from all things outside of myself. And the water, in its mischievous way, pulled me under its paw, anticipated an equal return of effort, a sparring match. However, it is only sand beneath my cheek and water surrounding the other and the ocean is bored as it drags me into its belly.

Life, we all act as Gods, we create the universe for ourselves. I suddenly thought of the houses I lived in; crucifixes on the walls, television flickering.

And as my demise accelerated, approaching escape velocity, only then was I slammed against the salvation shins of my older brother, seventies blond hair flailing out at the sides, the sun blessing him like the beach golden child christened by virtue of his awkward and insecure, yet holy, intentions.

Slammed against his legs like a safety net of flesh and yanked by shoulders for him to see. What did he see? I see him in my reflection, though older, does he see me in his reflection, though younger, or was it all just a dream as it feels like now, like so many of my memories and pillars of identity?

The sky forgave me and allowed me reentry. My brother and I never really talked about it. I bring it up from time to time and say,

“Don’t you recall when you saved my life at the beach?”

However, no one seems to have any recollection of it and really rather not talk about it in favor of pursuing their buzzing from leaf to leaf, gathering nectar and singing songs.

Where is Inez? Where are the others? Weren’t there thousands of them? I saw them, I watched them from my window in a house in the suburbs and the world was ours to destroy. And everyone constantly preoccupied with thoughts of escape, subsequent annihilation. Didn’t we realize it somehow along the way? Weren’t their houses falling and pharmacies closing, too? Weren’t the schools bombed for the summer? Didn’t we leave our rivals behind?

Ah, but Inez.

It’s all crumbled now. I fooled my self and was fooled by her, two ladybugs, earthworms, and butterflies.

And the water tugged at me like little glittering fingers tickling at my toes, little sardines with a treasure in their eyes that say

“Come hither, we have sweet Atlantis’s for you and darling mermaids for comforts and capricious carnal knowledge.”

I stepped back from the incoming waves, reluctant. I sang, I sang as loud as I could, again and again; another chorus, another bop scat, another hymn to the land and world.

The ocean still washed over my legs. The rushing of the water stuck to my body like boulders, like a landside pulling down the slope of a mountain. I felt rocks and bits of shells, once tiny mansions.

The waves rolled in again, this time with more force. The water, tempestuous, swirled with layers of white foam glowing in the moonlight; rushed to the land and swallowed me to my thighs. And as it retreated, it pulled me with such force that I tripped and stumbled in further.

Another wave came suddenly and splashed against my torso sending a fountain of water flooding against my neck and through my hair.

“Water so eager,” I said, “I’ll join you in your intimate innermost folds and immerse myself inside of your body with concentration, splash in your bounty of wetness and joy. But your coercions are too forceful; I rather dive in at my leisure and soak up your sensuality with ease.”

I hastened back onto the sand and looked around to see if any life had materialized, none. I gazed south toward the posada and nearby was a small fisherman’s cantina open to the beach, built of concrete and painted in green, the radical white of a fluorescent light reflecting off of the sides of the three walls, almost antiseptic like hospital green, or the austere green in my elementary school bathroom. But the green here, much deeper, like the predominant orange, infused with jungle potency, vitality, unlike the doom of the dark and scary toilets and stalls of boy’s room as a child.

A light bulb, covered in a wide wicker shade, dangled from a craggily wooden beam above a table. The wicker split the light up into jagged fragments onto the chairs and the sand at the foot of the open front.

The combination of colors and lights made a strange cocktail, bits of palm and concrete, wooden table from a Van Gogh painting, conquistador beach sand all soaked in jungle stew and stirred together along with the insects that were addicted to the glow.

Big moths and gold beetles flung themselves into the light, ricocheted, but nevertheless determined to slam into it again, big flies and mosquitoes, and bugs with veined wings and wide eyes. And the thatch roof hung over the tables, one table graced with an empty beer, the thatch drooped, like the intestines of a straw man leaking out of its stomach.

The bar had the same feeling of irrelevance as the town church in its solemn silence, its eager invitation, and its failure.

I walk further north up the beach, over coconut husks, ragged and splayed, the milky nourishment absent, only dark blackness and bugs. I found a stick and jammed it into the sand and untied my shorts.

I lay my trunks down next to the stick and unbuttoned my favorite blue shirt, the top three buttons still missing somewhere in the world.

“Is this a woman’s shirt?” I pondered again.

I laid it on the sand beside my trunks and stood up tall, feeling the raw wind on my naked body. It coiled up around me and suckled me. It massaged my flesh and flicked off unnecessary bits of sand, skin cells, and dusty baggage.

