



# **KILL THE DOVE!**

A tale of the revolutionary '60s

By

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## PART I: THE OUTLAW

### 1 - THE RAID, JULY 10, 1970: SAUK CENTRE, MINNESOTA

"Look, motherfucker, the days of nonviolence are over!" Aaren sticks a stone hammer in her knapsack, then bends to tape a stiletto to her left ankle. "You warmed-over hippies might still think Jericho will fall if you march and march, wagging your fannies and farting *Peace now! Peace now! Give peace a chance!*"

Her tirade doesn't anger Jared, who falls under her benediction as hippie, for Aaren has ranted like this all during the three-day retreat. It's her show of weapons that pulls the venom from her airy ideological ranting. They make her words poison darts.

"Put that shit away!" Jared bellows as he jolts from behind the couch to confront her. "You heard what I said. Put that shit away!" as he swipes her knapsack.

Aaren, at the other end of the same motion, effortlessly snatches her stiletto with practiced hand and presses its point against Jared's heart. The artfulness of the threat scares him more than the reality of the blade poised to slice him.

"Who the fuck are you anyway?" he shouts at her. She doesn't move. "You didn't learn that move in graduate school!"

Aaren lets the blade talk for her. She draws, uses it as a kid would a sketching pencil, slowly in one graceful movement, circling down his rib case, across his stomach, up to his throat. It stays but an instant before returning home at her ankle.

Jared is astonished by her swift, deathly move. He's spellbound, almost tottering in the air like a string puppet. She glares up at him. She, a mite of flesh almost obliterated by the weight of his shadow. He, a tornado of male power, sucking himself back into a vortex of straining muscle working a heart not lusting for murder.

She spits rage upwards. "I've taken three days of your pacifistic bullshit, but I'm still here. I'm still going out." Threateningly, "Are you?"

Her body arches arrogantly. It conveys her disdain of him. It holds him at bay. She quickly turns, spurns him. It's an authoritative shirk that says to all that her actions are not to be discussed or judged.

Jared scans the group looking for support or at least condemnation of her. No one moves.

"So it comes to this--the revelation of our thinly veiled violence. All this," and Jared's right arm sweeps the room, capturing all nine, freezing them with his words, halting their departure in small groups. "All you people and our talk and opening up is bullshit like she says?"

Jared notices Sean turn and continue to gather his things. But no word. *Sean?* Sean his bud, his brother in nonviolent passion and civil disobedience—*no word?*

"No word, eh, Sean?" he expels. "No word from any of you guys?"

Disgusted, Jared drops Aaren's bag, pivots and returns slowly but resolutely to finish his packing. He stuffs in his tools and casing maps. Latches and slings a backpack over his left shoulder, and not looking at anyone, avoiding all, strides towards his designated car.

Out on Highway 61 it's all North Country Minnesota farms and picture-book animals. "C-O-W, cow. Cow is a moo-moo. G-O-A-T, goat. Goat is a nyaah, nyaah." Jared has been doing this for about twenty minutes when Matt breaks in.

"Don't know why you're so pissed off. How Aaren felt was apparent from the start."

"Really? I'm the only fuckhead who didn't read her right?"

"Yep."

The simple truth stings him. *Maybe Matt's right. Maybe I didn't want to face up to our real ideological differences.* Out loud: "I just thought all this Weatherman bullshit was just that, bullshit. Can she really believe all that Marxist-Maoist crap about The Vanguard?"

"Yep."

Jared recalls a poster Aaren put up during the retreat: "Revolution grows out of the barrel of a gun!" He laughed at her when she threw it out as a challenge to the group. Jesus, how she had scourged him for that!

"After Kent State . . . after the Christmas Bombing of Cambodia . . . after the Chicago Seven trial . . . after all the black murders and the endless lies about 'Light at the end of the tunnel'. . . you're still quoting me King and Gandhi and Jesus?!"

Man, she had really been turned on then, and it had turned him on—to *her*, not to her insane political rhetoric. He roundly denounced her "foolish macho posturing" and ridiculed her by dramatic exaggeration. He made her position seem buffoonery as he jumped around, wildly gesticulating and blaring, "And here's America's armed Resisters, all steamed up and stampeding towards Suicide Cliff. I ask, *How many barrels do you have, Resisters?* Oh my! Twenty-five. And, *How many barrels do you have, Uncle Sam?* Oh my! Twenty-five million!" She stormed away from that confrontation. Jared remembers it with relish. "She's a pistol . . . and I'd like her to carry my barrel!" was his wry summation to the guys after all the women left.

Jared gave her a code name, "Liquid Fire." That's how he feels around her, as if his thighs dripped molten desire. Not that she's a beauty queen. On the contrary she could evaporate into "average." He, a full foot over her five-foot-five and a ton more than her hundred and twenty-two pounds. Yet she's quick, athletic and he likes that. Likes her long raven hair and her dark black eyes. Alluring eyes that

gleam when she gets worked up. Eyes that reflect a distant light, a tenebrous source.

Jared sighs as he feels Aaren's strong, daunting, relentless energy. Not macho, as he often says as a put-down, but piercing. *God, how I'd like to wrestle with her*, is his deeply repressed desire. Free love is something that Jared's strong Catholic upbringing thwarts. Plus he wants to be faithful to Char. He fails her now and then, but readily absolves himself with a confessional "I drank too much!" or "Just a one-nighter, I mean, we were stoned!" Here with Aaren, something shudders at his core when his lips form her name.

"Aaren." Jared shivers a bit. An ethereal voice warns, "Sleep with her and you'll never wake up!"

*"Wake up!" Sister Johanna claps her hands just a hair's breadth from Jared's cheeks. Up and down the line titters and giggles hide themselves in the folds of the white surplices worn by the twenty-plus pre-adolescents, all of whom see themselves warned by Her clap. She who looms as Her, the omnipresence of female power, more foreboding than their mothers could ever be, would be. "Sister," they call her, but they all know her as the power from beyond Death.*

*Sister Johanna, the drill sergeant for Christmas midnight Mass, that gathering resplendent with all the pagan pomp of Catholicism in its Roman vestment. The Holy Mass in memory of the Father God who gave divine birth to his own Son without a Mother Goddess. The Night of the Forgetfulness of Her.*

*Ever chosen to be one of the special acolytes, robed in papal imitation, a white innocence among other black-robed acolytes, rosy-cheeked Jared carries a special torch as bodyguard to the newborn Babe. And at the crèche he's honored to pull special time: holy hours in adoration, another privilege.*

*Yet, when Father is not looking, Sister Johanna enacts a conspiratorial role, that of spiritual terrorist. She takes Jared to the side altar, the one reserved for*

*Mary, the "almost but not quite Divine" altar, and has him pray to Her. Yes, they are prayers that celebrate her "almost divinity," praise her "mediating role," address her as "co-Mediatrix of Grace." Nevertheless, Jared learns Sister's ardent lesson. "Pray to her, Jared. Every day. She is God's Mother."*

"HOOONKKK! HOOONKKK! HOOONKKK!" Matt is arm-pumping out the window at a convoy of six big semis, jacked by the sound they love to unleash, especially in wide-open cow country. It spooks the bovines, gets them running and mooing. From a distance, dogs bark. It juices the boredom of their drive. The thunderous blare also snaps Jared back to the reality of the road.

"So, OK," he asks, stung by this new insight into Aaren, "she meant all that shit when she called me, how's it phrased—*lackey running dog of Imperialist Pigs?*"

"Yep."

"And you knew she was packing that blade?"

"Yep."

"Jesus, why wasn't anyone else upset?"

"Because she's a solo. None of us can control her. It's just her karma."

*Oh, bejesus, Jared explodes within, Karma! Where the fuck's Matt's head? This gal's going to bring down all the anti-war symbolism with her puny penis-envy dagger!*

"She's going to ruin everything. I wish you'd've told me she was straight on that stuff."

"Look," Matt says as he checks the rearview mirror—not that he thinks they are being followed, just that they *might*. "Look, she'll get the job done."

Jared blurts, "But the job's to create symbols of Resistance." He flings the words at Matt as he did towards the others during the past several days, as if no one but he understood the purpose of the mission, the message of the raids.

"Damn," Jared catches himself, pointedly embarrassed by his preaching at Matt. "Do I have to remind *you* about this? All we need is someone writing Maoist slogans on the walls and the media will eat us alive."

Matt doesn't respond. *What is there to say to Jared?*

A quiet settles between them. Matt kicks on the headlights. Jared half-reclines his seat, kicks back and broods. It's a brooding whose edge he wants to cut, for he knows that he must be disciplined tonight, focused. Eyes closed, he searches for the flame of white light within.

*"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord." This, the priest was ever fond of quoting. It was his opening slogan for every eighth grade sex talk. Imagery he wanted to seed in their young minds. "Woman is made in the image of man. Man in the image of God. Jesus is to the Church as the husband is to the wife." He held a priestly cache of such spiritual bullets. "Always," and he would physically dramatize, moving his arm in jerky punctuation, "always keep women on a pedestal. Always."*

*Youthful Jared ponders, Where else is it possible to keep them? Mary herself is on a pedestal—off on a side altar. There for all to see and adore. Truly, Jared believes: woman flesh, if not to be worshipped, is to be revered, respected, protected and, if God so calls, to be preserved. Flesh unsoiled. Unspotted.*

Matt's is also flashing on Aaren. He knows that she is a symbol. Matters have changed since Kent State. *"Extra! Extra! Four White Kids Killed by Ohio National*

*Guard!*" Many of the Resisters are now questioning nonviolence and Aaren's starting to snare a few ears. Diverse rhetoric has always charged the anti-war Movement at every step. It's not surprising that Maoist rhetoric now sways the fancy of those marginally committed to nonviolence. Matt always knew that "The Movement" was fraught with hangers-on, those who were there for the electric charge of the moment, the erection of the mass rally. Still, what does it matter? *Karma*. They either suck at the teats of the Peace Movement or find themselves being sucked blood-empty by Uncle Sam's Vietnam Vampire.

Just this May, five days after Kent State and five before a like incident at Jackson State—*No Extra! Old Story: Nigger Students Bagged!*"—while at the New Mobilization's mass "March on Washington," Matt had seen them all: pathetics and empathetics, sympathizers and activists, the weirdoes and crazies. Hundreds of thousands of protesters giving rise to a moral nerve network that Washington didn't want, and which most of the protesters were unaware they were creating. Longhairs, old hairs, old Reds, New Lefts, beads, and business suits. Each but a dash or sprinkle in the witch's pot. A pot flamed to a sizzling overflow by the chants, murmurs, prayers and sacred ejaculations of Catholics, Jews, Protestants, even Buddhists! *What group wasn't there?*

At first Matt stood back, sought a vantage point to assess whether the milling was a mob, a Movement or, what he spied for, a new Heart. At first he felt only terror. The multitude was a swill, a gulp of humanity pitching like an unsettled stomach. Indigestion of soul. Patiently, he waited for the vomit. Yet, at some unmarked moment, *It* became a *We*. Maybe it was the influence of the Marshals for Peace that Jared had joined. The four thousand or so who lined the route and kept dousing the surge with hope and vision, chanting, "Peace now! Give peace a chance!" Such were words of potency that day.

*"All we are saying is give peace a chance!"*

Matt had not been able to explain all that day meant, but he knew it had grounded him in his commitment to clandestine civil disobedience.

May 8, 9 and 10, 1970 would stand as watershed dates for Matt as they would for others in the anti-war Movement. Yet, committed as he was, a small voice lingered that shook his certainty. Once, while stoned on hashish, Matt had blurted to a room full of Movement heavies, "We're all just a bunch of young assholes, college punks, grad lab junkies." Why his brain would not flush away that line even now he can't figure out. *My karma?* Whatever. At this moment it draws him to look again at himself and Jared and the image of Aaren.

*Jared. What can I say about Jared?* Matt imagines him an Angry Angel. Like the one who carried out God's expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. An angel seething with holy anger, faithfully obeying his God's command through committing an act of "holy violence." He's heard Jared speak about "Holy Nonviolence," but Matt wonders, "Has he crossed the line? Like Aaren?" This question lingers briefly, quickly fades, sucked down within the flowing country night blackness that has been slowly mesmerizing Matt.

Matt's driving on mental cruise control because he has driven Highway 61 a hundred times up to his family's summer cabin on Birch Lake. Once again he's awash within that familiar cloak of darkness that quiets and settles the farmer, blankets him and embeds his dreams. It pacifies Matt, soothes him. Not even the snorts and teeth-grinding from slumbering Jared can ruffle his inner calm.

*". . . for I have sinned!" Oh, shame! Oh, withering flesh!*

*"Bless me, Father!" Oh, to live without this . . . this Thing!*

*"You are to be pure. You have a Vocation!" But how can he now? Ever sin spotted, hands ever guilty. "Having touched . . ." Not what would later be known as pleasure, for it was only titillation, the gasp at the expanding "weenie balloon," like the Balloon Meister at the Italian Festival, twining lengths of pencil-thin balloons*

*into shapes, linking them, laughing at the sausage doggie. "How big's your wiener?!"*

*Now his self-condemnation. Weeping. At his weakness of will. For without intent he has knocked Her off Her pedestal, so he confesses, for he has thought, "Janet Tremblay's soft breasts . . . ,"* and his doggie went wild.

*"Oh FATHER . . ."*

*"Bad doggie! Bad doggie!"*

As Jared wakes only the hum of the road and the hot kiss of rubber on warm cement greet him. Oddly, all else is silent. No music on. Matt's noiseless. Clearly in deep thought. Or something.

It's still a bit over two hours to get to their target. Matt's never been much of a talker, Jared knows that, but he sure has the best road boat in the Resistance! Matt's resurrected 1957 Chevy Bel-Air, with gleaming fins and all, is a true relic. Matt's a natural talent when it comes to highway hogs, and has truly raised this clunker from the dead. Inside and out: glistening and meticulously clean. Matt's own type of shine and new. Junkyard retrofitted engine matched by down-home interior refurbishing. Paisley-robed bucket seats and beaded curtains. Fancy Hippie stuff, but not overdone; a soft sniff of incense.

Matt's the type of guy who talks more to his machines than to people. Jared sees this trait expressed through Matt's immersion in music. *Immersion* is the correct word Jared assures

himself as he checks the stacks of tapes Matt has stashed and secreted away in "Shiree," as he calls her. It seems like Matt always has music in the background when he doesn't have it in the

foreground. He's like an acidhead, stoned on music all the time, though Jared knows Matt is mainly a light weed man, like himself. The Grateful Dead are his

main guides. Matt's *truckin'*—though he travels in touch with all who are sounding the magical thump and wail of the counter-culture.

As if reading his mind, just like that—*click!*—Matt starts to spin a medley of Led Zeppelin, the Moody Blues, Iron Butterfly, and a dash of the Beatles. As they get closer to their target, Jared knows Matt will switch into another cosmic channel. Minnesota's own hard-driving Bob Dylan, the sweet rousing Joan Baez, the soulful Janis Joplin, all leading up to the final sprint—wild Country Joe and the Fish, blaring Matt's draft raid anthem, "I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag." The two will shout out. Scream it. Beat it with their fingertips on Shiree's forehead, but never, like a duet singing the "Star Spangled Banner," belt it in key.

Come on all of you big strong men  
Uncle Sam needs your help again.  
He's got himself in a terrible jam  
'Way down yonder in Vietnam  
So put down your books and pick up a gun  
We're gonna have a whole lotta fun.

And it's one, two, three  
What are we fightin' for?  
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn,  
Next stop is Vietnam.  
And it's five, six, seven  
Open up the pearly gates,

Well, there ain't no time to wonder why,  
Whoopee! we're all gonna die.

*His dad. What he always remembers is the sheer joy of walking next to his dad. Knights of Columbus parade. Holy Name march. Veterans of Wars, sacred and profane. There was the sense of doing something. Of carrying out in his own small way the War—against Whom was not necessary to know, for it was always against Evil. Satan in some guise. Even the Protestants and Jews.*

*His Dad in naval attire, a picture he long admired. A status he was eager to attain. But wherever he would go it would be where Dad said, "Go!" And from the first, it was to Him crucified. Following a pathway as uncluttered as it was cruel: "Thy will be done."*

*"Say only that, Jared. 'Thy will be done.'"*

*To wage the battle so as to win victory, all that was required was to surrender one's will. It was this humbling act of submissive obedience that was seed to Jared's character. Its flower was the act of offering oneself cruciform to the world, in imitatio Christi.*

Ten miles later, with Janis cranking on "Ball and Chain," a huge grin suddenly rises on Matt's face. "Did she tell you about her fantasy?"

Without waiting for an answer, "Of course she didn't. Not to you." This private joke keeps Matt amused for several miles.

Jared wants to ask but doesn't. He's not sure he wants to know about Aaren's fantasy. *Must stop thinking about her.* He struggles to get back into his own space. So he chimes, "Sure, Matt, I know—it's her karma, right?"

Jared stiff-legs the seat back, reclines it as far down as it can go, and writhes for comfort. He painstakingly unfurls his six-foot-five frame, wiggling toenail to fingernail into a spot here, a twist there, capturing for bits of his two hundred forty-five pounds of lean muscle tiny niches of comfort. So laid out, he closes his eyes.

Matt mirthfully needles the slumbering giant about Aaren by inserting and raising the volume on Dylan's "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows!"

*"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Jared's thurible bangs against the pew but grief deafens all. He aches to lift the lid and converse with the dead. "Dad . . . Dad, do you know now? Is it true? Is He the Son of God?"*

"Pit stop in 'bout two minutes," tugs Jared back into Matt's world.

"This is taking longer than I remembered. By the time we get there the other four will have gone down." *Look, man, paranoia doesn't mean they ain't following you. So you don't drive straight, never. Take 61 to 95, hang a left, go through St. Cloud, hook-up with the 52, that way if they are following you, you'll notice. Screwball driving, sure, but it'll only add an hour or so, maybe less.*

"Probably."

Jared loves Matt but his habit of tossing one-line answers never fails to irritate him.

"Okay, man, you've never really dug out your reasons for doing this. I mean, you sat in that retreat for three freaking days and you were as silent as a spy. Don't you think it's time you at least let *me* know what's churning inside?"

"Nope."

"Christ Almighty and bejesus! Cut me some slack, Jack. Here we're about to commit yet another crime against Big Brother and all I really know about you is your short obituary." Jared mimics being interviewed. "'Yes, I risked my life with him many times. Yes, we were very close. What can I say about him? Sure, he did some Methodist seminary time, was a dedicated granola vegetarian, and a devotee of the Grateful Dead.' *Fuck, Man*, that's not much of a base for long-term revolutionary commitment, is it?"

"Nope."

"Is this the Theater of the Absurd or am I bundled here with a renegade sage from some hilltop?" Jared laughs at himself and his smirking partner. "Wait—then I can say, 'Yes, I knew him, he was six feet tall, not too fat, not too thin, not too religious but not too non-religious, not a Democratic but not a Republican . . . *C'mon!*'"

*"Matt, your father's dead." And he runs and runs, looking for him all over the world, until he comes to the bedroom. Hoisting the whiskey bottle, he gags on its bitterness. Now he understands why his Dad hid this vile liquid all around the house. He, at ten, now grasping that this bitterness kept his father alive, for it must be so—the sacred elixir which Matt reasons his Dad must have forgotten to take today and so he died. Matt squeezes his eyes tightly shut and braces his throat for the bath of fire. He gulps the fullness of his Dad's bitterness.*

"Okay," Matt grabs the wheel with both hands, stiff-arming himself back. His words are drawn from him not by a compulsion to confess or to satisfy Jared's curiosity but by the rightness of the moment. *Karma*.

Matt speaks as if quoting himself.

"To cause the least harm."

"That's it? Absolute passive nonresistance?"

"Can it be non-absolute?"

"But why are you a raider? Isn't that *non*-passive?"

Matt brakes and slows as he takes a full, deep breath, inhale . . . exhale. "Think about this: To live causing the least harm, one must be prepared to suffer the most harm."

"Sounds like a recipe for martyrdom or suicide." As soon as he says this, Jared regrets it. Regrets its stupidity and insensitivity. Regrets it with a flush of embarrassment because the identical sentence has been flung at him so many times when he has testified to his own way of nonviolence.

Matt smiles, sighs, murmurs a soft, "Think about it."

"Karma, is that it?"

Matt steadies himself—they have the time, so he figures he might as well try. "Karma is a tricky concept. It's not shallow, man. Look, we all carry things from the past and into the future. It's what we do with them *now* that counts. How we turn them into right action, moral action. What happens to us is less important than what we *do* with what happens to us. *Get it?*"

"I thought it meant fated, like predestined or some iron law, like gravity?"

Matt's about maxed out on words; he takes a deep breath. "No. Just that everything we do right now is *related* to what we've done and will do." He chuckles. "Trying to figure what karma means might be your karma, but it ain't mine. *Get that?*"

Jared wants to say yes but he really doesn't get it. He's about to press the matter, as Matt knows is his way, so, "Coffee time!" he blurts, like a ref calling "Time out!" Also with the urgency of one long overdue for a piss.

It's 11:30 p.m. as they pull into the lot beside the *Bashful Viking Bar & Grill*. They are on the outskirts of their target, Sauk Centre, Minnesota—Sinclair Lewis's famous "Main Street." The symbol Jared wants: "The Draft Board on America's Main Street."

*"Am I a Conscientious Objector?"*

*"No."*

*But how can it be that simple? Jared in his novice monk robes as Friar Otto pleads to the Master and the onlooker, "But . . ."*

*"No buts. Your role is to obey!"*

*Could it be simpler? "His will be done." Wasn't this now his own father, dead, speaking through the Novice Master?*

*From within his heart, in testimony to all Fathers, he strongly voices, "Thy will be done."*

*Auburn, Indiana, 1964. The post office. Friar Otto signs the Registration form—"Jared Jennings"—and hands it to the Selective Service clerk.*

*As Matt docks Shiree, Jared forces a hard look at him. Why have I been risking my life with a guy I don't really know? Why is he with me?*

*It's a sign of the times, these fucked-up times, he answers himself. An answer that accounts for his many oversights as he, as all students-become-Resisters, rushed to end the war. Right now he realizes that he's never even gotten Matt's physical details together. White, truly white. Blond on blond. Hazel eyes. Taut body, like a seasoned tennis pro. But I don't even know if he works out! Maybe we're together because it is "just karma," as he says!*

Jared banishes any further musings, especially those that draw out his hunger for the past. Those not-so-distant early Sixties that were quiet days of monastic confidence when he had only to pray and fast to feel at peace with himself. He doesn't want that hunger tonight. Yet he also doesn't want the pangs of starvation that throttles him when he thinks about now, the moment, this supposed "times they are a'changing" that charge the air of all the crazies and dopeheads and Flower Power kids who run amuck in the spirit of "these revolutionary times."

No, he doesn't want yesterday nor tomorrow, not even now. He just wants to act, to do something! Almost the frenetic "Do it!" of that asshole Jerry Rubin. *Do it! Consecrate, immolate, expiate! DO IT!* These thoughts settle him as he sits down at the counter, cups and welcomes the warmth of the steaming java.

*Steam: the perverseness of a Minnesota bone-chilling winter day. Was it not sufficient that the Earth hardened her heart and refused to yield, had to be forced? So rudely pick-axed and back-hoed in rock screams. Bodies rest in tombs above ground in New Orleans. In Minnesota many must wait until spring's tender thaw to inter their dead.*

*Joseph: brother. Eleven. Fourteen months older: almost twins. A memory of steam.*

*It's the words of the priest, so silly and stupid, about "little angels" that draw steam from the ten-below air. Tears cloud all eyes and fog Jared's glasses, creating a slope of ice on his nose, consigning him to the taunts of small devils who laugh at him as his glasses keep falling off. Jared bends the sides so hard they stab his ears. He feels no pain.*

*Steam. Holy whispers. Evidence of prayers from the Communion of Saints. Even the casket exudes steam, as if Joey himself is praying, a young child's prayers.*

*This is their beloved child who died at eight yet lived, entombed in a betraying body, for three more years. As then, now stand the inconsolable parents, brothers, sisters, all Jennings from far and wide around the cruel, cold hole. All ask, through their father's spoken doubt: "How could God let this happen to an innocent child?" All hear, through his submission, his obedience, through his arms cast out and upward in cruciform surrender, through his uttering out loud a fiercely hissing steam of words: "Thy will be done!" Only then does the family, does Jared, hope again in their God.*

*Roses, as they are laid upon the casket, start to shrivel, curl up into dark scarlet lines and blackened clumps as the bitter, harsh, dry December cold transforms them quickly into rose crystals. Yet they die victorious as their steam rises in celebration. Jared hears, says to all, "Closely, listen closely . . . you can hear the hush of steam." Yes, truly, a hiss, a rosy angelic ejaculation, "Thy will is done!"*

After his second cup, Matt flips into his raider mode. "Let's go over this, a final time." He pulls out a short yellow pad with a hand-drawn diagram. "This office is a lot like the one in Hastings. It's on the second floor and as planned we climb up here," he pinpoints the spot with his spoon, "and then jimmy this window. As from my casing run, it's pretty well shadowed from the street. Once inside we go through this door, out into the corridor, score and torch the glass, and *bingo!* It's rock 'n' roll time."

Jared's amused by how excited Matt gets about raids. *The guy makes you feel like there's no danger. He really gets off ripping off the Selective Service.*

Jared quietly chuckles. Some guys get cranked by cheating the IRS. Matt gets juiced stealing, defiling, burning, and shredding draft files. It's like watching a young priest robe for Mass during the early years when they still have fervor. They get lost in the ritual. Really meet their God in the drama of symbolic sacrifice, and crack open that special space and time called *holy*. Jared had always finagled a way

to serve at their masses. Matt brings these old memories back. *In his own way, he's a priest. Jared muses, immolator of symbols.*

*The purest of kerchiefs laid with sepulchral touch, the priest rises, eyes searching Jared's. Eyes that stand in terror of the Devil who must have possessed him. How else this desecration? For one instant Jared misjudged and the Host fluttered to the floor. His stab to halt its flight only jostled the priest and caused two more Holy Wafers to be defiled.*

*It's not Jared's awkwardness that irritates the priest. No, he himself has been as Jared, has done as Jared. Rather, it is the task he knows lies ahead. Canon Law is exactingly specific. The area must be scrubbed clean: scraped and scraped with the Paten so that no crumbs are left. No microscopic Real Presences. "For the host is the Real Presence, Jesus here in the bread and the wine." Not a molecule, nary an atom is to be defiled.*

*It's a laborious task, one that almost inevitably yields tastes of floor wax, droppings of candles, grime from leather soles. As he blesses himself, Father knows this is the Sunday morning taunt of the Vile One. Verily, he will be strong and stomach the distaste. Only a priest knows God under such foul circumstances.*

*Jared watches in rapt fascination. Awed, yet knowing that he could not, no, really does not want to spend his life in service to the Hosts. For it is not the Host that he honors by serving at Communion—rather, he's delighted by the rare intimacies it gives him with Her. She, Mary, Mother of God, present in the guises of young women to whom he could never in any other circumstance be so close. How otherwise to inhale the perfume that Janet wears? Or spy the strap on Stephanie's bra? Or confront the temptation of Martha's oh so soft and inviting pink tongue!*

*"Bless me . . ."*

*". . . are Called!"*

*Oh, Mary Mother of God, pray for me!*

As they cut their lights and slip into the alley, the emotion of Country Joe's song sobers them:

Come on Mothers throughout the land,

Pack your boys off to Vietnam.

Come on Fathers, don't hesitate

Send your sons off before it's too late

Be the first ones on your block

To have your boy come home in a box.

Its imagery makes Jared think about the others, wonder whether all has gone smoothly. Right now the tally is three raids for the good guys, zero nabs for the bad guys. No one has gotten caught. Yet he fears to admit, *Not yet, you mean!*

"It's been six months since the Beavers, did you know that?"

"Nope, haven't thought much about it."

"Seems like six years, six eons." No one's gotten caught. *Karma.*

What about tonight? Lots of things have changed rapidly during the last months. After the Beaver raid, that St. Paul anti-war festivity, Hoover had sent in over a hundred FBI Special Agents. Back then, Jared blustered, "Jesus, they must've been jacked. It must've blown their minds that the largest draft raid in Resistance history would happen in Farmland, USA! Jesus, what a gas, fifty-five boards and the State Director's office in one night!"

Their success swelled their bravado. "We're going to gnaw away until the tree falls! We're going to be busy beavers!" The media image took, so they used it

in their post-raid PR—the “Beaver 55.” Like other draft raid groups, they wanted a name that would irritate, annoy and miff the Feds. A name of silliness and ambiguity but a name that could instill a fear that there were many, many raiders out there, gnawing away.

Fatefully, neither satisfied nor patient enough to sit tight, wait out the Feds, Jared and a handful of Beavers plotted, upped the ante, decided to move out into the countryside. Knock off a chain of smaller draft boards, circling and creating a “Ring of Fire” around the Twin Cities.

Little did Jared and his city slicker comrades realize how different small towns would be. During their casing runs, their amateurish disguises only made them more visible to Our Town’s denizens. Old ladies watch everything, pass along rumors. “Hippies! Oh my, Millie, I saw two hippies in town today!”

Although Jared savors this Beaver 55 footnote to American anti-war history, he’s agitated by another gnawing, somewhat somber afterthought.

“Matt, how did you feel when the Kenneth Legion posted those ten-grand bounties on us?”

“Part of the risk.”

“Yeah—now’s not the time to think about that.”

Once inside the board, the night proceeds routinely on this the third raid for each of them. Matt tapes the office door’s glass pane, scratches a triangle, torches and pops the glass. In a sec, they find and are ripping the files marked “1-A.” *Ollly olly home free!*

Yet, tonight something is wrong. Jared is beset by a wave of fright. He’s perspiring like a fool. Maniacally reciting “Hail Mary, full of grace” over and over in his mind. *Silent prayer.*

"Over here," Matt whispers. He's crowbarring another lock when Jared is startled by the first sound out of place. He grabs Matt's arm.

"Hear that?"

"Nope."

Matt heaves and with one jerk snaps open the file cabinet. As practiced Jared scans the drawer, quickly picks out the 1-A files and throws them into a trash bag. They always steal some, just to fuck up the System as much as they can.

*"Thump, thump!"*

"Hear that?"

"Yep!"

Neither looks at the other. Both move towards the door. Jared drags a chair and Matt starts pushing a large desk.

"We need five minutes," Matt says out loud, not whispering anymore. "Just five minutes."

They blockade the door and swiftly return to the file cabinet.

"Plan B! Plan B!" Matt blurts, saying it over and over with escalating excitement. "Plan B! Plan B!" as he throws a bunch of files into a heap.

Jared douses them with charcoal fluid.

*"Open the door! FBI!"*

"Shit, fire them up! Burn the suckers!" Matt howls.

*"FBI!"* once again. Then the blockade starts to heave and split like a ship battered by high seas. The files flare up quicker than Aaren's temper but just as fast smolder into a thickening cloud of smoke.

"Jesus, where can we go?"

"Over here, in the corner."

Both cough, move towards an open window.

What they had not planned for was Plan B. Plan B was always a joke. "And if you get caught, burn the suckers! At least go down in a blaze of glory."

"Blaze of glory" was a humorous password among them. Now it rouses terror.

*"Put out your hands!" Like a turtle asked to stick out its neck. "Show me your palms!" Ah, will the sting ever be forgotten? The memory of the ruler: palms, not knuckles. Sister Johanna loved palms. It was the Brothers who later lashed the knuckles. But she, Dreadful She, diligently watched, looking for signs of weakness.*

*She did not have to say it, he knew. "Don't cry!"*

*It was a hope, a prayer, a plea, "Don't cry!"*

"Saved by the FBI! How humiliating," Jared mocks himself as he's pulled and pushed out of the choking smoke. It's a scene he will long remember. They had smashed in what remained of the door, stuck their guns through the smoke, all the time yelling, commanding, threatening. "FBI! You're under arrest. *Don't move or we'll kill you!*"

*Kill me, shit, I'm suffocating to death and I'm supposed to be worried about him killing me?*

Later on, that memory never fails to get a laugh. But this night it doesn't.

Jared at first was sure that it wasn't really the FBI but locals. Mad-ass VFWers or some redneck bunch itching to kick their radical asses all over town. But *Sweet Jesus, it is the FBI!*

"Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Jared's relief is short-lived. A gloved fist whacks him across the chin, implanting a spike of pain he's never felt before. *Where's Matt? Is he okay?* flicks through his mind. He's answered by a jabbing stick, poking and snagging his belly flesh, sticking him with needles of hurt that throw him into spasms. He would have retched but nothing functions as his every sense scrambles for shelter from the attack. *It's not the FBI! Holy Jesus!* A final flurry of punches sends him reeling to the floor.

Before Jared can get up, a heavy book, thick and droopy—later jailhouse chatter names it the phone book trick! "Leaves no bruises, see, it's magic!"—is slammed on top of his head and someone begins beating on it with a club. Heavily hard, heaving breaths hard, pounding a dull popping beat into his head. "God! What an unforgiving headache," is how he'll retell it later.

Thoughts of Matt have disappeared, replaced by a set of images that Jared has never let out, only now paroled from his nightmares.

*"Don't move or I'll break your arm!" Jared stirs under the blanket of sticks and wads of newspapers as bully-boy Quinn strikes, then blows out the match. "I warned you!" Quinn hefts him up, a seven-year-old skinny as a twig, and yanks his left arm behind his back up to his ears, Crack! Crack!*

*"What did you do to get him so angry?"*

*What did I do? Dad . . . what did I do?*

*Why doesn't anyone believe me?*

The beating drives Jared back so deeply into a repressed area of his psyche that it releases a fury and a savagery that threatens his own sense of himself. He—the preacher of nonviolence, the trainer in nonviolent tactics, the spiritual witness

to the nonviolent Jesus—explodes and attacks with the savage violence unleashed by Quinn.

In a blink—he could never recall how it happened—Jared ejects himself up from the floor, throws out his arms as if scattering tall brush and swatting down a pathway, slaps his face to focus his eyes, and lunges towards the nearest human form.

For what seems longer than a chase dream, he holds on to this form, a form he does not take in as to size or weight or even gender. Off balance, he flings himself so bundled against the wall, bouncing back to the other side, holding on as if to a treasured packet, banging and banging, thumping and thumping till a chilled dark wind settles him down in a frontier town of the dreamless unconscious.

*She smiles as they walk up. Monsignor Boyle says, "He'll make a good priest." She smiles but it's just to artfully cover the lie. Gracefully—her bitterness deeply hidden—she untethers the boy from herself. His tender hand she places in the hand of this ancient one, but his heart, never! This is not the first time nor will it be the last that he—Reverend Father!—will steal her treasures. But she knows how to survive. Her heart holds firmly on to the crucifix on her rosary as she prays "Holy Mary Mother of God!" to carry off this ordeal. The throb in her throat is but a repressed outlet for the grief she's feeling at this theft from her loins. Her own mother had told her, "Marie, keep your eyes on the crucifix. It's the only way!" Jared enters the "minor seminary" at thirteen years of age.*

"Good evening, Mr. Jennings."

The phrase, the salutation floats from somewhere and settles on the tip of his nose. "Good evening," as he tries to focus on the shadow, ". . . Mr. Jennings." He's coming to, hearing other noises, voices.

"Good evening, Mr. Puglasi."

"Matt—Matt, is that you?" Jared feels himself shout, but not so that others can hear.

*Mr. Jennings . . . Mr. Jennings . . . Mr. Jennings . . . .* the call for his name, as in the early days of the seminary, before he became Friar Otto. As regained in those days of college where

it was a sign of his forthcoming adulthood. His name—but who knows his name but Matt?

Four men are standing above him. He's sitting on the hallway floor outside the draft office. No smoke, only odor. His body is so sore that he does not feel pain at all.

"Who are you?" he asks, his voice like that of a lost child.

"Mr. Jennings," a fatherly voice begins to lift Jared, "I'm Agent Brennan, FBI."

Agent Brennan, as he helps Jared stand up, begins adjusting his clothes, tugging his shirt, smoothing out his slacks. Jared is really confused. *How did they know? Who told them?* He doesn't want the word to live but it jumps up bawling, *Betrayed! Betrayed! You've been betrayed!*

He can't see Matt. *Where have they taken him? Who does he suspect? No, no, she wouldn't—Aaren? Why had she gone solo? What had she meant, "What this Movement needs is more blood!" Could she?* His thoughts are shattered as suddenly Matt's body is thrown up against his. *Where'd he come from? How...?* Later he'd hear, "FBI magic, voodoo, man, these guys are spooky!"

*He touches her body. Softness, her smile. So inexperienced in images and words, her breasts defy his tongue but he adores, whispers, "Sweet breezes." His*

*soul licks hers. These, his thoughts the moment before the screen is pulled and he's paralyzed. Netted in Confessional darkness.*

Before he can muster, "Matt!" Before he can express his concern about the welt on Matt's cheek both are shoved, pushed with those tiny thrusts whose meager energy builds like the first grains of a sand slide from infinitesimal to infinite initiating Matt and Jared's slog down a creaking flight of wooden stairs to the street and towards a harsh reality.

The Little Hoovers handle them according to their orderly ways. Speedily, each is spread across the trunk of an unmarked car, patted down, and handcuffed.

Off to the side an ambulance idles, lights flashing. *What happened?* Splayed on the trunk, Jared strains to see but can't. "You son-of-a-bitch!" is heard as a hand grabs his hair and yanks his head back. A knee pounds an ungodly pain up into his butt, the blow placed expertly with full force on his anal sphincter. His head is thrown back down against the car's rear window, a head *thud!* almost driving him back into unconsciousness. Word fly that he does not hear, "Stop!" "Jack, don't!" "Get that motherfucking fag pinko bastard, good!" Actions happen that he does not see: Agent Brennan walks up and stops the pummeling. Only later will he learn, at trial, that he had broken this agent's arm, that he was "the nearest human form" Jared bounced around the hallway.

Jared and Matt are spooked, scared, subdued, exhausted. They are not left alone for a second. Someone is watching them or someone is questioning them; relentlessly.

"Where are the other guys?" one agent keeps asking. He asks it about every other minute. He appears to be in charge.

"You guys are in deep shit, so you better cooperate," he cajoles. Silence.

*What's Matt thinking? Is he listing names?*

As if hearing his question, Matt, in the one moment they are left alone, smiles and says, "Karma."

"Karma?" Jared snickers. A slow rumble of chuckling gathers and builds, then erupts. He's roaring louder than he wants to, pain and ache and unplumbed tension fleeing on his sound. His attempt at self-control breaks down into a series of muffled snorts.

At the first sound, the head Agent practically leaps on them. "Quiet! You jerks think this is funny? You'll see how funny prison is! Separate these two."

Jared can't regain his composure and when pushed into the FBI's back seat he writhes with the unseemly stabbing numbness of excessive giggling.

*"Arise, Friar Otto!" In his father's eyes it can be seen: "Thy will be done." Here, as for centuries, a son reborn as Son. In the denial of Her birthright name he now comes: Franciscan*

*Investiture, 1962. His father's middle name, "Otto."*

On the ride back to Minneapolis's Hennepin County Jail, and as Agent Brennan barks, "Take these jerks to the Hole!" a tape loops endlessly through Jared's mind: *I am alive. I am alive. Leave your name and phone number and I will get back to you as soon as possible. I am alive. I am alive.* This plays and replays all during his short clips of conversations with the Feds.

"We got you guys cold. You're not as smart as you think."

"Don't you guys got anything better to do than beat up on nonviolent protesters?"

"Nonviolent! You call this raid nonviolence?"

"What do you guys think about the war?"

"I think it's great!"

"Are there any priests in your group?"

And so it goes, jabs of conversation, leading to no knockouts.

Jared lets the film reel roll. Acts his part. In the sole moment when he finds himself questioning the night, *Did the FBI beat on us?* he stomps on the urge. He doesn't want to analyze the evening. Doesn't want answers to that question. So he rewinds the reel and plays it again.

He imagines Matt *Giving them his famous one-liners. That'll drive them nuts!* Then he remembers all the other guys. *Were we all betrayed?*

He feels Aaren and her stiletto: agitation. *If she's not Judas . . . Would she really use that piddling dagger? If she has, did they shoot her? Would they shoot a woman?*

*As she reaches towards her ankle, a savvy agent cocks his gun and point-blank aims it at her. Jared lunges, throwing his body across hers. The bullet couples them. He's fatally wounded. She lives.*

*She gazes upon him: he's John Wayne. He looks at her: she's Maureen O'Hara.*

*"Liquid Fire!" he gasps as he touches her tears. "Liquid Fire, I love you."*

*Screen dissolves.*

"Bejesus, how stupid!" Jared snorts. To others, a comment without an apparent cause.

"Yes? Do you have something to say?" encourages Agent Brennan.

Jared doesn't hear him. He's recasting the fantasy, realizing how enraged Aaren would be by such a scenario. *If she got shot . . .* Man, what would she think? What was her fantasy?

So taken by this fancy is he that Jared misses what distinguishes this night from any he's ever had or will have. He wants a Revolution and now he's got one. But it's certainly not his hoped for "Peace now!" world. No, hardly—rather, his life is about to start anew and no one's singing "Happy Birthday."

## 2 - CONSPIRACY

"The State is asking Your Honor to set a fifty-thousand-dollar bond for each defendant."

Jared hears that concluding remark to the DA's rambling account of "The Great Catholic Conspiracy" and his charge of "sabotage of the national defense" and his mouth drops.

Dismissively. "You guys must be nuts! *Real loco!*" The DA's not flustered. He formally comments, "This will send a message to these types about the seriousness of what they're doing. Your Honor, civilized society can no longer tolerate the dangerous few whose cult of violence is masked by a thin veneer of 'nonviolent civil disobedience.' These men are true radicals. They aren't nonviolent like Martin Luther King. They aren't moral leaders. Absolutely not. They are saboteurs!

For that reason, they are being arraigned on the charge of sabotage of the national defense. I anticipate the defense's counter-argument. Yes, these young men do come from good families. One is even personally known to me."

Of all the things said, this catches Matt and Jared off guard. *Who?* is shrugged back and forth.

"This is more the pity, and more a reason for making an example of these misguided few."

"Your Honor," Jared and Matt's public defender protests, "I do not at this time want to question the charge, but the amount of fifty thousand dollars! Your Honor, you know that's the range reserved for heinous criminals, for repeat offenders. These are draft resisters not murderers!" "Bond set as requested," gavel the magistrate.

Jared and Matt, handcuffed and leg chained, are stood up by two bailiffs apiece and led awkwardly back to their cell.

"Can you believe that?"

"Yep."

Jared's not paying attention to Matt—he's into a rolling monologue. The guards pay Jared no mind. Jail so often brings out the ravers and ranters.

"BeJesus, who'd ever think they'd believe that conspiracy bullshit! I mean, do we appear *that* organized to them? Sabotage of the national defense. Renegade Jesuits? Hell, I'm the only Catholic in this bunch! *Shit*, they fear us more than I thought. Their own imagination is scaring them. Maybe attacking the symbol of Main Street, USA was more powerful than we thought? But, sweet Jesus, they're taking it out on my ass!"

Matt's rarely seen Jared so stuck in self-absorbed silliness. *Of course they believe it's a conspiracy. Aren't our after-raid letters to the press signed, The Midwest Conspiracy To Save Lives?* Matt wants to say this but surely it must be obvious to Jared. Yet somehow it's clearly not computing. Why the DA jumped on Catholic Radicals is beyond Matt, but it's really bugging the hell out of Jared.

Uncuffed and unchained, Matt sits down on the cell's lower bunk. Jared continues to ramble on, pacing the cell—six paces this way and turn, six paces that way and turn. The DA, identifying himself as "an active Catholic," spoke with fervor and conviction about the "Catholic Conspiracy." He named its Jesuit leaders and detailed how they recruited at seminaries and through specific theological and spiritual journals. He harped on "the Jesuits" as the Conspiracy's ringleaders, and to the uninitiated his case was ironclad.

*The Catholic Conspiracy! Funded by Castro! Money from Moscow! The Jesuit Underground! They really believe it!* Jared's internal monologue outpaces his external one.

Matt lies down and stretches. Stuffs a pillow over his head, muffling Jared's outpourings, and beckons the soporific kiss of sleep.

Doggedly, Jared goes on. Exclaims and gestures and paces for about twenty minutes. He can't seem to convince himself that they really believe in this conspiracy.

"They *can't* believe it. They must be setting a trap for something else."

Then a familiar voice frees him.

"My man, Jared! You poor excuse for the savior of mankind, don't you love me anymore?"

It's Sean!

Four of them. They've trapped four of them. Five slipped through. Five, including Aaren and two other women.

"What does that mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything," Sean answers. "We don't know what went down. And let's not spend too much time spooking ourselves. Let's think about what the hell we're going to do about this outrageous bail."

Sean is two cells down, bunked with Corey. *That's who the DA must know!* Until after the bail hearing, they'd been separated, each thinking they were the only ones caught.

"Four. Four out of nine. Not bad," shouts Sean. "Means we're still ahead. Three and one-half to one-half. The Good Guys are still winning!"

"Big joke, Sean, but what good are we in here? We're politically dead. Can't do a damn thing with the action. With that crazy bail we have to get ten thousand apiece for deposit. We'll be here forever!"

"Maybe my dad will figure something out."

"Sure, Sean—*your* dad, big Mister Republican Big Shot, is gonna risk his reputation helping us? Get real!"

"Maybe," Sean mutters unconvincingly.

"On top of that, now we've got to deal with the media. *Shit!*"

With so much going down, Jared doesn't broach the subject of *Judas* nor risk talking about the FBI beatings. These will have to be dealt with when, if ever, they get released.

Dealing with the media becomes agenda item number one. *Who should speak? What should be said?* The idea behind their style was to hit draft boards anonymously. Then political education could be done around draft resistance by anyone who supported the actions, not just by Movement personalities.

Across the country, other raiders had demonstrated in a more traditional nonviolent manner. Like the Milwaukee 14, who raided offices and burned files, intending to be caught. Their idea was to use their capture as a launching point for their personal public campaign against the war. Jared was not prepared for going public, what his group liked to call *Plan C*. It was a lot like Plan B. No one ever expected to employ it!

*Fuck!* They will have to deal with becoming media personalities. But how to prevent the media from taking control? Prevent them from making the four of them the issue, instead of the war? Like men in battle who don't spend time working out the details of being captured or dying, so the group had not defined Plan C.

Like Matt's *karma!* the media is beyond their control. In the morning paper they see the theme that TV and radio will mimic. Front page: STATEWIDE SWEEP CRUSHES VIOLENT DRAFT RAID RING. Inside headline: FBI DEALS BLOW TO NATIONAL RADICAL CONSPIRACY. On the editorial page: *PEACENIK* VIOLENCE ON

THE ROAD TO JUNGLE LAW. These and accompanying articles set up the raiders as idealistic youths duped by international Communist rhetoric and sympathies.

The media's tone is a blush shy of McCarthy era "Red baiting." They're granted "former pacifists" and "one-time nonviolence leaders" status but now are labeled as "predators and purveyors of political violence." They are kept practically nameless, referred to as "The Four" or "radicals" or "Viet Cong sympathizers" throughout. The message is, "We must make an example out of these guys."