The rich smells of the ocean and jungle enveloped me. I reached out my arms and felt the muscles release along my forearms into my hands. I quickly snapped my neck and heard a crack and felt the tension release from my vertebrae. I looked down at my stomach and saw that it was lean and sovereign. My sex hung before me in a confident, though neutral way, unlike the excited attention and duty before Inez.

Here was the instrument of Inez’s flower. The conduit through which levees from the depths of my soul burst open to penetrate the soft curtain of her pillow into the hungry passions of heart.

Different pills and different alchemies; different religions devoted to one color or the next; scary, smoke enveloped sorcerer, manipulator priest commands the church; rises up like Merlin in a purple robe,

“Bring in the goat.”

His ribs protrude and he rips off his shirt, flings it in the fire; a virgin is offered up for his edification; her heart pulses in his hand, temporarily quenching his blood thirst; a moaning Aztec pill guru. The pews are filled to the max, a collective chant is recited, the pills are taken, and the next communal sacrifice begins.

The pills tell me, “It’s time to meditate man, it’s time to be born, it’s time to use your pinky, it’s time to stop thinking about yourself, it’s time to celebrate the jester, it’s time to remember the dutiful sad faced Indian woman with black plastic trash bag holes cut for

her head and arms washing clothes by hand, it's time to start thinking about your id, what happened to the years, where is tomorrow, what is today, have you heard of planned obsolescence?"

The water licked my toes again, like puppy waves pushing themselves closer to me. The salt in the mist clung to my skin like little crystals and jewels. I looked up. Where there used to be billions of twinkling lights was a massive, sinister, grey curtain, its bulges and contours uneven and globular.

I thought of the stingray and wondered if it were still flapping its invisible wings under the water, whether it was my friend or nemesis. I sang out. I hummed. I cried. I bellowed my most beautiful songs, "Summertime, Besame Mucho, Black Coffee;" first to the water, then to the village and hills.

Where was Inez?

Where was the choir?

Where were the hookers in the orange room?

Faintly, I heard singing in the distance; a man's voice, beautiful. Was this my echo return to me?

Was this the spirits of the jungle and water imitating me and mocking me?

I listened more carefully; the singing was distinct but very far away. It came from further up the coast, perhaps beyond the dark bluff of hills. If there were lightning I could count the seconds between flash and boom and know exactly the distance. I took a step in that direction, and then another; I ran.

The singing stopped.

I sang out again and waited for a response.

Silence.

The crickets, ants, beetles, elves that hover in the nighttime jungle screeched out their weird conversations, in weird tones, timbres, unaffected by my calls.

I sang again in every direction.

Silence.

Then, faintly, I heard singing again, a man's voice.

But this voice came from the other direction down the coast, a tenor; the last was baritone, strange and haunted, but a beautiful voice.

Where is Inez?

I ran south toward the song, I could climb over trees and valleys, across creeks, across Tyrannosaurus Rex, slay serpents, and ask him,

"Where is the world? Where is Inez? Where are the little thoughts in our mind after we have gone to sleep and let them go? Where was the footstep that I took at the market when I bought a star fruit, or the juice that spilled on the soil when I cut it in slices, thin

little star slices, kid star slices that you'd find scribbled on a paper and attach to the refrigerator with a magnet?"

I sprinted; I followed the trail of the voice, like following magic beans trickled on a trail. My heart pounded and I hesitated, what if he is an aggressor with shotgun or sword, what if we must combat like rhinoceros beetles, jousting with forked horns to the death. I looked at my arms, they were tight with muscle, my legs rumbled the ground beneath me, and my chest heaved with power and strength.

"I will kill him," I thought.

I ran again, marveling at the speed of my leap, the firm grip of my thighs, and the sure dash of my sprint. All the games I ever played as a child came rushing back into my consciousness with a flood of information to rearrange itself in my mind with a brand new perfect logic and relevance.

"When I slid down the slide, I rolled like that, when I dodged my dog's leap, it felt like this, when I hit the toy crane with a rock I did it like this."

I ran quicker, then paused. I had lost the scent; the sound was gone. I held my breath.

"Quiet heart, I'm trying to listen."

I leaned my ear in every direction. Silence; was this my plight for the sin of thinking combative thoughts? Where is my singing brother, where is my ally and kin?

The waves crashed up. The jungle chuckled; buzzed squeaked out its rackets, squawks, whistles, and conversations; but there were no songs. I sang. I called.

"Inez!" I yelled.

The ocean swallowed the sound up like a candy.

The water licked my right ankle. It stuck to me this time and folded over my foot. I stepped the other foot in closer. It actually felt nice, after my run; and my throat was hoarse from the singing. I could step in for a second, just in the shallow to rest, to cool down.