What's curious is the lack of description as "Catholic." For this had been the big point in the bail hearing. There, wild-eyed evocations of anti-Catholicism were slung around with phrases like "Catholic Underground," "Jesuit rabble rousers," "anti-American theology," and similar rank stuff that Jared thought the presidency of JFK had laid to rest.

"Maybe they're afraid of going public with that? Maybe it's too hot for them to handle 'religious civil disobedience' and all that?"

Jared fails to realize how much the FBI has learned from tracking and putting down Martin Luther King.

Before they get around to discussing how to handle the press, Jared is told he's been "granted" a meeting with a reporter. Strangely, it's a decision made and personally delivered by Agent Brennan who clearly felt no need to consult with Jared about the arrangement.

"What's up?" They're all puzzled. Why would the Feds arrange *their* press meeting?

That something queer's afoot becomes apparent right after breakfast as "The Four" are separated and scattered throughout the jail. Each is celled with a nonpolitical prisoner. No one is housed near the others. They can't even

communicate by shouting or passing messages. So when Jared is called out, he hasn't a clue about what to expect.

In the visiting room Jared's sardonically introduced as "the ringleader" to Charlie Burston from the *Tribune*. Then the escort agent leaves. Both men sit down.

"You've read these?" Burston asks as he slides copies of the morning edition articles across the table.

"Yeah. Sure. Read 'em all."

Burston lights a cigarette, drags and in the cloud of smoke asks, "Mind if I smoke?"

"Nope."

Burston flips his notepad open. "Okay, kid, give me *your* side of the story."

Was he a friendly or what? "I thought your byline was Entertainment."

Burston doesn't lift his pen from the pad. "That's true."

"Why are you interviewing me? This is a political case."

Burston pencil-drums his pad, not looking at Jared; exhales. "All they want is the personal stuff on you guys—you know, bios. Where you were born, went to school, all that stuff. *Glamour*, if you have any!" He says *glamour* with a tiny chuckle.

"Ah," Jared prolongs the "Ahh," indicating that his secret plot has been exposed. "Ah, Plan C."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing." He pauses, then, "Look, who we are, who I am, is of no consequence. What's important is what we did and why we did it."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. It is. What do you think we were doing, going on joy rides?"

Burston sizes up that this will go nowhere, fast. *Contentious SOB!* he mutters to himself while sucking a dying smoke and then stubbing it out. Within almost the same motion he lights another. Quickly blows a stream, picks his pen back up, preparing for a more tedious drill than anticipated.

"Kid, if you want some press, you're going to have to follow my program. I'm not here as your propaganda agent."

"Bullshit! Whose propaganda agent *are* you?!"

As a distraction Burston begins to doodle. Jared watches him closely, thinking that he's going to start writing something.

"Kid, let me ask you some questions. First, are you part of a national network, some kind of conspiracy?"

"That's so much bullshit. I can't believe you'd even honor it with a question."

"Maybe. But it's on the Feds' mind."

"Yeah. Right. Sure. They wish there was something organized about the Resistance. What they can't handle is that *things just keep happening!* I mean, man, I hear about draft raids and blockades and actions and all that just happens. What's frightening about all this nonviolent Resistance is that it *is* unorganized . . . Something powerful, something spiritual's afloat across America. And they can't stop it because it ain't organized!"

Burston's observing Jared as closely as Jared's been following his every move, each trying to read between the lines. He wants more, much more. Characteristically, Jared responds to his silence by talking. Stands and walks, circling the table; compulsion.

"Conspiracy! Okay. I'll tell you there's a conspiracy. Of the Spirit! Of the Will! This is a really strange time, let me tell you that. Who'd have thought so much

nonviolent Resistance would just pop up here and there around the country? And from white middle-class kids! *Dig it!* Doesn't that make you stop and think? I mean, I could never figure it out. No one I know studied *Nonviolence in America* in high school. And we sure as hell didn't learn about the Civil Rights movement in graduate school. There were no Martin Luther Kings in our pulpits!

Hell, we were programmed for violence, not nonviolence. I was even in ROTC! Believe that, me! *Kill a Cong for Christ!* So who's talking about a conspiracy? The only conspiracy's been the conspiracy for violence, and that's *well* organized. The damn FBI knows that!"

As the kid talks—*harangues!*—Burston can't help but picture him as a soldier. A Big Mick, wild, with a touch of German in his logical intensity. *In another life, a Hitler Youth?*

Yes, *another life*—Burston's memory is jogged. "Jennings, the Hermit Jock!" Headlines and titles: "All State," "Minnesota Rookie of the Year," "College of St. Clement's First Little All-American." Sure, he's seen this body of brawn dance and cavort and raise cheerleaders' nipples. But then a stud gone spiritual. *Just what those monks wanted . . . or was it?*

Burston knows most of this story. In his senior year Jared made his own self-styled anti-war protest. He dropped out of basketball, refused to talk to any NBA scouts, killing whatever slim chance he had to advertise himself. Then he took to the deep woods behind St. Clement's monastery. He finished his degree as a "commuter"—actually a hermit. A friendly faculty adviser brought him his tasks and his books.

Jared lived in a hut. No electricity. No plumbing. A veggie diet. Candlelight but no broads. Few knew what he did. All was mystery and rumor. *Dope? Talks with Jesus? Running away from himself?*

For the whole senior basketball season his was a running story, often a joke, lampooned. "Does the jock itch?" A pun on his woodsy sanitation or lack thereof and his vaunted—no, crazed love—no, *addiction* to basketball. But by spring his was a story without ink and a protest forgotten by most on campus as "taking it to the streets" action was everywhere in the air.

As to the kid's politics, Burston believes he knows it—nonviolent Jesus and all that. Burston isn't anticipating any great revelation on that topic. Also, he's seasoned enough not to get pumped by the FBI briefing. He scoffed at them, "You're really calling him a *Benedict Arnold*?" All told, Burston doesn't expect Jared to break down and reveal some Pulitzer Prize-winning story exposing the workings of a "Secret Brotherhood of the Nonviolent Cross" or something really far-out like that. "Conspiracy?" he said to the Feds. "What hard evidence do you guys have?" They were noncommittal, but they pushed him to work Jared with it. He agreed.

Burston draws his line, questioning, "Second, where do you get your funding?"

"There's no funding. What do you think? We rented Rolls Royces to do these raids? Hey, man, maybe you should take some pictures of Matt's road boat. It's a '57 Chevy clunker. Show them we go in style! ...But seriously, we just live simply, that's all."

Jared sits down, revved now and jazzed.

"Should I say you're volunteers?"

With gritted teeth, Jared leans across the table, face-to-face, snarling, "Don't play the fool with me!"

"No, I'm serious. How should I describe you guys? You've been running around for six months terrorizing Uncle Sam, breaking into his draft boards. You certainly couldn't've been working all that time. Somebody has to be picking up the tab?"

*There'd be no escape today. Ominously, his private guardians—young seminarians all in black with wicker baskets in hand—stand sentinel at the church's entrance and exits. The habitually "early leavers" know they will be caught today. It's hopeless. So they wait and watch as Father pulls himself up from his last prostration. Risen, he bows before the tabernacle and reverently turns, takes a step, almost begins to strut as each stride that takes him closer to the ancient, raised pulpit vitalizes him. Atop this promontory Holy Spirit fire blasts forth as he pleads, "GIVE! Give for the poor starving children of China! GIVE!"*

*And they give and they give again. Hard-rubbed nickels and bottom-of-the-purse pennies to the Fourth Collection. "For the pagan babies of China!"*

There's a hint of sincere curiosity behind Burston's questions that softens Jared a tad.

"Yeah. I see. Maybe that's what it looks like—from the outside. But here's how it is." He sits back, legs crossed. "We're just a group of guys who've come together sort of spontaneously. Some met at the Draft Resistance Center, others at the Catholic Peace Center. Crazy as it might seem, only a few of us knew each other before the raids.

For some, it starts out as frustration, mostly with their lack of political clout. For others, it's with moral outrage just about war itself. Then some are just pissed off in general about lots of things: racism, poverty—you know, lots of things. It sorta all just happens."

Curiously, Jared stalls like a plane rising too fast. He's self-conscious about dictating, uneasy at Burston's rapid and intent writing. But he lets suspicion fly by and continues.

"About six months ago we gathered—after Nixon's Christmas raid on Cambodia—and rapped for about a day. Most of us actually live communally. Like we

share most everything. Some of our friends give us a little money, some work part-time. We use food stamps. The whole line.”

Burston chuckles silently and quickly jots down “Food stamps! . . . Commune! Free love! . . . Aroma of marijuana!” *Hmmm, maybe there’s a sensational angle here after all!*

Despite his habitual instinct for the superficial, Burston is cooperating with the FBI because he wants a story, something truly politically radical, hopefully explosive! He desperately wants off *Entertainment*.

Two puffs. *Naw!* He reconsiders, blots out the sensational imagery. *There has to be something more to this guy.* He fidgets a moment or two, trying to focus. He’s frustrated that he can’t find a zinging focal point. But he can’t let on. Otherwise he might spook Jared.

Burston sticks his pen’s tip into his reporter’s pad. He does this once, twice. He’s aware of being both stumped by and fascinated with Jared’s *innocence*.

*Maybe that’s the story?*

“The guy’s sure no dope,” the Fed’s assured him, briefing him fairly deeply on Jared’s background—his education, his theology, and the list of raids and protests they’ve tracked. Taking their slant, Burston came prepared to meet a type of warrior or mercenary not an altar boy. Nevertheless, that’s what he finds. It’s as if he’s seeing Jared in papal white acolyte robes. Burston remembers others of this type. A type that fascinates him, draws forth his admiration, but from whom he distances himself as if they were aliens from another planet. Possibly it’s their physical contradiction that leaves him restless. Possibly he’s afraid.

He has no doubt that Jared is one of these, the Baby Face Nelson type. Brutes with cherubic demeanors. More, in Jared’s case, an angelic air. Guys whose walk screams, “Savage! Animal! Ass-kicker!” but whose actions are rabbit-soft, cousins of Steinbeck’s Lennie Small.

Burston really doesn't understand where "nonviolent resistance" comes from. At this point, he wishes the FBI's "Catholic Conspiracy" angle was true. It would easily resolve many, many of his long-standing unanswered questions.

Burston follows up on another objective listed during his FBI briefing. "Where's all of this going?" He punctuates his question by vigorously snubbing out his fourth unfiltered cigarette on "going?"

Jared leans back, lifting the front feet of his chair. "Going? That's a truly philosophical question. Hmm. Well, here it is, man. Quote me: *We're stopping the war! Okay?*"

"You gotta be kidding!"

"If not us, who the hell *is* stopping the war?"

Burston doesn't want to get mired in that question. "Kid, who's gonna believe you? Do you think Nixon's going to read about your arrest and say to Kissinger, *Oh, dear, let's stop the war, Henry, they're rioting in the North Country!*"

Jared half-laughs, snorts. "Are you a jaded motherfucker or what, Burston? Didn't you learn anything from the Civil Rights movement?"

As if stung by a quick jab to the gut Burston jams his elbows on the table. Sweat beads pop and dance along his brow. He's fading towards pale. His face is a pasty pallor. The sudden change stuns Jared. He's uncharacteristically slow in responding.

"What's the matter—ulcers?"

Burston wipes his forehead with his coat sleeve. Recovers. Stands up and starts to haltingly circle around the table. Jared eyes him, full circle once or twice, then drops his surveillance. Moved by a monastic habit Jared's brow tilts forward and he focuses on his own hands, giving Burston some private space. Burston completes

five laps before replying, "I'm okay. Just an old problem. Bad coffee." But he doesn't look okay.

*". . . killed the nigger."*

*"You in?"*

*"Yeah. Okay. ... Did you have to kill him?"*

*"Don't let it bust yo' balls."*

*The locker room wasn't ever empty. Others heard. Accepted this way. Knew "truth" would tie his tongue. Make it "one of the guns."*

*No one would ever, ever print the Truth. December 4, 1969. The Pulitzer Prize "Fred Hampton Story" he never wrote.*

Burston never faced the truth about racism in capital letters before the execution of Hampton. "Who would believe me?" he often asks himself when drunk and remembering. "Who'd believe that that big badass Black Panther Fred Hampton – Shit, more charismatic than King! -- was really into nonviolence and serving breakfast to kids?"

Everyone knew – *I'm no one's fool!* Burston boasts—that when Chicago's Mayor Daley had Hampton shotgunned while he slept—*Ya know, one of his inner cadre drugged him with Seconal was the rumor*—it was political and career suicide to go up against *da Boss*.

"Okay, our goal," Jared coughs into his hands, shifts in the chair, continues in earnest, "is to create symbols of Resistance. We want the blue-collar kid, the farm boy, the college student, to see that The System is vulnerable. Our raids are sand in the machinery of the Selective Service System. It's all really just that simple."

Burston finally finds a workable theme. "So you're just another chapter in Minnesota Populism!" Certainly not radical, not the pop he wants. *But, hell, I gotta get some ink on this. Later. The kid'll pop later.*

Burston makes a personal mental note to keep this kid tethered to him, somehow. *For now*, Burston laughs to himself, *nothing too offensive*. His typical byline style. For sure, this case is hot and he knows his final editor is J. Edgar himself. "Will he let me print even this?" Burston scratches in the notepad's margin, circling and circling the "he."

Flipping the pad shut, Burston gathers his things, grinds his umpteenth butt and moves towards departure. "Kid, I'm going to keep a line of communication open for you from here. Don't get me wrong—I don't particularly like what you did. But I owe a favor to someone who might have been one of you, given another time and place."

"What do you mean, *line of communication*?"

"I mean just that. You need to get something out of here, contact a trustee named Victor. He'll get it to me."

In jail's social order trustees are the odd few who do long County jail time instead of going to prison. Jared didn't care to understand the legality of it all, just that trustees can do things. They're either good guys or informers. You take a high risk with them but they get things done. Move things from inside out and outside in. Power brokers. Princes of gray eminence.

Burston knuckle-raps a call to the guard. He speaks while looking for the guard, not at Jared. "Right now, Kid, I just need some fluff on you guys. Like it or not, the politics of your action's a dead issue."

"Free speech," Jared slowly enunciates, sarcastically.

Burston steps back towards Jared, leans down to eye level. "Kid, I first went on the Entertainment page by choice. Things happen." Pauses. Tenses his stare, "

I've been in many jails, more than I want to remember. What's happening to you, I've seen it happen before. When Hoover gets personally involved, there are long strings on a reporter."

"Wow, man! So, there *is* a conspiracy, but just from the other end?!"

"Something like that. Let's just say, *interests of national security* are in control here."

"Yeah, I can dig that, but where are *you*—I mean, personally—on all of this?"

Burston pulls back upright, reaches out to shake Jared's hand. "Kid . . ." but breaks off as the guard keys the door.

Jared's puzzled by Burston. Is he a plant? Who does he "owe"? Did he mean to imply that his former jails were in the South during the Civil Rights days? Is he a guilty liberal? Or a closet "red diaper baby" from the 1930s? Jared knows they abound in the Midwest. But shit, he didn't even get what he came for. Jared didn't tell him anything *glamorous* about himself or the guys.

"Shit shit!" Jared's interview has pushed his frustration to boil. He fist-bangs, palm-slams on the door, ordering, "Guard, take me back to my cell!"

Next day, the morning edition headlines show something about the reporter behind Burston's veil of smoke. Front page: DRAFT RAIDERS EXEMPLARY STUDENTS. Inside: MOTHERS SUPPORT SONS IN THEIR PROTESTS. While there's no editorial on their behalf, the accompanying article, under Burston's byline, is sympathetic. It draws heavily on interviews with their mothers and paints what Jared labels "our Little Lord Fauntleroy biographies." He could see Burston's touch, making The Four seem like "your boys." As expected, there's no political commentary at all. *But hell, at least it makes us look human*, and it also dims the stereotype of "violent radical revolutionaries" that the DA was pushing.

All said, Jared feels it's was a grand waste. Nothing will come of it. *Maybe it makes Burston feel better, I don't know.* In fact, Jared's a bit embarrassed. The article plays up his "genius" and "voracious appetite for books." It casts a romantically mystical aura to his year as a hermit. *Not a mention of the demons and ghouls who infest the forest, hungering for wandering monastic souls!* Jared tosses the paper aside. Closes his eyes. Murmurs to the ever-present Novice Master, "Maybe it's good for my pride. This left-handed compliment, painting me—more than the others—as an idealistic fool?"

The only positive thread Jared sees is the mention of their fathers and brothers who have served in various wars. It places his raider action in the warrior lineage of his brother, Larry, the Korean War hero and his dad, a WWII patriot. It might, just might move someone else to realize that Resistance is the only patriotic act left. *Maybe!*

But as discussed in pre-raid retreats, the raiders never expected anything positive from the Establishment media. For they are, as to class and economic status, just part of the anonymous middle class. Maybe upper-middle for Sean and Corey? They *are* just "someone's kids," all coming from conservative to middle-of-the-road white-collar families. Sean's is a lawyering family on both sides. Corey's been president of the university's student body. All have been to college and taken draft deferments. But theirs is a story that only the anti-Establishment underground press like Minneapolis' *Hundred Flowers* rag would write as it is. Sadly, that was, in sum, preaching to the converted.

The everyday citizen would never hear their story: *Patriot or Outlaw?* Never fully understand how the anti-war movement is fueled by their neighbor's kid who over time has step-by-step become angrier and angrier. Angry that the war's never been officially declared. Angry that LBJ snake-oiled everybody with his Bay of Tonkin resolution. Angrier when troop deployments keep escalating. Mad and madder as the damn Selective Service gets weirder. Maddest as deferments are willy-nilly removed. And then they run a lottery, bejesus! Beyond maddest when one after another leading liberal gets up and shows that the Emperor Has No Balls. Big fucking story!

“Fucked, things are just fucked here in Amerika. Got that, Mr. Reporter? Yeah, man, with a ‘k,’ as in Klu Klux Klan. Racists, dumbass, fucked-up Amerika. We hunt niggers for sport. We even have a limited open season on white kids now. See your local college or university for permits!

“We like to lie to ourselves daily. Just witness our wonderful Evening News where flayed bodies of babies, some burnt to ‘crispy critters,’ are brought to you by our patriotic sponsors, Honeywell and Dow Chemical.”

Frustrated, Jared knows even he himself can't say that, even if at times he feels that way. For his true story, and that of the others, he believes—*except Aaren* is a bitter, unvoiced interjection—is the story of nonviolent resistance. A long story going back to the eighteenth-century American anti-slavery Quaker John Woolman, up through nineteenth-century abolitionists and women liberationists, to Martin Luther King, our “dead King.”

Rolling up the newspaper, Jared starts to pound the bars with it. “No one cares! No one gives a royal fuck!”

*Heavenly Father, why am I here?*

### 3 - BEFORE THE COCK CROWED: HENNEPIN COUNTY JAIL

The next morning, after his allotted weekly shower, as he's being escorted back to his cell, the mind-fuck games continue.

"Hey, this isn't my cell!" Jared protests, resisting the push in. "What the fuck's going on. man?"

The guard ignores him. Just shoves him in and leaves.

"Who . . . the fuck?" He's not alone. On the far bunk sits a burly, tattooed, almost toothless, shit-ugly biker.

"Hi, cutie, c'mon ovah har 'n sets down," his new cellmate entices while patting the mattress. Jared is at a total loss.

"Is this a motherfucking joke or what?" he swears, then turns, ignoring the guy and looking down the corridor. But he has to know! Over his shoulder, face pressed on the bars, "What's your name?"

The guy laughs: a small sound, almost a titter. Jared is buzzed. *The stupid interview and now this!*

Suddenly, he hears Matt's voice, rising uncommonly loud.

"Matt, where are you?"

"Hey, Brother J, I'm here." Nervous—anxious.

"Where?"

"Next door I think." Matt's left arm appears through the bars of the cell to Jared's right.

"Goddam, good to see someone," Jared sighs in relief. Then *thunk!* and Matt shrieks, "Stop!" The sound drifts off into a faint drone.

"Jesus, Matt, what's going on?" Only thumps, thuds, and grunts answer. *Matt's in serious trouble!*

"Matt! Matt!"

"Rest raht don har, sweetie!" his cellmate coos.

Jared spins around and stares wide-eyed at his mate. "What's going on?" He thumb-jerks towards Matt's cell. "What the fuck are they pulling on us now?"

The hulk stands up and takes one long stretching step towards Jared; arrives at arm's length.

"Cutie, c'mon, lats me shew yer a gud time."

*Fuckhead!* Jared screams inside, shouting it over and over almost in unison with the grunts and bangs and curses from Matt's cell.

"Matt! Matt! Tell me what to do!"

Jared flings himself against the bars, jerks them, kicks and shouts frantically, "Guards! Guards! Riot! Riot!"

But no one responds. Not even echoes, as his cries fade. *Jesus!* With a chill he realizes that all the other cells in this strip are empty. There's not one other inmate to pick up on his call. It's too late to be absolved for missing another survival clue: the quiet should have aroused his suspicion. In jail, a TV is always blaring on a cell block but he was overwrought and missed the cue. *Absolve me, Pater!*

Out loud, desperate, "Jesus, Holy Mother—Jesus, what are they doing this for?"

As Jared slumps off the bars and turns, his shoulder bumps his cellmate's. He recoils, more in shock than fear. "Back off, motherfucker!"

The mate says, "Neme's Brooza, wat's yers?"

"Jesus, motherfucker, you must be kidding me!" Jared almost laughs in comic relief at finding a fucking polite biker! "You're a stone cold motherfucking fag!"

"Yespth," Bruiser winks, feigning a lisp.

Jared sidesteps to the far side of the cell. Bruiser drops his trousers, clutches his big cock and starts rubbing it, then waves it towards Jared like a radar gun.

"I'se nit lek Hareld nixt door. He'za real ass bangar. Nit me. I catch." And with that said he crawls onto the lower bunk and sets himself up doggie style.

"Ef yer neece to me, I'se dun't snitch on yer."

Jared can't believe this is happening. *What's happening to Matt?* Not another sound comes from that direction. *What's this asshole fag homo bitch queer doing here? Does he really expect me to bang him?*

"Are you fucking crazy? I pitch only to broads!" Jared flings that remark, irritated but almost casually as if waving off an obnoxious door-to-door salesman.

Bruiser doesn't move from his spot. "C'mon, yer leecky. Hacks mek funnie mestake. Tink I'se a bangar. I'se not." Coos again, "I lek to git broozed. Dat's how'da I git mis name! So, c'mon Big Mon, geve mes all yas got. I cun teke it!" A request that's almost pleading, desirous, fearful of a lost opportunity.

Ominously, "Ef yer dun't tekes me. Hareld gets en," as he thumb-points to Matt's cell. "N yer wun't lek wat he'za doin'!"

*The Novice Master draws prayerful, shaking hands together as Friar Otto asks about the moans and groans late at night. "Is someone overdoing it with private flagellation?"*

*The Master sighs. Alien amidst their geography, Otto maneuvered past robes in heaps in front of dormitory beds as he stumbled without his glasses in disoriented nighttime piss runs quite often in the Seminary. Now in the Novitiate he's "Sure, I'm*

*absolutely sure!” that the closed cell doors, whose aperture width is defined with inches of specificity in the Common Rules, give absolute evidence and proof about a group of heretical extremists. “Definite flagellants!”*

*Ah, how the Master wishes it was so. He’d readily handle heretical Flagellants rather than roust and chastise catamites!*

*“Pray! Pray!” The Master assures Friar Otto that only prayer will chase this Evil One away.*

“Matt!” Jared yells frantically, “MattMattMattMatt!” No response. *Matt!* ripped from his heart, his soul, but there is no energy left. He’s mute. He senses the hopelessness of it all. He desperately craves a response but no words or sounds come back.

Why what happens happens—what it is that moves from within him, what spiritual force capitulates him from the person Burston met to the force that Jared becomes, what is released by his capture and caging—Jared will only understand much later. For, as if responding to Matt’s cries—and to Bruiser’s siren invitation—Jared steps over to the bunk and kicks Bruiser hard in the ass. *Quinn?* It’s a rock-thud hard blow, tearing an inch of muscle. Bruiser squeals. The bleat ignites Jared. *Quinn.* Detonates a fuse, a long-distance detonation set off by remote depth control, a simple, small sound that draws forth avalanche and earthquake. *“What did you do to get him so angry?” What did I do? Dad . . . What did I do? Why doesn’t anyone believe me?*

With the swift and savage motions of a jackal upon a new kill, Jared repeatedly hits and strikes. Again and again. On the back, the neck. Grabs Bruiser’s head, turns him around, hard-drives a knee to his gut. Ceaselessly kicking and punching, Jared works up a steaming sweat. The cell is soon a steam bath: sweat dripping, piss odors, ancient crud and cum dust billowing up with each blow.

Jared is working like a blacksmith, pounding with thunder and intensity. Some part of him knows that he's in the land of crazy but no part fights against it. Without qualms, he rages against Bruiser's body, a lump over two hundred and fifty pounds. A lump of meat which he beats, hammers, fashions as if iron on the anvil. He molds Bruiser's animal sounds—growlings from deep caves—into a frenzy of hurt. He clubs with all his might into manic exhaustion.

At last, fists powerless, fingers limp, right arm like a dead fish, there comes a deep echo: "*Ite Missa est!*" The Mass is ended. Finished. Consummated. Jared steps away, teeters, almost faints as he staggers and slams his own forgotten body against the toilet's wall, sliding down into a puddle, left arm resting on the lidless shitter.

Bruiser is all whimper and sob. Jared is totally oblivious. His mind went blank with the last flailing blow. All that registers are the aches in his hands and arms. Before he can figure out what just did happen, Bruiser is at his side, unbuckling Jared's belt and tugging down his pants. Jared defends not against this assault; cannot. His eyes can barely focus on Bruiser, yet a spark of awareness burns into his soul. *Green eyes! . . . Char green!*

"Pell 'em dan er tha hacksa wun't beleeves mes."

Mesmerized, Jared robotically jerks at his pants and slides them off. Bruiser yanks off Jared's shoes. Then he reaches up, twists and snaps a button or two from Jared's shirt with one hand while mussing his hair with the other.

Jared can't will himself to move anymore. Bruiser stands, buckles his own pants, and before going to the cell's gate, turns to Jared and says cloyingly, "Tanks, sweet pee!"

The perversity of it all doesn't hit Jared until Bruiser has left and he gets up to lie on his bunk. Streaks of blood and several wads of cum are *prima facie* evidence of Bruiser's delights.

That night, Jared desperately gives the story of the staged rape to the trustee, Victor. *Is Victor part of the plot?* Regardless, he's Jared's only hope. The story cannot convey Jared's pain over his powerlessness. His anger at himself. His sense of guilt that he drew Bruiser by chance. Matt was removed at the same time that Bruiser left. Jared couldn't imagine what had gone on, doesn't want to. He wonders if Matt fought back or whether he yielded in passive nonresistance.

"Does it matter?" Jared asks himself, audibly. He can hear Matt's response: "Nope." *Fuck that karma shit, man!* "Look, man, it's about ignorance. No matter if you're violent or nonviolent, what are you learning about yourself?" *Fuck that karma shit, man!* He can see Matt's sly smile.

Jared knows that Matt's commitment to "passive nonresistance" is as profound as his many silences. *What will he say about my actions? Have I betrayed the principles that bind us together?* Shamed, Jared cannot suppress his sense of relief that he had *not* had the opportunity to "lay down his life." Quite simply, getting raped or being forced to suck cock were sacrifices beyond the pale, demands for a fidelity beyond his comprehension, a call for obedience more radical than he has ever conceived possible. *No matter if you're violent or nonviolent, what are you learning about yourself?*

For Jared, it's to be a long night of bad dreams.

There is one haunting dream that comes back again this night, comes back time and again after Jared escapes the dream, drenched in sweat, heart pounding. Time and again upon release back into sleep, it reruns. *Through the main door of a medieval cathedral he goes, processing down the center aisle, drawn by the scent of frankincense and the lure of Gregorian chant, here the beauty of the Ambrosian Gloria. Met at the altar rail by a hooded monk, they proceed behind the altar to a hidden doorway that opens upon a blessing whose phrases are garbled. Down a swirling stairway they float, feet almost not on the ground, till they come to a second doorway, the entrance to a confessional. They enter and find themselves standing*

*before a lectern from which a bodiless voice emanates: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." This phrase repeats over and over.*

*He and his companion bow and leave by another door, foreboding in its massiveness, opening this time with words clearly understood, "Christus Victor!" They enter into darkness. Hear refrains of "Kyrie eleison!" reverberate. The companion lights a candle that casts a misty glow about the room. Through the mist flow decapitated bodies, mutilated faces, and a stench of pungent lilac perfume so dense that he gags. They wade through the carnage slowly like pilgrims sightseeing. His companion chants, "Christus Victor! Christus Victor!"*

*Then another room unveils upon the battle cry, "Milites Christi!" Within is a staggering squad of these "Soldiers of Christ" in military dress of uncountable wars, each mutilating his own flesh. They do not scream or writhe in pain. One walks to Jared and cuts a chunk of flesh from his own arm, offers it on point's end. "Ad majorem Dei gloriam," the soldier intones ("To the greater glory of God.") Two, three others approach him in like manner. Still Jared and his companion reveal only the curiosity of relic seekers.*

*They approach a fourth door, tabernacular in design and upon entering hear "Hoc est enim corpus meum!" ("For this is my body!") which is soon muffled as wild screeching racks his ears, loud martial music booms and the two are suddenly in a vast hall of grand Baroque design, filled with crying babies and mothers being raped, mothers of all colors by men of all colors; the noise is cacophonous but glorious, itself one with the Gregorian swell.*

*Jared and his companion proceed, observing the utter terror in the eyes of the women, registering the frantic wails of the babes. They move towards a large divan at one end of the room, a gilded, plushly arrayed, silk and diamond-studded couch. Upon it reclines a fright-eyed young damsel, amply endowed, with flowing black hair, wild black eyes. An exultant voice rising in pitch repeats, "Hoc est enim corpus meum," and as if practiced in this ritual Jared disrobes. Naked, his companion girds*

*him with a golden cord, drapes his back with a cloak of moonlight white. Then Jared kneels on the divan, effortlessly parts the woman's legs, she is like the mouse trapped by the cat, narcotized by fear. As he lays his body upon her, whispers rise from her trembling lips, gaining in volume, "I am NOT your body. I am NOT your body!" Words that catapult him back in wrenching screams: "No, no, no . . . !" The sounds fade in echoes as if falling into a bottomless well . . . he wakes.*

It's almost a ritual by now, his waking response. Despite himself he reaches for his penis, holds it gently and massages it, ever fearful that it is receding within, never to return. Once erect, fondling it, he falls into a deep sleep. It is hours before he wakes again. Once awake, conscious of his dreamy adventure, Jared habitually reaches for his Bible. He holds it, yet never reads it. Sits there holding it like a talisman.

Habitually but not now. There is no Bible. Just him holding this dream. Jared raises his eyes to heaven, utters not a prayer rather angrily implores, "Why do you let your demons in here? Isn't the monastic hermitage their den of pleasure? Wasn't that enough? Am I never ever to sleep alone?"

*Curse God and die!* The sage advice of Job's wife glides through his mind.

What adds to the fright tonight is the appearance of Aaren's face. *She's the woman on the divan! What does that mean?* Jared knows enough about dreams to understand that all this is supposed to mean something about *him*, not her, not his mother, not his girl Char, not any other woman. But *do I believe that?*

He has shared only a fragment of this dream with Char. He can't bear to tell her the graphic parts, just an abstract rendition of the rape. He trusts her. She's a comforting nurse, one with depthless compassion. Plus she shares his Catholic background.

Char's take on it: "Men hate women. Catholicism teaches that. Adam really hated Eve, didn't he? And American males get a double dose with their macho

cowboy culture. You have a lot of violence which you have to face. That's the road to nonviolence, isn't it, through violence?"

God, how she left him feeling like an insect wiggling on a pin! *Am I violent when I avoid violence? If I accept my own violence, how will I ever get out of its clutch?* Such questions just churn up his psychological water and point to no harbor in sight.

*Damn, what would she say about Bruiser?*

Would she say that he did right? He knows why he attacked Bruiser. Violence—that he knows how to give. He stated the same to Burston, underlined it. "We're programmed for violence!" Said it while standing, flexing his muscles like the famous body-builder, Charles Atlas.

Bruiser's easy to please because he's a sicko male. Just "Thwack!" and "Pow!" punches. He receives and Jared figures he probably can pitch, too. The baseball imagery fits. Pitch and catch. That's all there appears to be: fuck and come! It defines the *satisfied* male. Religion just raises it to a symbolic level. Bread and wine. Flesh and blood. Blood and guts. "YOU'RE GOING TO BURN FOR THIS!" is a warning dredged from his early Catholic formation. But he knows he won't. Or will he?

To the empty cell, "Hell, if I'm going to hell, fuck it all!" Moving around slowly Jared makes his bed and attempts to sleep one more time. He has no idea what time of night or early morning it is. The row is quiet. Ominously quiet. Apparently he's still alone. Strange.

Jared dips back into sleep only to bolt awake again within minutes. He shivers then shakes. Shudders into cold sweating without warning. The cell is freaking Midwest July hot but Jared is ice-cold, chilled. He starts to dry-retch. He coughs and grabs his gut, dry-heaves until he prays he'll pass out.

He strips the blankets from the upper bunk, cocoons, curls to fetal. Hands, feet, lips and teeth shake, tremble and grind.

“Oh sweet Jesus, Mary mother of God! What's happening?”

His eyes burn, itching and on fire. His legs jerk up and cramp into fetal lock. His calves and thighs knot and spasm like twisted fingers. He's all ache and burn, then everything lurches downward, out of his control. Thoughts of *They've drugged me!* clamor inside his throbbing head. He's never felt such seething pain. Hot stabs randomly occur at his joints, legs, wrists, ankles, and he continues to retch violently loud. Like a bullfrog with a bullhorn, “Gaaaomph! Gaaaomph!” But nothing is delivered, nothing born. Nothing propels out from within.

When Jared wakes in the morning, he feels glued to the sheets. Only the daylight convinces him that he has survived. Had it been dark still he might have surrendered all. Every muscle in his body is sore and twitching. *This must be what it's like to get run over*, crosses his mind as he lugs and drags his hands from his toes to the top of his head. He could not begin to count the aches nor discern what happened. He's just grateful that at some point he passed out—or at least his mind can't confront in memory what really happened.

Jared knows what he must do. “*Beseech Jesus! Beseech His forgiveness with your groans! Groan loud enough to wake a deaf monk!*” He kneels down by the side of his bed, folds his hands in worship, straightens up his back and tilts his face upwards, whispers, “Thy will be done!” Murmurs, “Thy will be done!” Then increasingly loudly, “*Thy will be done!*” Till he bellows. “**THY WILL BE DONE!**”

“Shut the fuck up, asshole, I'm trying to sleep,” lets Jared know that the jailors have returned this day to normal.

#### 4 - JAILHOUSE ROCK

Matt's already in the hearing room as Jared's brought in. Neither has seen or communicated with the other over the past four days. Jared's desperate to talk but the bailiffs keep them at a no-talking distance. Their lawyer feels confident that Burston's articles, the large outpouring of supportive letters to the editor—matched by a venomous batch of "Ship them to Russia!" and "Hang the bastards!"—in addition to the large support rally that materialized, unbeknownst to Jared and the others, the morning after they were captured, will bolster his case for bail reduction.

Matt looks okay. No apparent bruises or harm. The draft board welt is gone. Once again, he's all white on pure white.

Matt's been closely watching Jared from the moment the door opened. He's on hold, waiting to catch his attention. Without sound he mouths but one word to Jared, *Karma*. Intones it to himself then ends chuckling a half-faced smile. Jared is taken aback. *Karma?! Humor in the midst of everything's fucked-up!*

The bailiffs pull them even farther apart. The session begins then ends almost in the split second it takes the judge to rap the gavel. For all the lawyer's exploitation of the "Little Lord Fauntleroy" newspaper clips, nothing changes. The judge summarily denies all their attorney's motions.

As Jared is escorted back to his cell, he's absorbed, intently trying to form the question, a question whose probable answer rattles his core of commitment to nonviolence. *Did Matt submit? Passively!*

Once again, as Jared becomes aware as to which cell block they've taken him, he bolts backwards, trying to avoid entering. Once again they've played their own humorous version of musical chairs. Once again it's a different wing and cell. This time, though, shoved and stumbling, he enters to the sound of a blaring TV. *What the fuck, now?*

Jared's new cell mate is black. An older guy, early forties, maybe late thirties. Hard to tell. Tall, not too heavy. Fairly well muscled. He propped up by a pillow, half-reclined in his bunk, wearing glasses, ones he takes off as he checks Jared out.

This guy at least looks friendly.

"I'm Dikbar." A head nod, not a handshake. He puts his glasses back on.

"Name's Jared." Nothing more. Then Jared lies down on the unmade bunk.

Dikbar resumes reading the paper.

"Psst!" The trustee, Victor, is at the bars. "Here, quickly!" He waves a wad of yellow paper. Jared gets up to take it but before he can ask about the report he had sent, Victor vanishes. Dikbar doesn't stir. Never leaves his newsprint.

Jared plops back down and sits on the edge of the bed. He furtively unfolds the wad. *It's from Aaren!* "Bejesus, almighty!" Uttered with a bit more fear than he'd admit, but Dikbar hears him clearly. Jared doesn't pause to question how she connected with Victor, he just jumps into the letter like a lost puppy into its mistress's lap. No salutation; not noticed.

We are proud of your selfless sacrifice on behalf of the Heroic Anti-Imperialist People of Minnesota. You have valiantly advanced the contradictions of this militaristic, racist and corrupt capitalistic society. You have shown the People the true predatory character of the Imperialist Lackeys! You have struck a victorious blow for the suffering masses around the world. Those who suffer from Amerika's imperialistic wars salute you! The valiant Vietnamese salute you! The valiant Cambodians salute

you! The valiant Laotians salute you! Stand fast brothers  
for the cobra has not yet found its nest!

It's signed,

In the blood of true revolutionaries! Aaren

Upon first reading a rush of warm, comforting feelings swirl through Jared. Even the hard-line leftist doggerel fails to derail him. All he can think about is her. *She has written!* Risked herself. A hot fantasy of them in bed races through his mind. As he falls back and stretches out, he reads it again. This time, a shiver rattles him.

He mutters, "Damn, if they've intercepted this and then passed it through, she's in danger!" He's momentarily blanketed with powerlessness. "Trapped in here and she's at risk out there!" he voices out loud.

As he gets up and sits back on the bed's edge, "A letter from home?" laughs Dikbar.

Jared had pushed him out of his mind.

"No, no, not that," he answers as if he's received the note at Mail Call.

"You gotta watch ole Victor, he's an Oreo."

"What?"

"Har, smart boy like you don't know Oreos?"

"You mean the cookies?"

"Yes sir."

"I still don't get it."

Dikbar's enjoying the farce. "Oreos. Black on the outside and white on the inside!" Finally, the light flickers on. "This might not be from who I think it is?"

"You're getting smarter just sitting there." Dikbar rustles and flaps his newspaper, indicating that the conversation is at end. He slips back to reading.

Dikbar's remarks move Jared to re-read the letter, to search between the lines.

*Maybe he's right. Why would she sign this? And this line, "Stand fast brothers for the cobra has not yet found its nest!" That's an oblique reference to herself. She once called*

*herself The Cobra. But how would they know all of this? It has to be from her.*

Then the message within the message speaks to him. Dikbar hears, "Shit, she's planning to break me out! That's what this cobra thing's about! Jesus, is she that crazy?"

As he mutters "crazy," Jared realizes he'll have to risk trusting Dikbar.

With a feigned air of friendliness, as if Dikbar hasn't witnessed anything, "Say Dikbar, why do you think we're housed together?"

Dikbar doesn't immediately respond. He takes his time, finishing and folding his paper. He returns it to its original fold, and then rolls it into a paper baton. As he begins to speak he takes off his glasses, then says matter-of-factly, "It wasn't at my request."

Jared misses Dikbar's point and blurts, "What are you in here for?"

Dikbar snaps back, "None of your business, *white boy!*"

"White boy? I told you my name's Jared."

"You're all white boy to me, sonny." Dikbar focuses on Jared without staring.

"This is going down the wrong street," Jared sighs. More than that he's totally missed the subtle emotional reversal that is creeping stealthily about and commanding Dikbar.

"Look, man, just do me one favor. Give me a bead on Victor. Does he have any political sympathies? I mean, you know, if he's supported the Civil Rights movement or anything?"

"What are you looking for, *boy*?"

"Just that I'm in here for political reasons, did ya know that?"

Dikbar unchains a hoot, whacks the side of his bunk with his paper baton.

"I'se con read! I'se con read!"

Flustered, Jared flicks out an "Oh fuck that shit!" This rankles Dikbar. He's seen too many guys like this white boy whose words release poison into the air. An air already heavily masked by the guy's self-absorbed sense of importance.

"Help me out, man! Maybe ol' Victor's sympathetic to me and this is really from who I think it's from?"

"Sympathetic?" Dikbar practically chews the word, tearing it into tidbits of disbelief. "How can you expect a black convict to be sympathetic with you, *white boy*?" He sways his head in a rhythm of disbelief. "You're either dumber or a greater fool than these stories make you out to be." He taps his paper baton against his right temple. "You're supposed to be some derring-do Savior of All the Oppressed Peoples of the World—the Good Guys who are real bad asses—and you really think Victor's sympathetic to you?"

Dikbar sits up and shifts to the edge of his bed. He stares at Jared, closing the physical distance between them, drawing him emotionally face to face. "This is black skin, see it?" He stretches a grip of facial flesh towards Jared. "Can you be in sympathy with me when you have white skin? *Sympathy* is a feeling of the heart, a piece of soul. Can you be white and have a black soul or a black heart?"

Without even a nod of hesitation Jared says, "Yeah. Sure, man." His easy, flip answer maddens Dikbar who jolts off the bed and whips towards Jared.

"*You arrogant son-of-a-bitch! You mad dog white boy!*" Dikbar seethes, clenches his left fist and waves it threateningly at Jared, just a micrometer from the tip of his nose.

"You're a true descendant of the slave master! *You bastard!* They took our bodies *and* our souls. They thought they could possess our feelings and our hearts. They took our women and raped their seeds into our hearts. Do you know," Dikbar's face begins to pulsate with spasms of misery, pain and rage, "do you know why I hate this black skin?" He rolls back a sleeve holds up a bare right arm.

Jared is dumbstruck.

"Because it has the worm of white sperm in it!"

As the convict who hears the judge deliver the death sentence, Dikbar turns slowly, shoulders slumping. Overcome by the weight of despair and resignation, he steps back and lies down on his bunk, face to the wall away from Jared.

Dikbar has unintentionally bewitched Jared. His manner of talking, his "I'm teetering at the edge of life and death" passion excites Jared just as Jared has excited others when taken by a like fervor. He watches Dikbar's anger and passion recede as he pulls a pillow over his eyes.

Jared bursts into vigorous applause as if the final curtain has just rung down on a thrilling one-act play. Dikbar, lost within himself, doesn't respond. Grants no encore.

"God, man, you really have soul!" Jared booms, unaware of the cruelty of his words. "You really are in touch with the heart of Resistance!" He stands and draws a pace closer to Dikbar. Reaches down to touch him, saying, "I do, I *do* understand . . . I do feel what you feel."

Jared's words awaken the other aspect of Dikbar's personality—a dark apocalyptic soul . His eyes snap open, he rolls over and off the bunk, stands fully erect, then quickly steps forward and embraces Jared. He picks him up with a huge hugging motion, shaking and rattling him up and down. As he releases him Dikbar looks at Jared with saucer-like eyes of wonder. “Maybe you are *The One!* You’ll help me escape? Find a place for me on the Outside?”

Dikbar rolls his eyes up towards heaven and utters with burning sincerity as if a revelation has been entrusted to him, “Yes! Yes! The *Time* has come!”

Then he thrusts his right arm towards Jared, fingers jerkily dancing, “Let me read the letter! Let me read . . . !”

Jared hesitantly hands it to him. Dikbar sits down and pores over it, reading and re-reading with prophet's eyes ferreting out secret messages. Suddenly, in a breath, another mood abruptly transfixes Dikbar. He drops the letter, arms go limp, says to Jared while staring at the floor, “It's all foolishness.”

Jared’s so intent on finding an answer to his own question that he misses the flip-flop in Dikbar's voice. “But do you think the Feds would write something like that to trap me?”

Dikbar rises slowly, takes a few plodding steps to the bars. Dangles his arms out into the free air of the corridor. Near whisper: “Can't you tell by the writing? Don't you know how the writer writes?”

Jared stoops and retrieves the letter. “Well, I mean, man, I never got a letter from her before.”

“I can't help you,” Dikbar exhales as if regretfully addressing a supplicant from the void outside the cell. In a mental *Click!* he regains the composure he held prior to their conversation. “Just take this. Victor doesn't want to leave this place. So he's not at risk. What he does, he does for money and influence. Answer your question?”

Smacking the letter against the back of his left hand, Jared is pleased.  
“Thanks. Thanks.”

Then he goes back and half-reclines on his bunk. Dikbar has disappeared from his world.

*This has got to be from her. Who else could write this fucked-up Maoist crap? Jared’s arguing within. But then, why did she sign it if she mentioned Cobra? She’d use that as her signature.*

Jared muses back and forth on the points, pro and con. Hours pass, as they do in County, to the beat of daydreaming, and Jared daydreams most of this day away.

It’s just after lights-out when Jared hears the blast. *Kaaaroom!* The ancient stone building shivers slightly. A second blast causes a detectable jolt. It trips all the cell block security systems, cell locks clunk open and the air shrills with several sirens, caterwauling one after the other. Within a *Fucking shit, man!* it’s all chaos and cacophony. Then another duet of a jailhouse shuddering blast and more wailing sirens turn the chaos up a notch. More, this last explosion takes out a glass panel in the upper window of their cell. Like snowflakes, glass shards pop, float, and tinkle onto the floor. Protectively, Jared and Dikbar raise their arms, duck down under their pillows as if warding off a guard’s attack.

Jared’s ears ring and he strains to hear clearly. Like gunshot echoes, glass continues to explode up and down the cell block. *Pop! Pop!* Light-bulbs and window panes shatter. The cell block dims, fogs with an eerie, failing light casts by a few unbroken overhead banks of flourescents. As if harmonizing in a chorus, a deafening hum of chaos rises and soulfully vibrates throughout all corridors and cell blocks. Only the massive granite blocks that frame and secure this aging fortress jailhouse prevent the whole building from collapsing.

Jared yells at the top of his lungs, "Bejesus! *The Cobra's* looking for her nest." Totally freaked, he rolls out of his bed, hits the ground and rolls under Dikbar's bunk.

He's paralyzed, not knowing what to expect next. Will he see *helicopters and Aaren swinging down like Wonder Woman?!*

But Jared is Jared and in no time curiosity trumps his fear and he cautiously belly-crawls over to the bars, presses his face between two of them, peers, strains to see down the corridor to spy what the guards might be doing. He squinches his face harder against the iron as if by doing so his eyes and ears would actually function better. But he really can't make out a thing.