The cloudiness of the pills was gone; my mind was perfectly crisp. The thrust of my sprint had expelled the fog from my body, the sudden force and velocity of my blood stream too inhospitable for the pill's ionic bonds to sustain, their half-lives exponentially accelerated to an immaterial singularity.

I dove into an oncoming wave. The chatter of the trembling jungle surrendered to an aquatic soundscape, full of gurgles, swashes of whirlpools, and heaves of opposing currents; the waves thumped like heavy artillery as they crashed and transmitted their rumble beneath the surface in a liquid medium, both immediate and hollow.

I broke the layer, the thin film of molecules, which separated the sky from the ocean. In the familiar air again, and then another immediate explosion collapsed and rebounded up to my chest, body-slammed me. I surrendered and let the power of the water thrash me inside of it, the ocean rushing over my skin, sand scraping against my back.

I recovered with just enough time to see another wave come. I dove in like a torpedo and emerged on the other side. The ocean acknowledged this; I had earned its respect.

We played more together, quick dodge of giant swipe of hand, duck beneath sudden onslaught of flood, leap over fierce sweep of foot.

Spontaneous waterfalls, infused with barracuda, great white, algae, and starfish, sent by remote typhoons deep in the source of the world, across remote, unseen, underwater continents; launched up layers of atmosphere like aquatic kites, blown far away into the blue skies of ocean depths, string lost and tangled up in tree branch connected to algae trunk, or telephone wire.

Outside of the breaking waves, I reached my arm out, cupped my hand, slid it into the epidermis of the water, kicked my legs, and thrust the handful of ocean behind me. The sky was a complete 360 degrees and full of wonders; like breaks in clouds and hidden moonlight. Sometimes Venus pierced its eye through the celestial curtain like a laser; it blinked, and then stared at me, then blinked again.

I submerged underwater, glided through the silky black, then back up, and looked skyward again; the curtains tumbled in a different combination of patterns and currents.

The water washed over my body and tickled the hairs on my legs and arms. I flipped gracefully, as naturally as a dolphin, and seamlessly segued into a backstroke.

I submerged myself. I could feel the bubbles of my breath run over my face and frantically rise to the surface.

Where was Inez?

I wanted to ask her, "Why do bubbles go up? Gravity down, bubbles up."

Where was she?

"Keep it ineffable, baby, Keep it ineffable."

That's all I had, a vague sense of ineffability. A vague sense that something had happened; a vague sense that something was happening at that moment; a vague sense of calmness that Inez was someplace safe; a vague, ineffable, sense that it felt right to swim in the water and blow bubbles.

It's all kicks after all. And our drive down from U.S. Interstates 10, 15, 5; to Mexican autopistas, 2D, 15D; may as well have been years ago, the suburbs were gone someplace else, maybe new children there; maybe a nuclear winter. I looked at the shore; I had drifted out further than I thought.

I could still see the Posada Amor.

I could still see that one bright orange room, empty, that glowed like a lighthouse in the night. I wonder what memories, follies, and dramas are inscribed in its walls, embedded in its orange self.

The coast curved around in capricious bends, pulled in, jutted out, created artistic embellishments in the geography, little daggers. Rocks and boulders dominated the shoreline, like some gods or dinosaurs, petrified, had crumbled and fallen to rest there.

I reached out my arm, scooped the water, and swam further; it felt good, like the warmth of a fire on a cold night. I looked again at the coast, the light from the bar was very distant now, a little pinhole; a little pinhole of green and fluorescent, like looking into a diorama, and the orange window had disappeared behind giant dark leaves of a palm fanning up; a peacock tail in the sky.

The ocean was like liquid glass, perfectly still, no wind, no buzzing, no chatter; I swam with a swish and a glide, kicked my legs and felt like a great dolphin racing through underwater mysteries. I dove, undulated my body like a mermaid, and a minute later ascended above the surface; the vast panorama pure black in every direction.

The bar was gone; the black hilltops were flat; everything was silent except for my breath and splash of swim strokes. I must have been miles from the shore. How long had I been swimming? Where was the anaconda orchid smell, that jungle scent, where is the dark perfume?

Inez would know.

Would she?

I submerged in the water and pushed my arms out wide. It felt infinite and clean. I glided deep within the ink, then paused, blew out the captive air from my lungs; the bubbles ran along the contours of my face, over my nose, tickled my cheeks and forehead, giggled through my hair; big wild Christmas ornament bubbles and medium size golf ball bubbles and tiny beach sand pebble bubbles.

I wondered where Inez was.

Did I ever ask her, "Why do bubbles go up, and not down?"

She could tell me, she would know.

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