"Come back here and go to bed," Dikbar says, paternalistically. "They blew the south wing."

"Jesus, man, tell me what wing this is!"

"It's north, boy, north."

*The humor of it all!* Dikbar's punch line, "It's north, boy, north," delivered in monotone. Jared can't but laugh. *Could it have been funnier if mimed?* He reruns the scene. Dikbar in whiteface prancing around the cell, miming *The Mining of the Jail*. Nestling the explosives in place, watching all with parental fondness, patting the bombs with kitchee-coo strokes, blowing goodnight kisses . . . only to watch it all blow up in his own face. *Shit-faced!* With Revolutionary embarrassment, Marxist poo-poo, Maoist caca.

Jared crosses himself and chuckles out loud, "Jesus save us one and all!"

As both the noise and the reverie subside, Jared pitches back onto his own bunk. Dikbar's never left his. Jared's throttled by mirthless glee. All these revolutionary shenanigans have made him tired, dog-tired. Eyes closed, he crashes, slipping again, readily and eagerly, into the embrace of the night.

Jared's been in deep sleep for several hours when Dikbar's screams wake him.

"Help me! Help me!"

Jared bolts and half-jumps out of bed, not aware of where he's going, when he's elbow-rapped in the mouth. Blood seeps between his front teeth. Two large guards, Lone Ranger masks on their faces, are beating the shit out of Dikbar. The one who slammed Jared halts momentarily, tapping his baton against his own thigh, gauging Jared's reaction.

"What the fuck's going on, man?" Jared shouts, angrily.

"What are you gonna do, hippie asshole?" taunts the guard who whacked him. The other one has knocked Dikbar unconscious, yet continues to pummel him with a blackjack.

"C'mon, hippie asshole, show me what kinda man you are!" He beckons, calling Jared like one does a dog. "C'mon, badass hippie!"

Something inside tells Jared to fly up and deck the guy, like John Wayne in the movies—but Jared's never been in a real fight, so he freezes.

The taste of blood on his lips and the stings shooting through his jaw are wounds that waken all the demons of fright who ever visited him during a draft raid. Once again he's stone-cold paralyzed. Later he'll be further mortified by the pee stains down his left trouser leg.

Several times during the past few days, he's begun to reproach himself for his cowardice. Cowardice in terms of nonviolence. *Shit-kicking Bruiser was an act of cowardice too!* And now in fright he stomps all over such thoughts, drives them deeper within. Undeterred, as they retreat, they indict, lash out, *Coward! Coward!* Although he himself is a trainer in nonviolent resistance techniques—and therefore doubly able to protect Dikbar—he does not thrust his body forward in nonviolent offense. No, shamefully, he's stuck, deadened, comatose in violent fantasy.

In his moral defense arises a voice, a voice weak as if hoarse from repeated pleadings. This voice speaks about his bravery at the front line of many nonviolent protests. It proffers as evidence his suffering of bruises at the end of blunt clubs and from being jammed into the sides of paddy wagons. Yet the voice falls ever so slowly into a shaky stillness as it is demonstrated by the prosecutor that such protests are well publicized and have a protocol that restrains the police. No questions about it, Dikbar's threat is different. It occurs not on the streets but in a cage, inside a jail with two berserk guards.

*Coward! Coward!*

Dikbar's groans have stopped pleading for help, though his silent screams reach Jared's panicky ears. This is worse than his worst nightmare.

"You're just a fucking fag! I knew it," sneers Jared's attacker as he turns to his partner who shares his dark power. "He's a lily-assed cock-sucking fag. Just for that I should kick his ass for good."

Dikbar's punisher quits his task, roughly grabs his cohort, restrains him.

"No. Don't touch him. Let him be." Their purpose must not be sullied by personal indulgence. Jared's body was not the target tonight. Stepping back, they stand like dancers waiting for the music to resume, beside the heap of Dikbar's body, and glare at Jared with scorn.

"My oh my, you don't want to die for this uppity nigger? Maybe you're more of a white man than we thought!"

This purchases a riff of self-amused laughter. The one who challenged Jared makes a feint as if to come at him. Jared cowers on his bunk, curls up even tighter, covering his face with his hands, body rigid, fearfully bracing for more pain. But all that touches him is a cold wave of humiliation.

"God damn, peacenik, you're a fucking pile of puke. You don't even have the balls to fight!"

Fighting the humiliation, Jared uncurls and sits ramrod straight at his bed's edge. All he can muster is a forced stare and a theatrical half-sneer at the guards. As they leave each hack spits on Jared. One glob lands smack dab in the center of his forehead. It starts to drip down the side of his left eyebrow oozing over the center of his nose. But Jared is too stupefied, too embalmed to even wipe the spittle off. He just squats there like a skid row drunk with bird shit on his face. Just a statue splotched with white medals of a forgotten revolution. Sitting there during the time that Victor comes into the cell with another trustee and carries Dikbar away.

The morning's light finds Jared on his knees again. Not since the days of the Franciscan novitiate has he spent so many hours on his knees. Back then, like the other novices, he developed thick calluses from making the Stations of the Cross, crawling all the way around the chapel on submissive knees. It was self-inflicted pain, self-conscious pain, pain satisfied in its purpose. Now his knees burn and unforgiving pain repeatedly stab his calves.

Although this pain was not his choice, Jared knows how to use it. He invokes a stoical discipline, welcomes the anguish and hurt. Savors it as he knows it is real. *Is all of this real?* keeps ricocheting through his mind. *Is all of this real?*

Jared must make it real! So he does what he has been trained to do. Teach and preach. He does what so many prisoners in so many countries at so many times have done—He starts scratching on paper. With fierce effort, as fierce as his actions to protect Dikbar should have been, Jared starts clawing his brain and heart for words. Words with which to speak to himself.

Like a deaf and dumb mute, Jared is desperate for the miracle of words, the music of his tongue, to bless him, save him from the jail cell of himself. He scrawls the first words of his "Manifesto" on a pad he filches from Dikbar's cache. For unmeasured hours he labors and labors, till birth trades him the sound of life for the groans of his dying.

*To the People of America:*

*We live in a country built upon violence. Violence pervades and gives meaning to every facet of our lives. We're a market economy rapidly deteriorating into a military-driven economy. Over half of our businesses now focus on military projects, directly or indirectly. Education is a military incentive and reward. Politicians fashion America as the Savior of the World, turning Jesus into the Commander-in-Chief. Between ourselves, in the intimacy of our homes, this greater violence is ritualized. Men define their maleness in terms of threats of violence. Their authority is grounded in their ability to punish, beat their wives and children into submission. Women are continually offered up as acceptable sacrifices to wanton rape. Look at the newspapers—women half-clad, sold at a discount! Our media is pornography. Our sit-coms feed off interpersonal violence as their fodder. Each "Movie of the Week" is another offering to the insatiable god of violence. Who will save us from this cult of violence?*

*I ask this question because I desire to be saved. I come before you as both a symbol and the reality of your violence. There are few as violent as I. I dream violence. I speak violence. I watch violence. My nonviolence is even its own peculiar violence. For I have become a violent observer. I have watched a black man being beaten, and I only feared for myself. I have become what I most feared. I am a German who stands by and watches the Nazis tear Jews from their homes. I am the pacifist Quaker frontiersman who in 1758 watched the militia from the New Jersey Colony drive the Delaware Indians onto the first Reservation . . . then took up the plough. I am the exemplary, fervent, daily Catholic communicant who ignores the poor clamoring for crumbs on the steps of a bejeweled cathedral. Where is there a violence I have not committed? Where is there a woman I have not raped in my mind's eye, in my imagination? Where is there a child I have not willingly consigned to die in battle on my behalf—in my stead? There is no greater violence than I.*

*Where do I ask you to start this chain of anti-violence? Start with yourself, as I do with myself. Do not let the oppressive realization of the breadth and depth of violence in America kill you. Do not commit suicide! Do not escape into drugs or booze or therapy. No. Look at yourself and love yourself. Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves. He knew how wrenchingly difficult this is. Start with yourself. Forgive yourself for past violences. Do not deny or regret them. They are you. Accept your violences. Then, start in your home and at your work. Struggle where you can succeed. Make those little in-roads which are the small chips and cracks that will one day swell into an earthquake that will topple this culture of violence.*

*Remember, we are seeking nothing short of a New Creation, a true personal revolution. And the revolution begins with you! It comes from the barrel of your heart!*

Completed, totally exhausted, he carefully folds and creases the pages into the smallest square possible. He slips it inside his sock, under his right heel. Jail searches are more like pat downs, but he can't risk getting caught. *How to get it to Burston? Should Victor be trusted?*

As Victor rolls the lunch wagon up to his cell, a hack is with him.

"Roll up. Be ready after lunch."

"Shit, moving me again? Aw, fuck!"

No answer. He waits, doesn't eat.

When commanded, he rises and follows the guard. Through two gates, one cursory body search, then he's told to drop his roll.

*What room is this?* he wonders. Also wonders why he is unguarded, alone. *Strange*. He hears a corridor gate creak open and thud shut. Then a key at his door. It's the same guard, but this time with Matt.

Neither is chained, both are left alone. *Stranger*. Both move to take advantage of the moment. Jared embraces Matt and bounces him around in a half-bear-hug.

"How are you, man?"

"Okay. Okay."

Before either can say more, the key clicks and the door opens. Both are surprised as Sean's dad bounds in. His exuberance—hands clapping, broad smile, moving to slap them both on the back—only intensifies their bewilderment.

"Great news! I got the bail lowered to ten grand. That's only one thousand for deposit!"

Jared and Matt are two blanks.

"Hey, wake up, you two!" Sean's dad waves his hands in their faces. "Hey, you're free! *Free!*"

With "*Free!*" something breaks loose and both fall upon Sean's dad, wordless but pounding him on the back, shaking his hand. Without asking who bailed them out or voicing any comments, Matt and Jared hurriedly pick up their rolls and fall in behind Mr. Schneider as if following orders from the guard. For himself, Sean's dad can't understand why they aren't kicking their heels for joy. "Strange brew these anti-war guys, strange brew," he mutters, a sound lost amidst the clatter of jail cell grates and caged voices as he leads them to the discharge desk where Sean and Corey have already been processed.

## 5 - THE FOUR

The rumor had a life of its own, but the gathering at Sean's house would have been called, regardless.

"Corey, you're going to have to explain, man." The three look at him, thinking and feeling like a single entity.

"Why'd you cop a plea? We have the right to know, don't you think?"

What's been rumor is fact, as of four hours ago Corey pled guilty. It will make a terrible story on the evening news. The worst is that the other three didn't have a clue that this was going down. They had all met last week, two days after release, three weeks since the raid. It was a high. They rode the crest of each other's energy, not then aware of how cheaply this high had been bought at the cost of each one's despair. Today, the first of August, they are facing their first vision of the void.

Corey, whom most call a "pretty boy," is no stranger to controversy and public scrutiny. As president of the university's student body, he's been a highly visible leader for draft resistance and anti-war protest long before the other three had even begun to consider draft raids. Although recently graduated and the youngest of The Four, the media instinctively approached him after their bailout. All the radicals trusted him. Corey has that *something* that assures the people around him, even strangers, that he'll voice just what they are feeling. He's the most affluent and best connected of the group, and Sean had anticipated tapping his family's clout to help their case in court.

Corey stands by the center living room window, a broad picture window that visually carries one out onto the high River Road Parkway bluff overlooking the mighty Mississippi. He's absorbed in another dimension, as many have been while gazing upon the majesty of the Big Muddy. He's off trudging alongside the pioneers who first struggled up these thickly-treed cliffs. Then he's inside one of Mark Twain's scenarios of rafting life on the Great River. At another moment he's

watching a darker vision unfold – the massacre of Native Americans at river’s edge. His absorption has momentarily removed him from the unpleasantness of what must be done. In fact, Sean—bantamweight, bespectacled, and prematurely balding—has to yell, his anger almost lifting him off his toes—“Corey, you asshole, pay attention!”—before he turns towards them.

“Naturally,” catching himself falling out of reverie, “you deserve to know why.”

Moving back towards them Corey opts for an old musty rocking chair, almost an antique. He sits down, rocks slowly. Jared and Sean share the couch in front of him. Matt lies down on the floor near the picture window, flat on his back, gazing up at the ceiling. *Yoga nut!* flashes through Jared's mind. The image brings a quirky smile to his face.

Quite self-consciously, Corey positions himself at the center of their group vision.

“I want to say that it was my dad's influence or have someone to blame. I could run damage control on that around town. But the simple fact is, I'm in over my head. *I quit.*”

“You *quit?*” Sean's words slash at Corey's jugular. “What are you quitting? Peace? Justice? Truth? Integrity? Tell me, what did you *join* that you think you can quit?”

Sean has more in common with Corey than the others, and so he’s the one most threatened by Corey's actions. Although Matt and Jared have not spoken to either of them about their own jail experiences, both wonder, silently, whether similar experiences underlie Corey's decision. *Whatever!* What Corey is doing is, for them, just another peculiar happening in this whole bizarre series of events.

“Sean,” Corey begins as if talking to his younger brother, “there's a time to rush forward and a time to retreat. Now that we’re caught, the war is personal. No,” he pauses, searching for the accurate word, “no, the war is *intimate*. It's like

getting your Selective Service letter that opens "Greetings" from Uncle Sam. Then you know they mean *you*. Then you know you better take stock of your life, quickly."

Corey continually rocks, slowly, deliberately. He's delivering his little speech as if he's rehearsed it, though he hasn't.

"While I was in County, I took stock. I decided that a criminal record is neither a short or a long-term gain. If I plead guilty, my dad's been assured, I'll get a presidential pardon." He puts a stress on *pardon* as if citing its majesty as *presidential* would elicit their approval, *their* pardons.

Sean is at him before his statement ends. "I can't believe you. I fucking-A cannot believe you! You used to rap down the best analysis of why the war in Vietnam is destroying America. You used to reach people none of us could. You and your fucking-A charm—you're the only one of us who stands a chance of finessing the media during this trial, and now you're kissing us goodbye and pleading guilty?"

Sean's lost his cool. He throws his hands up and exhales loudly in exasperation and anger. Then he half-jumps to his feet and starts pacing back and forth, back and forth behind the couch. Abruptly he jerks to a halt, turns towards Corey, points a condemning finger. "Are we a short-term gain or a long-term loss?"

Louder, more emphasis with the condemning finger. "Tell me, short-term or long-term?" Again, "*Tell me!*"

Corey rocks and rocks, gently, rhythmically, in control. He addresses Sean almost as if he's the only audience. Oddly, Jared and Matt are somewhat detached from the gravity of Sean and Corey's encounter. It's clear that jail hasn't been for Corey and Sean what it was for them. Neither faults Corey for wanting out—at least they don't fault on the personal level. Neither Jared nor Matt are sure what actually is the "correct political stance" with respect to standing trial and doing prison time. Jared calmly observes. Matt quietly hears the stirring conversation, the mini-cross-examination unfolding between their partners in crime.

Corey responds, “Sean—” but then chokes. Sean’s reaction has triggered a deep, unfamiliar anger in Corey. He’s angry that the audience isn’t being swept away by his reasoning; isn’t agreeing with his carefully considered wisdom. Artfully, he doesn’t let it make him lose control. Within a reflexive swallow he regains his composure. His voice is smooth, fluid.

“Look at us. Leaders of the *Youth* Movement! Think about that. We’re all under twenty-five. No doubt, we’re bright, articulate, full of promise, but what experience of the real world do we have, really?”

*At the real world!* Sean snarls and glowers at Corey. The phrase marked many of his clashes with his father: two trains smashing head-on over and over again, each unyielding. Sean is seething at boiling point.

“Sean, we’ve had our fun. We’ve tweaked their noses. Look, I’m not doubting our wisdom. I’m just yielding to our ignorances!”

Corey pauses, as if expecting Sean’s applause at this clever phrasing—surely it provides a way out for all of them. But Sean’s clearly not swayed, so Corey broadens the throw of his net.

“Sean,” and for the first time Corey’s gaze includes the other two, “we know a lot about foreign policy and economics and social theory and all that. I know you’ve all read Marcuse and Chomsky, Norman O. Brown and the rest.”

No one checks off his reading list.

“I’m sure you’re all confident that LBJ lied to us, *every* night. That the moral sickness of even our most liberal liberals like McCarthy and McGovern has been hung out with the morning’s wash. But,” and here he leans slightly towards them, presaging a move he’ll later use so effectively before juries when actually prosecuting cases, “but which of us can say *with certainty*”—Corey instinctively inserts the phrase, “and beyond a reasonable doubt,” so often flung at him by his litigious father—“who killed JFK or Bobby or King?”

Pointing at Jared. "Or Fred Hampton in Chicago? Do you know for certain," he asks but doesn't wait for a response, "that Daley had him killed? Do you know that *for sure*?" Then back to the group, "Or about the real intentions of the Viet Cong? We've all laughed at the Domino Theory, but how do we know? Are we sure the Commies are any better than puppets like Diem and Ky?"

Corey stands and walks a half-step closer to the couch. He places his right hand on the couch's arm as if it's the jury rail. "For me, it's a matter of certainty. With you, I've acted in a specific way, a symbolic way, that says to all the world, 'Corey is certain the war is wrong!' But I don't feel certain." A pause, dramatic in intent. "I acted and reflected upon the act. And I judge the act *empty*!"

Sean writhes and explodes, "You *bastard*! You dirty, cowardly son-of-a-bitch! You . . . you stink!"

It's the same rage he taps into when he's hot with his father.

Jared looks over at Matt. Matt attentively rose to a sitting position at Sean's "cowardly." *What should we say?* mimes between them. Then Jared sighs in frustration as he states, "Man, only you can forgive yourself!" His words frame a weary dismissal of any attempt to analyze, justify, or couch their experiences in terms of reasonable arguments. Jail has moved the four of them into a peculiar realm of closeness . They are bound together with a heartfelt iron chain, crafted by each one's silent assent of "All the way!" Corey's action, more than his words, is the first crack in the chain.

As if Corey wasn't present, Jared says to the others, "For all I care, let him go. He came this far but he's looking back. That's no good for us." To Sean, "If he's not going to use that charm, he'll just be extra baggage. *Cut him loose.*"

Matt moves into the lotus position, nods in agreement.

Feeling the chasm ever-widening between him and them, Corey steps back and stands behind the rocker. He begins to slowly nudge it back and forth. He doesn't show it, couldn't bear to voice it even if he had the words, but he's

profoundly hurt. His vanity is wounded by his inability to tell this story to the three in such a way that they would beg him to stay. More, he's maimed by the fact that not one of the three stands to affirm their core need for his heroic leadership.

The logic and finality of Jared's evaluation calms Sean down. Still, his mind continues to race at light speed. "Fucking-A . . . Fucking-A . . . Sure, from the trial point of view I see your point, J. We've got to control the courtroom, or at least not get swallowed up. We need to be together."

But Sean still has an itch to scratch. "Man, I'm really pissed at you, Corey. I didn't expect you to be a traitor. Yeah, to me, to yourself. I know where you come from. What you're putting in the balance here—and it'll come around and bite your ass someday. Bite your fucking ass right off! ... I won't weep. Motherfuckin' no way!"

"Corey" —unexpectedly the sound of Matt's soft voice startles them. Up to now he's been characteristically reticent. Moreover, the others know that Matt and Corey have never had even a two-minute conversation, though Matt has heard Corey speak often and has told the others how much he's been influenced by the factual sweep of his anti-war arguments.

"Corey, you say the war's now intimate. But you've known that all along. You've known because, like me, you sat at the feet of the sage Professor Mulford Q. Sibley and drank in his history of nonviolence."

Matt's not advancing this memory as an appeal to reason. Rather, he's making his one stab at the heart of the beast. "You've known all along that nonviolence isn't a practice drawn from rational or even reasonable philosophical premises. You heard Sibley say over and over, to act nonviolently is to suspend the arguments of reason in an embrace of the common heart."

In his own peculiarly caring way, Matt continues: "You've been intimate with the war all along. I know your intimacy. I've been touched by your intimacy. You *are* nonviolent."

As happens when the dreaded moment of confession and confrontation passes, Corey momentarily slips into a gully of depression; pitifulness.

"I guess, I guess . . . jail just freaked me out. Just sitting there in that cage. Being totally out of control of the situation. I've never experienced that. There was no bailout." Agitation rides his words. "They nailed us for sabotage . . . I mean, they *really* nailed us."

This admission, this expression of fear snares Jared because this is the area of his own vulnerability. Unlike Matt, who is letting Corey go without preaching at him, Jared cannot look away. Corey's fear mirrors a Gorgon's face.

Memories of jail unnerve Jared. He stands and confronts Corey. "Prison! Is it prison you fear?" Booming out, then pacing, thrashing out ancient symbols with his hands, "For Christ's sake, man, if you don't resist then consider yourself your own captor. Do you grasp that? *Do you?*"

With each word Jared moves imperceptibly closer to Corey. His heart is on fire. Rising on deeply passionate words, shouting out, challenging ferociously, he's demanding that Corey *Resist!*

Accusations and angry impatience: "What do you think Jesus the Christ told us? Why do you think he risked the capture and death of his own body? Don't you see, he knew the primary prison is the one we choose each day when we refuse to act according to our hearts? Isn't that *clear?*"

Spitting out the God-gnawed bones: "Resisting evil means loving yourself and loving your neighbor. But—but you can't love your neighbor unless and until you love yourself!"

Prophecy: "The act that frees—the acceptable sacrifice—is resisting yourself. Resisting your own evil."

Exasperation: "You have to forgive yourself first before you can forgive others. Just what in hell do you think this war is telling us? What? *What?*" *The jury*

*turns its ear towards him, eager for the simple answer.* "That we're frantic towards *suicide*. That through war, our collective agreement, our debased covenant, we give others the right to kill us!"

Subsiding: "Christ, fuck it all, the goddamn acceptance of war is the acceptance of your own murder. It's a suicide pact, pure and simple."

Jared's rush to the border of holy madness rattles Corey. It snaps him out of his moment of self-pity and he starts to cover his tracks as he knows best, by getting out of Jared's way when he's fierce like this. In contrast Matt is carefully observing the interactions like a drama critic, still in lotus. Sean, as usual, is caught up by Jared's passion, but he's struggling to wring out something practical.

"What's this about suicide?" Sean asks with genuine puzzlement.

But Jared's once again a hermit chasing demons in the woods. *Suicide—oh My son Albert, I hear your wisdom: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide." It is so, the shadows know. Camus tied the whole berserk world up into a tight bundle.* Jared is sure of this, that *All we are doing is trying to kill ourselves.*

"Hey, Jared, we're over here," Sean snaps his fingers, jesting, acting out the hypnotist's role. "Wake up, man. What planet did you just drop off to?"

Self-conscious and embarrassed about his raving fugue, Jared flops onto an overstuffed River viewing chair. Matt leans over, still in lotus, and tugs Jared's trouser leg; it's an affectionate touch.

Corey loudly and rapidly claps his hands together, once, twice, three times—an indication that, for him, his part has been played and the scene is over. As he strides towards the front door, Sean steps towards him, not close enough to threaten but close enough to stamp his statement *Hand Delivered*. "You *have* betrayed us. But we can and we will handle that. Know, you've called upon yourself a greater curse. You've betrayed yourself. I fear for you on your journey."

Corey is only half listening and almost out the door when he feels the sting of Sean's final words. He doesn't stop. He hustles away without responding.

As Sean and Jared watch him hasten down the driveway to his car, Jared says, partly in

prayer, partly in dismissal, "God have mercy on him. He bears the mark of Cain."

"Just three," Matt raises his left hand and wiggles three fingers.

"Can't make a fist with three," Sean observes. "No fist. No fist for the Revolution." The perverse symbolic humor of this fact does not elude him. "Guys, we're stuck with two. Just enough for the Peace Sign—and one left over. Guess Aaren would appreciate our predicament!" At the mention of her name, Jared turns and looks quizzically at Sean.

"Aaren? Why are you thinking about Aaren? I mean, right now?"

Sean half-hears, half-ignores the question as he starts towards the kitchen. "All this has made me thirsty. Beer or anything for you guys?"

"Whoa, good buddy!" shoots Jared from his chair and with a long-stride and a long-arm he stretches to reach Sean's shoulder but snags only an elbow. "I want to know why Aaren is on your mind and in this conversation?"

Sean twists and with a snappy jerk frees himself from Jared's grasp. Without answering he enters the kitchen and opens the refrigerator. He's totally unaware of Jared's aching desire for Aaren. Sean simply believes that everyone wants to fuck her.

Head in the fridge, rattling a couple of bottles, Sean shouts back, "Why can't she be on my mind? Isn't Char on your mind a lot?"

"Yeah, man, but Char and I almost live together." Anxious pause. "Have you been banging Aaren?"

"Oooh, Jared, you're so crude, don't you know the *wimmen* are doing the banging now?" Sean accentuates his remark with a pelvic motion, indicating getting laid.

Jared flicks him the bird. "Cut the crap!"

Jared's heart is thumping but he's not sure he wants to ask—*Do I really want to know?*— whether Aaren's as free on love as her rhetoric implies. "What I want to know is if she's talked with you about the jailhouse bombing?"

Sean sidesteps the question, now in the mood to play out his sexual strutting. "Bombing? Naw, we didn't talk politics, *she* didn't have time to talk. And when we were through, she was only purring, not preaching!"

Jared is at a rare moment of loss. He can't maneuver the conversation without revealing his feelings. He slips on a serious mask. "She didn't say anything about sending a message to me in County?"

Sean's genuinely surprised. "Message to you! Damn, if there's one person she despises, it's you! Don't you know that?"

This condemning question momentarily shuts Jared down.

Sean returns from the kitchen with two beers and a seltzer for Matt.

*She really hates me?* The thought gnaws on Jared. He wants to shake it. He seeks a reversal. "She doesn't really hate me. She didn't say *hate*, did she?" He can hardly control the gulp reflex the question induces.

"Say, man, why are you so concerned about how Aaren feels? She hates all of us *heepies*," Sean chortles. "She hates all of us who preach nonviolence. She's a holy terror from hell." And milking that for all the macho it holds, he adds, "And a hellish terror in bed!"

The three drink and drift off into their own separate spaces. Sean sips the lust of his sexual adventure with Aaren. Matt disconnected when Sean started his

strutting. He has no truck with sex as warfare. Jared continues to nurse the hurt of rejection, and is working feverishly within to find a rationalization for it all.

*Somewhere I know I reach her . . .* In his mind's eye he foresees the day when she will come to him—redeemed and saved by her conversion to his spiritual ways.

The phone rings. It's the excuse they need to move along. The call is for Matt. His ex-wife, Sue, wants him over for dinner. Although they're divorced, Sue's still his best friend.

"Guys," he says as he makes motions to leave, "I think Corey's made the right decision for himself. Let him live with it. Let's drop it from our lives, agreed?"

Jared and Sean nod, *yeah, sure.*

"We've got to prepare for prison. The trial won't be ours to control. So let's not get trapped by false expectations. Lastly," and he says this as if harshly conscious that he's speaking his mind in as much detail as the other two have ever heard, "let's each in our own way to find our center. If we're not centered when we enter prison, we'll never weather its hurricane."

As Matt finishes he looks first at Sean and connects nonverbally, then at Jared. His face says—though Jared has not told him the names—*Bruiser, Dikbar . . . these and others, I know. Find your center!*

They all gather at the front door; embrace. Matt departs.

"What a strange guy."

"Not strange, just special," Sean appraises. "You were sure lucky to have him with you in County." It's said with a touch of envy. "He has a lot of strength to share."

Although Matt did not make time to meet with Jared after they were bailed out—he actually turned down several urgent requests—Jared senses that Matt knows all that happened, even if not the specifics. There’s something about Matt that Jared has never, till this moment, recognized or valued. It’s something he realizes he has never personally found, and it hits him that this might be what Corey’s searching for. *Matt is truly a strong man.*

Placing an arm around Sean's neck and playfully embracing/wrestling him, Jared jokes, “More than you know. More than you know.”

They linger—four arms dangling from Sean's chest—like parents who have just sent their kid off on the Greyhound bus to college for the first time. It’s a half-embrace, a half-hug, a touch of togetherness at a time of change that kisses them with abandonment. In that brief moment a riot of thoughts and urges chase each other through Jared's mind. He wants to talk with Sean about County, about Dikbar and Bruiser—but he can't.

*Damn!* He’s lost a connection to Sean at the mention of Aaren. *If Sean is screwing Aaren—God, take that thought away!*—then he could never . . . *Why do I feel betrayed?*

As Jared watches Sean walk back into the kitchen with the empty bottles, he feels a rush of shame. *Have I been honest about all this?* It’s a thought he’s had quite often in recent days. Agitated, he struggled with his need to make contact with Sean, but gave it up. Worse, he wasn’t even able to bring the matter up with Char, although after lovemaking he normally babbles to her about everything. Last night he found himself spewing out all kinds of feelings and thoughts but nothing about County. A small voice inside his head had promised, *I will . . . after talking with the guys.* But now what? Corey’s out. Matt’s inaccessible. And Sean . . . fuck, Sean’s just polluted the waters. *Shit!*

Nevertheless, Jared takes a stab. “Hey, good buddy, do you think it was the FBI who beat Matt and me up?”

Sean half leans through the kitchen doorway. "I know for sure it wasn't. My dad had a call." He says it as casually as if he were saying, "Honey, change the channel, would'ja?"

"What do you mean your dad had a call?"

Sean, this time, steps fully back into the room to answer. "Like I said, a call—one of those anonymous things, from some crank who said, 'Next time, we're gonna cut your boy for fish bait.' Something like that."

Sean's hands are full. He's fumbling a bowl of pretzels while balancing a platter of cheese and crackers. Under his armpits, two more bottles of beer. "Want some?"

Jared's bemused by Sean's nonchalant attitude. "Jesus, Sean, *I* got beat up! Aren't you afraid?"

Sean takes his spread to the couch, sits down, grabs and hits the remote, flicks quickly through the channels. "Damn, nothing but dumbass baseball. I can't wait for the pre-season." Then, as an afterthought, as he finds a Jimmy Cagney movie—his favorite, *White Heat*—with a raised pretzel he announces, "The FBI's in control. They're in control of the whole fucking thing. You just got messed with by a local yokel deputy. Don't worry, you're safe."

Jared stands there, on hold, watching Sean recede into the soul of the tube. The word laughs at him. *Safe*.

*Well, maybe I am safe, now. Who knows?* It's a thought, one of those on the list he really doesn't want to mull over, that he allows himself to ignore. Catching Sean's playful mood Jared comes over and plops down next to him, sticks his big mitt into the pretzel bowl. He glances at the TV. "Cagney?" Then, in his mind, *Great!* Cagney has always appealed to him. He has that daring, that sly glint that states, "I'm out here on the edge and I'm having fun!" Jared reaches a second time, mauls the pretzel bowl. Sean slaps his hand. Two beers are popped. Jared laughs.

After the movie, they mindlessly watch several sitcoms and avoid the news. Before they separate, Sean asks Jared to go up north to his place on Lake Superior for several weeks. "Trial prep's a full month away. For just doin' nuttin'. We've earned it. Fishing, sleeping, eating." Sean adds with a devilish grin, "Sacred mushroom dreaming!"

Jared waves him off, thinking, *Jesus, that's all I need now—daymares!*

Sean continues checking off his tantalizing list. "We can water ski . . . read if you want . . . write . . . and," then he stops and accents with a big huff, "and *broads!* Just more man-hungry broads than you've ever seen, in the little towns around," with a wicked chuckle, "just dying for a hunk of notorious Big Anti-War Man!"

Jared has to grin. Sean's getting semi-tempting. "I mean, with the press we've gotten, we'll get laid before and after every meal! C'mon, man, pack it up with me!"

Jared would normally have succumbed to Sean's enticements. They had great times there before—however, not as much luck with the local women as Sean now forecasts. More than that, however, something's driving him in another direction.

"No, my friend, I can't do that. There are some matters I have to tidy up. Some people I have to see before the trial begins."

Sean's too distracted to press, so he accepts Jared's vague excuse. In a way he's glad to have some time just for himself. To be away from anyone seriously involved in resisting the war.

The trial is set to begin in about two months. Probably in early October and each has begun to count and measure, handling time in that unusual way it must

be handled by people who are terminally ill. Jared knows, ironically, that he does not know where he's going. Only that the people he has to see are all within himself. Those different Jareds whom jail, Dikbar, Bruiser and Aaren have summoned.

## 6 - THE MESSENGER

Jared's Catholic world: It runs like a nightly revue through his dreams. All he ever wanted was to be a priest. Or at least that's what the family expected. Life was simple: "God calls, you answer!" His was a world of obedience: a commandment to obey parents and the absolute duty to obey God. But how does one hear the call? Jared wasn't sure.

Things in his life went quite automatically for years—the years of obedience to his father. He obeyed by enrolling in the minor seminary. It wasn't that his father said, "Go there!" No, everyone simply assumed he would. He was the last of seven children and none of his siblings had entered the religious life. This was almost a family sin of disobedience in the Irish Catholic world. Someone—at least one child—had to give his life to God on behalf of all others. That was the family obligation and Jared's fate.

So he spent his high school years at Mount St. Francis Seminary. He was a holy boy and a holy jock, ripping up the hardwoods and having to struggle with the sin of pride as he heard, "You're really great! God, what a gift to give up. You could be a star in college ball!" Coaches from other teams asked him, "What college are you going to?" Tempted him with the capital sin of pride. No, he obeyed, and the next step was the novitiate in Chaska, a year secluded from "the world," one of intense spiritual formation and study. But like most young seminarians, Jared struggled with the call—intellectual doubts spiked with hormonal cravings. Had he heard correctly? Was this really what God wanted him to do—be celibate? Then, one day, a messenger arrived.

Friar Albert is a "late vocation," one of those who enters the monastery after some life-altering event, usually a tragedy. Otto knows a bit about the Vietnam War because his brother Thomas, five years older, has been over there for several years, but then not too much because he and Thomas were never close. Now three

veterans have entered the novitiate right after they returned home from the battlefield. They don't talk much about the war and they're a bit cliquish given that they're older. Most novices are in their late teens like Otto, just graduated from high school in the minor seminary system. He's seen these vets together now and then, sharing smokes and the kind of laughter that comes from sharing an inside joke.

Otto's seen Albert mostly in his self-appointed role as monastic photographer. However, he's had no more than cursory exchanges with him. At times he's overheard bits of conversations but nothing of note. Of all the novices, Otto knows Albert the least. So the note slipped under his door was more than a surprise—"You got to talk with me." Its straightforward urgency was perplexing.

"C'mon in! Don't gawk like a tourist!"

As Otto has noted before, Friar Albert seems to always have a camera, the mechanical eye, draped around some part of his body. Even while chanting the Divine Office, Otto knows that it's hidden in a fold of his robes. He has fantasized that Albert pulls it out and snaps a quick one of the *Real Presence!*

Albert motions him into the dimly lit room, remaining half stooped over a light-box which is a slide viewer and the sole source of light. It takes a half-minute or so for Otto's eyes to fully adjust to the twilight atmosphere. Even in this shadowy world what he can make out is certainly more than what he finds in other monks' rooms. This one has the feel of an inner sanctum. He squints and sees fuzzy outlines of posters, photos, and film strips taped or tacked to the walls. It's certainly more a workshop than a room for prayer and meditation. More striking—and in stark contrast to the bareness of his own room—is a huge basket of freshly cut flowers. Carnations and roses—*curiously, all pink!*

Albert head-beckons him to step closer. Otto moves like a moth to flame.

"You should leave this place!"

Otto hears the sentence but not its meaning as it slips, slightly muffled upward from Albert's face-down lips. He's intently looking at one slide, pushing it this way and that.

"You should leave this place," he repeats.

"What?"

Still not looking at him, "You should leave this place."

Albert suddenly straightens up, almost knocking Otto backwards, walks past him and flips on the central light. As the harsh illumination unmasks their surroundings, Otto jerks a step further back in shock—from all sides it feels like he's being attacked!

*Albert's world:* "Attack of the eyes!" Eyes from an army of war photos. Splattered all over one whole wall. Hungry eyes, but not for food. Laughing eyes, but not for jokes. Longing eyes, but not wishing that you were there. Faces of American soldiers dressed and armed to the teeth. Faces of yellow people in black pajamas and sandals walking beside oxen. Otto recognizes from TV that these are Vietnamese farmers. Albert is clearly obsessed with faces and eyes.

*What?* Otto begins to feel the creeps—someone is looking at him, spying, sneaking up behind him—he turns and locks in on a set of eyes peering out from a gigantic mushroom cloud that rises to form a skull whose eyes, once the illusion is grasped, are the Earth and the Moon. He voices a soft, startled, "Jesus, Mary, Mother of God, protect me!" as he blesses himself.

More horror: Another enlarged photo shows a monk—Otto presumes he's Buddhist—sitting meditatively before a huge Gothic crucifix that holds Christ's body, broken and torn, with gouged flesh, blood streaming in every obscene direction and—horror of horrors!—Christ is headless!

"Oh sweet merciful Jesus!" Out loud, blesses himself, again. Otto is transfixed, immobilized.

Unnoticed, Albert has begun his ritual chain smoking and the wispy trails float, surrounding and irritating Otto. This nastiness makes him acutely aware of Albert and he once again hears his odd directive, "You should leave this place."

"What?"

"Listen, I've been watching you and it's clear, *crystal clear*, you gotta take a hike over the hill."

Albert doesn't wait for Otto's response. He's shuffling pictures, moving slides on and off the viewer, pausing now and then to draw Otto's attention to a specific image like a docent on a museum tour. Then he steps over, turns off the lights again, steps back, and like magic—without Otto's hearing the click—images appear against another wall, tall, wide, sharply focused, almost life like.

"See that?"

Otto looks at the projected image and as Albert brings it into focus a young, scraggly bearded face appears. It's a soldier with an index card taped on his helmet, stating "War is Peace!" Otto laughs.

Albert grumbles, "Funny? Jesus, Otto, you're—" but it gets suffocated by two quick hits and a deep exhale.

"Sorry. I mean, look he must be kidding? I mean, you know, he's killing people every day and he's certainly not enjoying the Peace!"

"Asshole!" Not noticing Otto's shock at the profanity, he urges, "Look closer, man. Whaddya see?"

As Otto steps nearer the projection, Albert blurts out, "It's me, man, it's me." Almost a whimper, "It's me, sucker. Look at that idiot. He believes he's waging peace. Look at him. *Look into his eyes!*" The eyes do fascinate and Otto is moved. He's about to say something when Albert presses forward, "Do you know what I did?"

Before Albert answers his own question, he spins around and slaps and tapes another enlarged photo on the lighted wall.

"*Thoc!* You got to understand Thoc."

Then Albert starts talking like a man with caffeine jitters, quickly, darting, frenetically, at times stuttering. "I was an assassin. On a team of assassins. But, but . . . no one will admit that, not—" He turns to check Otto's comprehension.

"You don't believe me, that in war there are assassins?" More smoke flares forth, "Jesus, are—are you—? You *are* a moral virgin!"

Albert slowly backs away and moves from the photo to the slide-board, picks two, three, slips them into the carousel, then in a rising panic—something he deals with daily—he starts rapidly projecting slides and as rapidly speaks to their illuminated faces on the wall. His frenzied passion conquers his stuttering.

"*Napalm!* Burns the skin and eats flesh like dragon breath. *Anti-personnel bombs!* Turns people—shit, even kids and old ladies into Swiss cheese. *Booby traps!* That guy lost his leg. He was lucky. See that! *A kid*, just a baby, dropped a grenade into that bar room."

Then up comes the face. Suddenly, Albert is stone-cold quiet. He appears caught, as if just nabbed by the cops. It takes a minute, then Otto cracks the silence. "Thoc?"

Albert coughs, takes out a new pack of cigarettes, slowly tears the wrapping, then lights one up and speaks through a cloud of smoke, "Right, Thoc." The words drag out from Albert's mouth. "He was one of my kills."

"What?!"

Albert pulls up a chair, sits, nasty laugh. "Or the one who killed me . . ."

Quiet suffocates the room.

*Motherfucker!*

Stillness. Faces. Eyes. Thoc. Otto is bewildered. "Why am I here?"

Albert crushes his barely smoked fag and stands up, getting back to his mission. "Why *did* you come to this place? Afraid of your d-d-dick? Or being eaten by some broad's p-p-pussy?"

*What?!*

Thomas had always taunted him, called him a pussy every time he whipped his ass shooting lights out at "horse." Big brother-little brother horseplay but it was more than that. Thomas didn't like his little brother. Coming to the seminary was Jared's not so sub-conscious way of one-upping the war hero. Unknowingly tapping into all this, Albert's remark roundly pisses him off. An ugliness crawls up and all around Otto's face: eyes that pierce his "big brother" Albert with little brother spite, lips that curl ready to spit, cheeks that harden, struggling to control a tongue that will only lash back with words that will evoke further punishment. Raging within, Otto pivots towards the door. Albert lurches and throws a forearm around Otto's throat, almost locking him in a half-nelson, only the bulky robes foil the move. Otto instinctively twists around and, face to face, slips his arms under Albert's armpits and lifts up the slightly shorter monk—athletic fingers pressing on cheekbones, ready to crush. Thomas was stunned the day Jared did that—the distance between them widened into a chasm. Here, the intimacy of the embrace, its virile heat, is something the Novice Master might interpret as too erotic for brotherly love. Both men freeze at the edge of a violence neither seeks.

Albert breaks the tension, snipes: "No doubt, Otto, you *do* need a good hot fuck, that's for sure."

Otto recoils. The statement frightens him. It's not Albert's foul language that startles him, rather he hears them echo his gravest self-doubt. *True?* He lifts Albert higher, and in one powerful stroke, slams his friarly feet onto the ground, as if trying to stake him there, then shoves him backwards. Albert stumbles, staggers,

and falls flat on his holy ass. He sits stunned for a moment, then laughs, rolls over and gets up off the floor. He whips out his pack and within a breath has a cig on his lips, lights it. To Otto he looks like a devil, horns rising amidst clouds of billowing smoke.

Otto struggles with whether to flee or fight. Words pour out—he’s cross-examining Albert. “What are you doing? Why are you here?”

Albert rips Thoc’s photo off the wall and holds it like a piece of evidence being shown to the jurors. His voice is from a morgue. “Thoc.” Tapping the wall, “I told you. *My* kill, damn, or he killed himself first. Immolation. Doused himself in gasoline and went up. *Poof!* Like a Roman candle.”

Otto’s compassion distracts him, “God, how sad. Was he crazy?”

“Crazy?! Jesus, Otto, he was holy . . . holy . . . *holy*, not crazy. Only me, *I* was crazy!”

Abruptly, with ambush startle, Albert is back at Otto. “How the fuck can you, in here? Look, you g-gotta get out of here. In here you, *they*—you know!—they’ll lead you into false worship. You’ll end up being a priest, not a saint. That’s what you want, r-right, to be a saint?”

Otto is totally flustered, tongue-tied. Albert shakes his head, both disapproving and disappointed. He puts down his smoke, steadies himself, smooths out his robes. Turns towards Otto. Coughs. Kneels, assumes a confessional posture.

“Listen. Look at Thoc. He was the leader of the Buddhist nonviolent resistance. His followers caused no end of problems for us and the South Vietnamese government.” He pauses. The next words come out sounding false, and it’s clear that Albert knows he never believed it. “He was the enemy. Worse than the Viet Cong. *I had no choice.*”

Albert takes out his rosary beads, closes his eyes and raises his arms to heaven. Otto watches his lips move in silent prayer. *Forgiveness? Mercy?* Otto is at a loss as to what to do next.

Abruptly, Albert rises. His voice is steady, soft. "I spent six months undercover as his disciple. I sat in lotus meditation till I thought my d-dick would fall out my a-asshole. I suffered all the time because I was a good soldier. I was waiting to find the right time to k-kill him. And ya know what happened?" He lights up yet another cigarette. Puffs, long drags. Crushes it, half smoked. The mound of the nicotine dead in the ashtray grows.

"Sh-shit, one night he calls me in and tells me," he blesses himself, "Jesus, tells me what I was about. *He knew*. G-goddamn it, he knew!" New smoke. "Instead of cursing me, instead of calling in some thugs to do me in, he blesses me! He tells me—Jesus, oh, Jesus, can you believe it!—he picks up *our* Bible and reads from Daniel, a passage: 'I will kill this dragon without sword or club.' Then he says, 'This is written for you. You are the messenger of he who kills without sword or club.'"

Otto doesn't have to ask. Clearly this is why Albert is here, searching for Thoc's meaning. But what does it mean, "without sword or club"? Otto wants to ask but Albert doesn't stop to talk about himself. He steps over and clicks another slide. It's Albert in saffron robes, nestling a charred body in his arms. It's a *Pieta*-like shot. Albert speaks but not to Otto. It's as if he's asking the question of himself, "Do you know what he's saying to me?" Answering, "He said, *The children*."

"What?"

"The children. He was always talking about "the children." How God doesn't want us to kill the children."

The messenger —*Thoc!*— is now speaking to Otto; he hears him. *How could Albert have known?*

*The Novice Master asks, "Tell me about your family." Joey. Young boy, just two years older. My brother, Joey, frothing at the mouth, me, standing, yelling, "Mom, Dad, something's wrong with Joey!"*

*"Encephalitis, Mrs. Jennings." The doctor turns to Dad as if the medical explanation is too burdensome for her. "The disease comes from Africa. It's spread by mosquitoes and when it bites the young it's almost always fatal." Then the death sentence: "They rarely make it through puberty."*

*"May he rest in peace," the Master blesses himself.*

*Nothing more need be said. Both know how the wheel of spiritual justice turns. Jared is called to give up his life to give fuller meaning for a life given up.*

*"But he killed himself. Suicide. He'll go to hell! Forever!"*

Albert is weeping. His tears harden back into fierce eyes. "Hell?" His left arm sweeps the area forcefully. "We're in hell, *now!* This place is hell as long as we k-kill for our God. Listen, Otto, Thoc *did not* die in my arms. No, a thousand times no. He was reborn. *I* died in *his* arms. He slew me with his love—love for the children I was killing. All of us, children of the One God."

Both men stand, stare at one another, perplexed. Albert: "All I know is this, Otto. I've seen terrible things. I've looked into the eyes of men who've done terrible things. I've done terrible things. I'm not forgiving myself, but God does work in mysterious ways. Thoc spoke to me so I could speak to you. Hear me?"

It's over. Whatever was meant to be said has been said. Albert has spoken what Thoc revealed. Albert knows that it was a message for Otto, knew the first time he looked the kid in the eyes—saw Thoc's eyes. It's the reason he's avoided getting to know him. He's put off this day as long as possible. Not because he feared for Otto but because he feared for himself. Once Thoc speaks to Otto through him—once the message is delivered—then Albert has to get about his own

work. He's come here to look at the eyes of his fellow friars to see if he could find God's eyes. Somehow he knows that living here is part of his own journey, a battlefield where he has to learn how to kill the dragon without sword or club.

*What more is there to do?*

Exhausted, as if saying farewell, he whispers, "You've got to leave."

"You stay and I leave?" More incredulous than asking for clarity.

Albert nods, head bent in resignation.

*I came here because of Joey.* He doesn't want to share this with Albert, but he hears himself speaking before he can censor himself, "I came here because of Joey. He was just a kid. I was just a kid. Why did God let that happen?" Otto hears the echo of his father's graveside despair.

Albert: "I don't know. I really just don't know."

Otto: "That's why I'm here. Like Thoc said, for the children. To bless the children. Baptize them. Teach them the ways of the Lord."

Albert takes out another cigarette and lights it as Otto steps away, turns, leaves, fingering his rosary as he walks back towards his room.

Walking alone, no one else in sight, Otto speaks to God, his dad and himself: "I'm to leave?" Pauses. Shakes his head, "I don't think so."

Spiritual justice: His meeting with Albert gives him no rest. Like all novices, Friar Otto has had doubts about his worthiness to become a monk. Such doubts plague all souls who seek spiritual treasure. The Novice Master counseled, "If you don't have doubts, then most certainly come talk with me!" But what Albert has raised in Otto's mind goes beyond doubt. He has delivered a message, possibly from God the Father through this holy monk Thoc. It didn't really matter how he heard—*God does work in mysterious ways!*

Day after day, Otto is convinced, then not. *Is Albert a nutcase? Working out his guilt through me? Maybe. But I came here to hear God's call. Is he calling from Vietnam? Is this why Thomas is there and I'm here?* He prays. Spends excessively long stints kneeling in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Late nights and early mornings in deep meditation on the sufferings of Jesus hanging from the cross. *Was I to leave the world? Or live in the world? Joey! Joey! I love you. Help me. Help me now. I need you, my brother!*

As is Otto's way—as it has been for Jared—he often gains spiritual insight while shooting hoops. Such a day comes: The sun is just rising. He's on the basketball court, ball in hand. The front of his shirt says, "Knights of Columbus, CYA" and the back, "St. George's Dragon Slayers" with the number 7. At court's edge he does some preliminary stretches. Then he starts a routine: lay-ups, jump shots and hooks. His athletic ability is apparent. He stops at the top of the circle, pauses to look at the rising sun.

Suddenly, with a lurch, he escalates the intensity. Rains shots through the basket like a pro: twenty-footers, top-of-the-key hook shots, left hand, right hand. He is a man possessed. Huffing, puffing, up and down the court, shot, rebound, again, again, faster, harder, *push it, push it* until at last he collapses, exhausted, face down on the grass.

*I hear!* Chest and shoulders heaving, he grips the grass, pulling up soil. With a clod of the fertile earth in each fist he rolls on his back and crumbles them onto his face and shirt. *I die with you O Lord!* He smears himself with the dirt, smears it all across his chest. Lies there a long moment. Shouts, "I rise with you O Lord!" Stands, takes the roundball, palms it, lifts it as high as his reach allows and then slams it down as if planting it in the ground. He looks at the hoop, raises his arms to the sun, implores the heavens, shouting, screaming, screeching: "I hear and I obey." Over and again: Accepting, rejoicing, a bit manic and at last, upon his knees, eyes towards heaven, "I hear and I obey."

All said, he turns and walks, without the ball, back to the monastery.

The Novice Master stands gazing out the window behind his desk. His thoughts are far off, grappling with the action this young novice has just taken. Friar Otto stands in full monastic garb, halfway across the room. It is noon. The sun is halfway up the window.

"Are you *sure*?"

With a sigh of empty resignation, "I'm sure, Reverend Father."

The Novice Master knows it is futile to try and convince young men to live the celibate life, knows that it has to be a gift from God. So, although shocked that this is coming from Jared, whose family he knows so well, he knows his task. He must make certain that this young soul is sincere—he must put him to the final test. Turning towards Otto, the Master upbraids him, "I am disappointed!"

Otto holds his ground, says, "I have prayed, I have searched my soul, I—"

"What foul thoughts have led you astray?"

Otto spurts out defensively, "The children!"

The Master is caught short—he has no idea what "The children!" means.

"What? *What* did you say?" The Master advances. Their faces almost touch.

"The children, Master. I must serve the children." But it comes across as a weak and lame excuse, sounds like whimpering, even to himself. Otto wishes that Friar Albert would come in and explain it all.

"You are denying God's call because of children?" The Master can only assess that this is a most clever way to cloak his real desire. "Children?" An embarrassed silence floats between them, "You mean you want to have sex with a woman. That's it, isn't it?"

Not knowing what to do next, feeling totally bewildered even by his own statements, swamped by a rush of doubts as to whether he's truly grasped what Albert meant, uncertain as to what is really driving him to this act of madness, the young Friar reaches back and speaks in the language he knows the Master will understand, possibly accept.

His head jerks slightly backward, lips trembling and hands shaking. "I am unworthy of God's call." Hurriedly, "I, I am impure in thought and heart . . . I am weak in will!"

This confession draws forth the Master's compassion. "Yes, truly, a monk's life is a hard life."

The Master pauses. Beyond his own disappointment, he's concerned for Jared's father, knowing how much he wants this, his youngest, to become a priest. Still, a priestly vocation has to come from within. No sense shaming the boy for what he doesn't have.

"It is good that you've listened to hear God's Call. It is good that you tried. Now," sighful resignation, "go back to your loving mother and father, your family—give my love and blessing to all the Jennings. You are a good boy, Otto—" he pauses, renames him. "You'll make a good husband, Jared."

With a blessing and a fond touch on the cheek, the Master—accepting as God wants him to do at these sad moments—dismisses him, "Go. Do God's work in the world."

Jared quickly returns to his room, disrobes Friar Otto for the last time, packs his belongings and heads for the monastery garage where he knows a ride is already waiting to take him to the train station. Fittingly, it is the feast day of his Order's founder, St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1964.

Friar Albert watches from the chapel window. He's trembling and crying, feeling abandoned and gripped by the self-hatred that visits him every time after a

kill. He tracks Jared's progress towards the waiting car, suitcase in hand, walking slowly, climbing in—*Otto, one of my kills!*

Albert wants to die right there, but then—*poof!*—the image of Jared lights up like a Roman candle. His heart feels suddenly, strangely lighter.

*Thoc is no longer here!*

## 7 - LAST RALLY

"The class consciousness of the American people must be raised. Revealing the internal contradictions of this racist, imperialistic war is the only way to reach the workers, the true revolutionary class. Listen, my brothers, my sisters, be strengthened by the words of Lenin. Do not be led astray into whiling away your time in the traps of cultural revolution. Sexism and racism can only be combated on a battleground drawn by the needs and necessities of the working class. My brothers . . ."

Jared stands off to the side of the crowd, shifting slowly from foot to foot, brushing off the chill of the frozen streets, ears exposed to the brisk wind. They're turning deep red. *Better red than dead*, he smirks, inverting the popular patriotic slogan, "Better dead than red."

It's so cold—wind chill of five below!—that few pedestrians are afoot this morning on the streets of downtown Minneapolis. Passersby must be wondering what is so important that this gaggle of crazies has assembled before the Federal Building to defy not only the government but the weather.

*Above the woman speaking, above her head he sees the clear, crystalline air of the post-revolutionary world in which, all having now been won, comes forth the Revolutionary Vanguard.*

*High on a platform raised above the roiling masses now liberated comes the Vanguard to liquidate itself. Here on this first day of working-class rule the Vanguard rises to denounce itself as too historically mired in pre-revolutionary nostalgia to be of service anymore.*

*Now her voice swells on this Day of the Peoples' Triumph: "My brothers"—she momentarily stifles a throaty "Oh comrades!"—"Oh, liberated peoples! We, the Vanguard, have served our historical function. Today we proclaim to you our*

*willingness to render ultimate service. Today we rid you of the last impurity, that of nostalgia. We wipe clean Party memory and history. We offer you ourselves."*

*On cue, the platform rises twenty feet higher. Two huge billowy Red Banners cascade in folds onto the ground. Now no decorations remain. The platform is bare except for the twenty-odd people. The sun brightens. It is indeed a crystal day, almost free of pollution. Suddenly, as if having found the appropriate instant, the platform evaporates in a gush of fire and smoke, so quickly as to hurt the eyes before they have a chance to blink. Thus it has been calculated, this moment of pure oblation, the transfiguration of human history. That fleeting spot in the historical struggle: the instant of revolutionary suicide.*

*So it might go, reflects Jared. How stupid but how possible.*

The young woman—an Athena who strikes the eye even while wearing camouflage—takes a half-step backwards from the frozen metal microphone and thrusts a gloved fist up towards the heavens. "*We shall WIN!*" she bellows as others thrust fists, some clap, and some merely move, unspeaking, sideways onto their other foot, trying to keep warm. With her small brood of disciples this woman purposefully struts past Jared, the only other speaker at the rally. It's a ritualized snubbing, a disdain echoed by two of her male followers who bump and jostle Jared as they leave. Athena is Aaren. *Liquid Fire.*

As much as he's smitten, Jared has to restrain himself from laughing at her theatrics, at this comedic Marx Brothers spectacle. While the whole anti-war Movement's begun to appear to him as a vaudevillian escapade, her style of far left politics is its own parody. Forgiving her that, he admires her bravery. She risked a lot by coming to the rally.

Jared knows that a New Year has already dawned in more ways than one. A great fear has settled upon the anti-war community with the bombing of the county jail. Paranoia's running deep. Even "The Four minus one," as Matt joked, could not

agree on the best way to interpret their trial or even whether to attempt to assume a leadership position.

Their trial had been brief—actually truncated. The Feds cleared their calendar and hurried The Four to court as fast as legalities permitted. Corey copped his plea and they became officially re-baptized by the media as The Three. Each had his day in court. Actually, more like an hour and a half in court because the judge limited them to giving personal testimony only. They were prevented from talking about why they raided the draft boards. It was as if the backdrop of the Vietnam War didn't exist.

To carry this off, the Feds had dropped the sabotage charge and then indicted them with "interference by force, violence or otherwise" against the Selective Service System. Now, all that had to be proved was that they broke into and entered the draft board. They were set up like three ducks in a row. *Pow! Pow! Pow!* Each was found guilty within seventy-two hours of opening statements. At Christmas time they were sentenced. It was an atomic bomb: "Five years." The maximum. No minimums. Jared saw the plane fly by dragging its apocalyptic banner, *The End*.

Unexpectedly, theirs became the longest sentence ever meted out to white anti-war radicals, and it had its effect. Jared realizes that today's rally is a testimony to that truth and the fact that the "Good Guys" are not winning. *Shit, not even show or place!*

For him their sentence is but a refrain adding "white middle-class kids" to the historic litany of governmental slaughter, such as the Cherokee Nation's Trail of Tears. He knows that The Three are merely a symbol, yet the severity of their sentence reveals that they are a significant, not an irrelevant symbol. This fact is underscored by the government's choice not to ignore them, not to trivialize them. Insightfully, Jared realizes that the State sees The Three as undermining a cornerstone symbol of its own sacred politics.

With a flinch of humility, Jared's grasp on the meaning of the trial brings back something one of his uncles attempted to "Get into your thick Mick skull!" several years ago, which is just now beginning to make sense. Uncle Eugene was a priest and an internationally famous theologian who had been deeply involved with Dulles, Kennedy and McNamara. This "Defender of the Faith," as others in the family called him—for he was ever quoting this historic Council or such-and-such a theologian, even to explain something as simple as why Catholics genuflect in church—this priestly uncle had spoken of America's "Civil Religion." It was for him the demon faith of secular America. He defined it as that cluster of cultural symbols that holds a country together, what others also call the "Religion of the Republic."

Jared remembers: It's a religion that steals bits and pieces from Christianity and Judaism but is more the stepchild of paganism and astrology. "Notice the occult symbols on the dollar bill," his uncle told him. Jared never forgot this lesson, hearing in the moment the crisp snap of the five-dollar bill. "Juxtaposed to *God*, but it's still a secular order. See"—and his finger circled the dollar's Great Seal—"Seclorum."

Uncle Eugene, O.F.M., Conventual—who was actually raised *Maurice* but cherished his monastic name more than his birth name—pointed out that the uniqueness of America is, indeed, its Declaration of Independence. But "Independence from what or from whom?" Then he'd answer without waiting, even in later years when Jared already knew the answer.

"As taught in school, it was from King George and from the notion of the 'Divine Right of Kings.' What's *not* taught is that in not adopting a specific Christian denomination—the vaunted 'separation of church and state'—that in actuality a *new* religion was created."

Right now, Jared realizes that he has actually unmasked, by his criminal deeds, the truth of his uncle's insight. *But should I speak about this to this audience? Will they understand?* In the flash of time it takes him to step up to the mic, the lectures from his uncle—*what else to call them?*—return. He hears the

scholarly tone as his uncle orates: "History reveals that every State power has been offset, at times challenged, by a traditional religious power. More often the story is that the religious power kowtows to the secular, as Christianity did to Constantine!"

*Ah, this is where it all begins – the Church kneels to the State!*

"Without doubt, the American Revolution was an original revolution, without historic or anthropological precedent. Note—pay particular attention to this shift—as the Church power becomes invisible, the fledgling American State sets itself up as godly!"

Jared hadn't had the training back then to fully follow his uncle's train of thought. But when he attempted, two years ago, to become a "Roman Catholic Conscientious Objector" he was told that there was no such thing. Forced to investigate the whole matter of "Peace Churches"—those who did officially qualify for CO status—and the "wall of separation" between church and state, he found that the religious argument was not only *not* persuasive but not the moral language of the draft board.

This realization deflated and flattened him because his only tools for revealing his conscience were his theological language and the Roman Catholic moral tradition. At the same time, the Church itself offered him—and others struggling with like questions—no sanctuary. In desperation, he had fled to the local, haphazardly organized "Draft Resistance Center." Only at this Center was Vietnam discussed as a moral issue.

*What was happening?* Jared, quite honestly, couldn't answer that question. But then he began to see it, see it through the eyes and stories of the early flock of returning veterans. Vets who hung out at the Draft Resistance Center because they too found it to be the only place where they could rap down the war, smoke dope, crank out high-decibel Jimi Hendrix all day without being judged criminal, crazy, or "Rude!" Significantly, their stories were not like their own fathers' or Jared's dad's World War II stories. In contrast, their stories didn't fit the mold of John Wayne's

cartoonish war movies. They spoke not about being soldiers but about being warriors.

What this meant and where it began to hook up with this Civil Religion notion was that they recounted how they were ordered to "Obliterate. Waste. Search and destroy *everyone and everything!*" They'd been thrust into terror and were to be the instruments of terror. A *holy terror* that's bound by no laws, no protocols of war, no moral or ethical niceties. They lived not as soldiers under a commander but as marauders under a single command, "Waste 'em!"

For them it was a *war without end, amen*. Their commission was to slay all: men, women, children, animals and plants. To step beyond morality, not just to kill but to obliterate. To commit genocide and biocide with instruments of cosmic destruction. Their slogans: "Bomb them back to the Stone Age!" "Agent Orange— Nothing will grow for twenty-five years!"

As such, these men met themselves within an alien mythology. They were faithful and obedient Abrahams about to slay Isaacs. Their god commanded, "Do it!" He called a thousand times to "Do it!" again and again. So they stabbed and stabbed, not the ram from the bush but Issac! Wrestled the Angel and slew him. Returned with blood-soaked hands and raped Sarah unto death.

When these early-returning vets rapped, they feared that they would never be able to settle back into an ordered society now that they had lived outside of the moral order. Their condemnation: Once exiled from the lawful, they did not know how to get back in.

Ironically—bitterly— they found themselves targeted as "the enemy." Hated by so many upstanding citizens whose kin in government denied them benefits and judged them to be whiners and unfit, even cowardly. Worse, these battle-weary patriots heard themselves denounced as traitors—not praised as heroes. Angry, confused but fearless they continued to fight for peace even when it meant defending the Constitution against the government, itself!

In every commune Jared kept finding these vets. Little did he know them to be the harbingers of his own fate—to know the prison within prison, the war within the war.

For Vietnam—*under some curse?*—had turned them all into outlaws to the human spirit. The State had destroyed them by destroying the moral soul which their families had nurtured.

“Not Christian, but Civil Religionists. Do you get it?”

Jared: “Yes, I get it.”

Uncle: “No you don’t!”

When asked, “Why did you turn nonviolent? Why do you oppose the war?” His answer: “Because they brought the battlefield right here, home!”

The vets—brothers of his own generation—started out here “at home” in a Selective Service office. That’s where they “signed up” and made the commitment. That’s where the lies began. Jared knows that the draft office is his part of the battlefield. It is there he must go to slay the Warrior’s god.

In his Catholic and theological mind, the draft office became the sanctuary that held the tabernacle and its hosts—draft cards. To touch them was to touch the Warrior God. Through these cards the State was transubstantiated into the Warrior God. Each male at eighteen—and no male, whether Joe Athlete or paraplegic, genius or moron, can escape—each must register with the draft. After Registration, deferments may be given but no one could choose not to register . . . without being slain—sent to prison or forced into exile.

In this light Jared formed an often voiced public answer to his own core question about their trial, “What does the State believe it is doing to us?” *Death. Execution. Obliteration.* That’s what he realizes they intend. *Felons.* What is their future?

Despite the numbing, bitter cold of this day, an insight pierces his awareness. The Three are to be sacrificed in the ancient tradition of first-son sacrifice. Like Abraham and Isaac, upon the mount called Vietnam, the State finds son-sacrifice acceptable. The Three must be sacrificed on the altar of prison as counter-sacrifice, to warn, to deter, to scare. They are the scapegoats, the ones burdened with the sins of all and sent into the desert. *Expulsion*. Never to return.

*Yes! Yes!* The Three are a symbol whose meaning is clear: "white," "white middle-class," "white middle-class males." From these no dissent, no questioning of authority would be, can be tolerated. "As such they are part of a twin symbol, whose other side is written in the body and blood of their drafted brothers, those animally named "grunts"!"

Jared wonders, *What has been spawned in America?* Is it the State beyond any morality and gods?

The inner scream, *Cold! Freezing! You're gonna die!* shatters his daydreaming and as he stomps and flails at himself like Minnesotans are wont to do in imitation of penguins, he laughs at the absurdity of the day, himself, the war ....

As Jared wakes from his reverie, he checks out the assembled group. He's taken with the thought that The Three—in point of fact a teensy band of not-famous Heartland kids, like their slain peers at Kent State—have been drawn out by the State onto a larger stage than they ever intended or imagined. They are a symbol made public by the State's need to proclaim that middle-class morality will no longer be tolerated. That the citizen's power housed in the Bill of Rights—that power claimed by dissidents and nonconformists—is forever imprisoned.

All these insights, experiences, truths, discoveries, betrayals, crimes—all in this instant flash before him and Jared is conscious of stepping up to the mic as a criminal. *Violent felon*. The violence of having destroyed government property: paper cards not human flesh.

Ironically, today Jared gets top billing by default. No one else could be found to take the stage with him—no one from the nonviolent community. Aaren was her own show. Sadly, within the activist community, people are saying, “They won't listen. So why should we risk it?”

It's the Corey syndrome. The war's gotten itchy personal, intimate. Liberals, pacifists, hangers-on: All have begun to look more like the hippies they so often deplore. It's political now to define nonviolence as being “laid back” and “dropping out.” Passivity. But Jared doesn't care to focus on that negativity. He grabs the mic. *I am a raider*. He would have hit the draft boards by himself if the others had not come.

*Those looking at me, do they know? How crazed I am? God-crazed?*

*Dikbar: Preach on it, white boy!*

*What shall I say?* Mic to his lips. *Do you really want more words?* He shuffles his feet. He's a symbol junkie. An artist of the psyche. He needs, right now, like the addict's fix, a vision, a phrase of incantation. This is one of his strongest links to Aaren.

*Aaren*. Jared burns with both a curiosity to know about her and a thirst to *know* her. Did she send the note? Did she do the bombing? Opinion ran deep and contradictory within the radical community. Some were convinced beyond doubt that she did it. That she did it to “heighten the contradictions,” as she so often urged. Others held it to be the work of the FBI. That it was their attempt to divide the anti-war community and discredit them in the eyes of the general community.

Still, Jared can't decide. He almost wants to believe that she did it, even though the bombings had by themselves almost totally wiped out the symbolic effectiveness of the draft raids. He's stimulated and aroused by her energy, her aggressiveness, and he has to admit, her female brand of leadership.

Aaren, however, has made it known that she does not want to see him, ever. Publicly, at every opportunity, she distances herself from “The Four and their

foolishness." She did not attend their trial or comment on their prison fate. She consigned them and especially him "to revolutionary perdition!" This makes Jared suspicious of Sean's version of her sexual submission.

*Aaren!*

"I'm proud to introduce Jared Jennings of The Three!" A smattering of applause, muffled by gloved hands hiding from the bone-chilling cold.

Jared hasn't ever been able to prepare himself for these moments. He knows that he won't have to talk long. Those who are out today are either the indefatigably committed or the unbaptized who don't know that the days of mass rallies are over. The media does, though, for they are absent. Rallies don't even merit filler status. Burston never published his Dikbar letter nor made any attempt to contact him after his release. In point of fact, today's mission is almost pastoral because after Aaren's Maoist denunciations those who stayed are in need of a word of hope.

*How strange again to stand before a microphone and spit, spit my syllables riding their groans, aimed at hearts . . .* He shakes his head to clear away this type of thinking. In one slip of a moment when he catches them about ready to listen, he begins.

"Brothers and sisters," planting his soles on the first of the granite steps leading up to the Federal sanctuary before them, "Brothers and sisters, today," moving his hands towards them, lifting his heart high into his chest, working to get his large-boned frame into a rhythm of power-touching, "we are here once again to protest the hideous way in which people relate to each other."

Now what he wants to say is, *Listen, that's all that I've got to say. That sums it up. Think about it.* But his tongue labors on.

“What may be the greatest difficulty this day is the small number of people here. We are small in number, true. The days of the mass rallies and marches seem to be over. The politicians talk about winding down the war. And a report from this building,” he points to it without turning around, “back to D.C. today will produce thrills in some assistant Attorney General's febrile brain. He'll wear an idiot's grin. For take my word,” he strikes his heart with open palm, “a word from my heart's knowledge that the smallness of our number is a sign of our success. Yes, our success. The Resistance doesn't chart its progress like the military, with body counts! No, we have *always* been few in number. The Remnant. The Yeast. The Catalyst. It took only one person resisting, one person burning his draft card to start the Resistance!

As long as there is one person who believes, who practices living nonviolence, then the war will end! It *is* inevitable.”

He shifts, sways slightly, brushes small ice flakes from his ragged moustache.

“What we have today is the manifestation of fear. Hundreds are not here because they fear their government. Consider that! Were you raised to fear your government? Ten, five years ago, would anyone have feared going to a rally? Now after Kent State there's the fear of getting shot. Killed. Murdered, right here in America. On Main Street. And by our own army! Believe me, when the people fear the government it *is* time for the government to fear the people. For the people will not be shackled by a tyranny of fear!”

There's a swell of clapping. One lone whistler. Jared is striking a chord. He's preaching but it's a preaching whose message is directed at himself! He knows that he comes today to learn, not teach. Learn from them. *Them*—these mostly unknown, never to be met again people who draw himself from within himself. Only when he is under their eyes, only when he's in range of their heartbeats, only when he's embraced by their spirits, then—he knows—only then will he know the truth, be healed.

"Listen, draw yourself closer and feel the warmth of each other's presence. Look at me. For in a little over two weeks you won't be able to see me."

A quiet pause, one held stable by his peering stare at them all—he holds them all in one fixed ray of energy.

"As many of you know, I will be in prison. I will be unknown to you in my days. For I shall be stripped of all my outward forms and colors. Hammered into a day of square hours. Sat upon as to my freedom of movement. Separated by steel from my loved ones. Yet . . . Yet," his lips take a strange fire from the near-arctic cold, "am I to be dead? Will I not live in your bones? The strut you make on these common streets. The caress of a cheek I have seen in this, our struggle. Will I not be forever alive in your desires and yearnings?"

He arches back. Releases into a jerky swaying. His right hand vice-grips the mic stand.

"As this day is small in number so shall my days be small. They will be days of my cut-off-ness. Days of my exile. But am I to then die?

"Yes, I will die if *you* let me. You, my friends, my friends—some in name, others in slight memory—*you will kill me*, as only you can. For those who kick us and beat us and manhandle us, those who have the pieces of iron and the walls of time with which to torture us, they, *they* cannot kill us. *We can only kill ourselves*. We can only kill each other. It's by betrayal that we die . . . and kill. And you know that I've been betrayed!"

With lowering voice he moves closer to the mic's head.

"I will betray you, *I will kill you*, if I waste my life in despair inside those prison walls. And you will betray me, kill me if you do not go back and live, live deeply, live with passion. Live as I know those thousands of others we once groped the streets with are now living. Gone back into the regimented times, into the squared offices, into the squeaking and screeching machines, back . . . back in the motion of the tide . . . back to come forward again when it shall be time."

Jared's shoulders relax, pitch downward. His elbows draw in towards his waist. His hands cross his lower chest, almost a gesture of prayer.

"Brothers and sisters, there is only one hope that I have. And that hope is you. As you live, so I live. As you die, so I die."

Four seconds of holding words unspoken, then, "Brothers and sisters, it is a beautiful day. Beautiful—ah, humph. Damn, how I hate Minnesota days, they're so damn cold—yet beautiful, yeah, because they make us *feel*. The cold brings us to a part of ourselves we often forget. It makes us over-conscious of the warmth we generate. Let me say, the only way to warm the earth for planting the peace, for nurturing children seeds of our hope, is to warm it with the passion of your hearts." Then Jared halts.

Many other images flood his mind. His temples ache and throb. The sweat on his forehead comes alive, instantly frozen, like mosquitoes stabbing with icy pricks. He wants to go on. To talk on and on about his fear of prison. About the years of struggle. About his love of the Vietnamese whom he has never seen. About his love of his brother Americans condemned to fight the Vietnamese. To wax poetic and to evoke that glint in men's and women's eyes that he has seen now and then and which, once seen, has enticed him to come back to seek it again. He has seen it but briefly today.

*No more words? Done?* "Peace!" he shouts, waving the fingered vee of *Peace!* above his head. He steps down and among the protesters, someone touches his shoulder. "I'll miss you, brother. Good luck." An older woman, precisely dressed and cosmetically made up, a stereotypical suburbanite, comes up, close enough to hug him. But she doesn't touch him. No, she wipes a tear, then extends her arms towards him, pushing something hard into his chest. Fear flashes—a *bomb!* But it's a Bible! Jared's jerky reaction almost makes him stumble but he catches himself on the shoulder of the rally's organizer. The elderly woman holds her ground, her gesture demands that he take hold of her gift. He does, but she does not let go.

She holds on, stares deeply, penetrating into his soul through eyes that are soft but fierce. "Thank you. Thank you, for going to prison for us."

Undaunted, she presses the Bible hard against his chest. She speaks again, her voice at once ancient, prophetic, oracular, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Stunned. In a way only a Catholic ex-monk could feel, Jared is chastised, humbled, fearful. The last rally ends.

## 8 - LAST NIGHT BEFORE

Char's room is Spartan, mostly window light nourishing several huge potted plants. Jared has come to be at home here. The simplicity comforts his spiritual sense. It's unencumbered, a free sense, like the meeting place of security and death. Tonight, amid the shadows of swiftly clouding moons, he has passed towards the point of departure.

He hasn't told her of the other woman whose specter has recently blown in on moonlight. It's something kept down inside him, caught between guilt and his fear of losing her, of providing an excuse for her to abandon him. She could never be unfaithful, is relentlessly *there* for him. But he knows that his infidelity, though only spiritual at this point, could conjure a chasm she could never leap. Such a chasm, he fears will be created by prison.

He leans over and tips a fifth of rotgut whiskey his way. Its power obliterates these confessional thoughts. He wants this night to be *The Night* he can dream about for a long time, from now through prison time.

Off and on he props himself up on an elbow and strains to hear the anticipated sounds of her presence. But she isn't there. He's mistaken again. The chorale of street noises harmonizes with one loudly humming streetlight. He lies back onto a pillow, turns onto his right side, thinks about sleep, something short, *thirty z's maybe*. He wants to be rested when she does come. But nothing lulls him. His mind's a dazzle of images, his body a milling mob of emotions. Soon, he dreads, only too soon he will be sleeping back in a cage. That's merely a matter of hours. *Merely*—Christ, how he has dreaded this night. The night before surrender. How often he's wondered how he would feel this night. Whether he could carry off the matter.

The bitter whiskey stings but it helps his mind become merciful. The moments and hours begin to fill with nostalgic remembrances of Char. He had met her just after his father's death— she had simply appeared, as if she was to be *there* for him now that Dad was gone. She didn't like him at first. All that to him seemed romantic and manly she spurned as bombastic and juvenile. His sharp wit

she assessed as humiliating sarcasm. His bodily strength and vigor wearied her—just another onslaught by a bullying male, stalking her, primed to snag her and pin her with his name tag. “God, you’re a damn man-eater!” She hadn’t like that remark.

A bemused “Hmmm. Ha!” marks his recall of their first confrontation. Jared prided himself on his cleverness and imagination. He besieged her with flowers and “love cards” gushing with volcanic emotions and protestations of unquenchable desires. He played all his male tricks. She rejected all of them and him!

Cleverly, he had tried to throw her off with the highly charged “man-eater!” which he thought was a most damning stereotype. It was a calculated trick—he expected her to be horrified by this *unfeminine* label and fly back into his arms. But Char had not rebounded. She didn’t even reject the stereotype. Just said, in her distinctive, maddeningly gentle way, “I *am* a man-eater. What of it?”

To say that Jared was staggered is to fail to capture the reverberations within his psyche. “Why should I marry you? So *you* can eat *me*?”

Jared didn’t have an answer for that then, and he doesn’t have one yet. “You’re right about that, I want to eat you!” is what he could have said, wanted to say, feels like saying tonight, but he senses that it was and is the wrong answer.

*A man needs to feel that his woman is his, with the same feeling and satisfaction of rubbing his belly after a great feast!* is what he truly believes. What’s wrong about that? He senses that Aaren would agree. He just knows that she wants to be eaten.

But Char . . . *Char, god how you have turned everything upside down!* For the past several years she has chewed up every male thing Jared has done. She was a feminist before the word was coined. It was instinctual with her because, Jared avers, “She’s *instinctually* just.”

What he means is that she can sense an injustice, spy its most ghostly outline before it’s apparent to others. While in college at St. Clare’s, an all-women’s

Catholic school in southern Minnesota—a sister college to his own central Minnesota all-male College of Saint Clement—she was an early supporter of draft resistance. It wasn't the abstract issue of violence versus nonviolence that engaged her, as initially it had Jared. Rather, she was against all types of wars: political, psychological, and spiritual. What her Catholic background had given her, and something that is ever at her lips, is an unforgiving respect for every person, each of whom is a child of God, all of whom are members of the Communion of Saints.

Char's theology is more practical than reflective. From the driest, most abstract theological principle, she draws forth its nurturing spirit. She lives from her heart and will put up with no foolishness of the mind that would sanction a “Just War” against anyone.

When Jared met her she was working on a health project for migrant laborers. During the prior decade Mexicans and other Hispanics became the mainstay of the migrating crews that swarm the North Country during planting-to-harvest time. They cluster in the oldest and poorest parts of town. Char was spearheading an unpopular campaign to make their presence known and to provide community-based health care. Within that cause she confronted, for the first time, the depths and complexity of injustices to women. “Mexican Catholicism gets them with a double whammy. They're supposed to be both the Virgin Mother and the cathouse whore.”

Cut from a different cloth, Jared was born in high gear. Folks who meet him either strongly like him or can barely tolerate him. There's little middle ground. He attracts and repels with *intensity*.

Intense. Intensifying. These are the words everyone would agree *define Jared*. Vortex. Maelstrom. Even in times of passivity he's a luring sinkhole, capturing people like he does ideas, almost organically; he ingests them.

As such, his inability to quickly understand Char, to inhale her, consume her, to make her part of himself, frustrated the living hell out of him. It went against all he had thought was properly male. He had expected her to be *his* woman, his “future wife,” to “win” her over and assimilate her within his life, on the spot. But it’s still not going that way. “Why do you stay with me?” he often asks after their bouts. She never gives him a satisfactory answer. Yet somehow, Char is stuck on him. Splattered inside him and breathing his breaths. He, likewise.

Typical of the times, it is with S-E-X—largely written in capitals across the era—that they struggle. Early on, the sheer athletic vigor of Jared's coupling hewed them. Char had never encountered such frenzy on the intimately physical level. At first she found his hard pressings on her, his exploration of her every part a bit comical, as if he were a mad potter endlessly kneading his throw. Yet the sheer exhaustion induced by his relentless erotic explorations yielded a sense of drenched satisfaction that she came, in time, to eagerly desire—despite her post-coital aches and pains.

As they both became more familiar and easy with one another, Char perceived the deeper character of Jared's raw yearning. He sought transcendence within her. Desired to pray her. Sex for him was a communion that was more than the linkage of two— it was a whole greater than the tally of its parts.

“I want *this!*” expresses his desire, which her eyes silently celebrate. It is to this raw yearning that she so passionately responds. It unleashes “her intoxicating presence.” Together they get drunk each with the other.

Physically, Char is tall, as tall as an average man, taller than most women, with an Appalachian slenderness that belies the strength of her grip and embrace. She possesses a dancer's grace that both protects her from Jared's often mislaid ferocity and enables her to artfully pleasure him by small movements.

For Jared, Char is the canvas. Together they are an expression, an artistic creation. Char, while not a Free Love advocate, is more open to that cause. She's drawn by its element of freedom for the individual but equally by its exposure of

sexual injustices. She made pioneer contact with the oppression suffered by battered and lesbian women. In such settings she learned more about what she did not want than about what she did. More, she also discovered—at times with a flood of blush—about what others actually did!

She heard tales of horror and humor, all the time marveling at all that her Catholic education had not told her about men and women. She muses, “They never offered a course in *Sexual Athletics*,” and shakes her head in bewildered laughter as she tries to picture Sister Benedicta marching out her famous audio-visual aids for such a lecture.

The first time she stayed on top—all night long!—it opened an avenue for unmapped communication. It spiritually reorganized things for Jared such that he was dumbstruck. It had, quite literally, turned their world upside down. It was a small gesture, something she had asked him to consider. *Oh, Jesus, it is the little things she asks me to do that turn me inside out, upend my world!* He remembers the moment ever so clearly.

“Just lie back. *Relax*,” she says, and he cooperates. But every fiber of his mind and soul howls with a fear of slow death through torture. He moves, glacially, from resigned acceptance of the gesture to a yanking revulsion as she drives herself onto him, slowly, patiently, with total control. He squirms and sweats, imagines ejecting her – *blast! splat!* – up to the ceiling as he feels a loss of sensation in his penis, which is mocked by her gentle whisper, “Who has the cock now? Who’s fucking who?”

“Just lie back. *Relax!*” This and so many other little things she says that rock him: “I’m not a housekeeper!” “I will always keep my last name!” “I can open doors for myself!” “You go shave *your* legs!”

*Just lie back ...* It’s an act only trivialized by comparing it to the effect Jared felt in church when the altar was turned towards the people showing if not the face of God at least the face of the priest—the visage of the sacred. “Who has the cock

now?" Yes, yes, at that moment he sees the face of this woman as if she were Goddess. *Awesome!* He becomes Earth, she Sky.

Ever since that moment he has struggled mightily to express how majestic she is, but words mightily fail him. He knows only this as absolute truth—sexual intimacy with Char is an act of worship.

Jared admits only to himself that Char is his equal in most every way and superior in what he holds is his forte—the realm of the spiritual. She's two steps ahead towards where he wants to go, if he'll ever get there. Humbled is how he feels. But he's too embarrassed to voice this – *Pride? Stupid macho ego?*

Oh he so deeply knows that he needs her, wants her so badly regardless of how painful her truths can be. She even—*and during the trial, goddamn her!*—began criticizing the Resistance as a male movement, not just in terms of bodies but in terms of its power vision. "Cowboys and John Wayne, that's all you guys are!"

This slashed him deeper than she knows. *God, what do we agree on?*

Protectively, for this special night, he banishes that thought. Forbids the whispers of memory from Bruiser and Dikbar to defile the moonlight. He searches for some more pleasurable remembrances. But nostalgia has deserted him. The haunting fears about whether he can handle prison return.

Throughout this special day, and intensifying with the darkening, those fears have settled upon him; piled up. And here on his last night of freedom . . . *Freedom?* What a queer word. But freedom in a very real sense. Free to dress as he likes, to speak where he's invited, to sleep with Char . . . truly, very many freedoms. But a profound doubt, accusatory, rips through him now as it did after every preachment. "Is all that I'm doing a subtle suicide?"

Such thoughts cease as the dark suddenly murmurs a familiar metallic whisper. Char is fumbling with her keys in the broken-light hallway.

Char's dark shape wavers within moonframe. Slowly, towards him, shifting sideways and upwards as scarf, jacket, hat are removed, a dress drops to the floor, crouching discards a shoe. Her face clears only when she kneels close to him.

"Jared, are you awake?" in a whisper.

"Yeah, babe, I am," steady and solemn.

Her voice is weary but strong. "Good. I was afraid you'd be sound asleep. Tomorrow will be such a hard day for you."

*Hard day for me? Gentlemen of the Council, fathers, brothers, can you feel my pain? Oh, my heart once again is stabbed. Fathers, brothers, can such a woman as this be justified? Is she fit for bearing our seed? Listen closely to her vile intentions.*

"It's already a hard day for me." He sucks in a long breath. "It's probably 2:30 and you're just fucking and truckin' home!"

"Stop it!"

"Bullshit, I won't stop it!" He sits up in anger. "Why should I? You've never stopped it."

"What?"

*Fathers, brothers she is beautiful I'll grant, but . . .*

"Don't fuck with me woman, you're a cool mean bitch." The words lie upon him in pain. "I've been here all night waiting for you, waiting for some tenderness," he sneers at himself. "What a fucked up nostalgic shithead am I—oh Christ!"

*Gentlemen, fathers, brothers, these tears of mine are weighted in stone.*

It is no longer night. The darkness has no more to say. The moon is not noticed. All is merely the bed and he and she.

"Jared, I love you." *Pause.* "Why do I always have to tell you that? Over and over? Why tonight? Why every night?"

"Fuck it, Char, fuck it all. Fuck it all! You and I simply don't live on the same planet. Jesus, woman, tomorrow I'm going to prison and all you care, all you fucking do, is go to *meetings.*" Then he gets downright nasty. "Ratting and tattling with your bitchy queer friends."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Char stands and grasps a window's ledge. No light comes to her eyes, but the warmth of darkness soothes her. A jagged silence vibrates between them.

"Jared," spoken smoothly and firmly, announced, "I love my Sisters and I want to be, *will* be, with them for a long time. It's real, you're going to prison but—but we *are* in prison. I have always been in prison."

"Aw, fuck that shit." He flips over backside towards her. She lingers within moonframe, and its lunatic power holds them both—burns this moment of departure into his memory.

The plants may have recorded this night, their leaves forever marked with the pain, but for him and her the event would ever be an incomplete memory. In the small awakenings of restless sleep they touch in the fear of departure. *Fathers, brothers, be not misled by her sense of duty!* There is no hesitation in her acceptance. She responds to him openly, accepts him within a shared imprisonment. She senses that together they are inside the Iron Cage. He, a new inmate. She, in the process of escaping her captors. Jared's mind labors, processing the ancient symbols. He desires to quench his thirst with familiar wine, feast on god in familiar bread. He needs to plow, she to be his field. He needs to hammer, she to be soft wood. He needs to smear her smell and taste, gasp and groan, push and grab all over the body of his memory. He needs his nakedness defined in terms of the Old Way. Fearful is he of forgetting, of being unfaithful to their newfound creations of intimacy. He needs to eat. Consume. Sate.

Char accepts.

Jared's lips suck hard upon her mouth. The strength of his tongue excites her. To this familiar place, once more, she will go. From within her desire speaks to be claimed. Ever hungered again and again he leaps from darkness into her fire. *Such eyes to probe!* Mystifying soft-green, almost sad, alluring in innocence. Deeply he plunges, all his bearing unmarked yet with hands and thighs following familiar scents. To breasts with softness sucked through his lips, swallowing her gentle nurture, spinning his thoughts to Mother and moving in worship to her folds, moist gates of redemption.

Accepting his weight, preparing for his search, her hips cradle him, embrace his hard driving, his wrenching throttling of her skeletal self. She desires to flow through him. Pore to pore, seeping into this man who might well be her only child. So the Sisters had encouraged and approved this dutiful resignation.

As he was blind at birth, so the man-child fumbles at his departure, wrenching sublime joys amid heartfelt pains of sad farewell. He arouses the token of her maleness and shakes it, storm and thunder, ground shudders and rivers burst. Breaths like electric gasps. Thighs liquefying, splattering succulent juice. Arms braced against backboard she wraps him with her legs, cloaks him. Waves foaming onto shore, all light shattered, his sagging and moist skin within her. Without pause, passion's gravity forlorn, he journeys down the spice of face, lingering in scent of breast, licks across the sweat of belly and the pit of coupling. He kisses her muff. Tongues her deeply, thrusting, merging lips of Earth and Sky, to savor the fragrance of departure. Gently to her thighs, a kiss to her calf, her foot, her toes, he salutes her, departing in the feeble light of sunrise.

Jared sleeps, the desperate sleep of the caged. Already, she realizes, he is in prison. She, whom he calls *Soothing Water*, touches him. Watches the fire seep from his flesh and encircle her hand. She loves his intensity, is nurtured by his

decisiveness. She will miss their differences, for she, like him, needs flint to strike fire. But most of all she will miss his zaniness and his compassion.

She remembers—Jared putting light shades on his head, hoisting an imitation Fidel Havana cigar and lampooning so, so serious Marxists—at an SDS meeting! And Jared playing with kids! The big galoot just loves kids and he's on the floor crawling around, making weird popping noises with his mouth, blowing their bellies, playing the giant and swinging them high and low, throwing them up like baseballs and catching them amid the giggles and giddy laughter that Jared always seems to bring out from kids and even jaded intellectuals.

More, she remembers that he is a gate-crasher, a boundary breaker, in his own way a serious comic. It's curious, so she has found, that he bounds from the comic always to the sacred—or at least with her from the comic to the sexual to the sacred. "Gosh, I'll really miss his laughter!" *And my own*, she realizes.

Yet how hard all this will be on her is a thought she sees as too selfish to ponder tonight. She prefers to think about the thousand ways he has intruded on her life. Positive ways. Manly ways. Helping her with this and that. And never seriously threatening her. In fact, he's so much the little puppy, always looking at her for approval. "God, how his eyes just glow and swell with just a little *thanks* . . . always wanting to seal it with a kiss!"

*San Francisco*. How could San Francisco not come to mind tonight? It was the time when she knew they were specially made for each other. He so impressed her. She—who as a nurse seemed always prepared for such things—had forgotten to pack her monthly equipment. And here they were, a most beautiful night, splurging on a week by the Bay and she flowing like lava. Can she ever forget? It was late at night and he walked with her, chatting and being playful, through neighborhoods neither knew, trying to find a store, any type, for it was almost midnight. He asks, "Are you okay? Want to sit down? Need a coke?" How strange. Who would believe this story? He ministers to her. She knows that that night she became his goddess.

And he would come to her. *Anytime*. Wade into the River of Blood to meet her. Always looking for his pleasure through her pleasure. *Oh, how lost*, she knows, *he will be!*

Such stories would perplex those who habitually comment on how oddly coupled they are. They see him as all brash and bluster, jock and wild-eyed heretic. She as soothing and nurturing, a healer and calm visionary of a Sisterly New Order. Few see him as she does. But such is their peculiar bond.

It's a bond that does have its oddly coupled side. Truly, as tonight, it's a bond that has almost always to be forged, to be re-created in the mist of red-hot iron being tempered by cool, sizzling water. She knows he calls her *Soothing Water* and this stirs her as she visualizes a final ritual. *Around him and above him she hovers, dripping her flesh, puddling him, making a cast of her flesh in spirit water upon his muscles, bones, breathing. She will never not be with him now and forever.*

At breakfast neither speaks much. Their embraces are few, nostalgic and routine. The ritual of spouses. The clock time comes as often it has over coffee cups and newsprint. There is nothing for him to take along. It's a journey without any luggage.

At the anticipated time both rise and step towards the door. Jared turns towards her, reaches and grasps her hands, raises and holds them close to her eyes, moist, misted—in tears, sparkling flickers of peridot—and kisses them. "I love you," opens the door and moves on. His imprisonment is begun.

As his footsteps fade to silence and the door creaks no more, Char weeps, softly and slowly, leaning her slender length against the hard wooden doorframe. She is now separated from him but she is not alone. Fulfilling his greatest desire, she has joined with him in spirit of memory and dream. That she could not tell him

*this* is but her acceptance of their shared imprisonment. Such is the wrench of yoking that is communion.

Char crosses her palms upon her slight belly and mentally prays that there soon will be two with whom she is about to be born anew. She is his body, he is hers. She wants it to be so, wants a child who will be them both—we. If they are so blessed, the child will be the bridge between their long time apart, a gangway between their prison cells, that under which *Soothing Water* will flow and heal them both.

## 9 - DAY OF SURRENDER

"Order anything you want. Make this last meal a good one." His brother Larry beckons the waitress back. "We'll want drinks all around."

It's only ten in the morning but who is she to question their time for drinking? Lately she's found more people drinking after breakfast. These four look oddly agitated, nervous and secretive. They make her feel that something dreadful is astir.

"I don't think I should drink," Jared says. "This day's already trippy for me. Just order for yourselves."

Eddie shifts in his seat, seeking comfort for his gangly frame. He's ten years Jared's senior and even taller but not athletic. He grew up nicknamed Rubberband. Once comfortable in his twists and turns he speaks to Jared.

"That might not be a bad idea. But you also might not taste good booze for several years. Maybe just a beer?"

Jared shakes his head *no*. Eddie checks the menu and tells the waitress he'd like a martini. Larry orders a double scotch and adds that he'll take the crab meat omelet. Eddie—second son and three years younger has always been Larry's "follower"—picks the menu back up, looks at it briefly and seconds Larry's order. Their sister Marian, the eldest, has been uncharacteristically quiet so far this morning. When seated she immediately popped three aspirins, inhaled a full glass of water, scanned the menu and put it down. Ready before the others, she has waited till asked.

"A Rusty Nail. A side order of the lasagna—just a taste."

The three then look at each other, waiting for Jared to order. He just can't get his mind around food. Yet, he feels that he has to keep the form of this day intact.

"Okay, let's see . . . hmmm . . . I'll do thirds on the crab meat and, well, sure okay, just for you Eddie, I'll take a Hamm's draft."

After the waitress departs, the foursome bends inward as if someone called a huddle. Larry, the shortest in the family except for Marian, has been chosen by his brother and sister as quarterback. He's the oldest male, thirteen years Jared's senior, round though not fat, and by far the most articulate and smoothest. When he's not around, his siblings refer to him as "Slick."

Larry has prepared their case with the same disciplined rigor that earned him his position as vice president of 3M's financial planning. With an eye-check of his confederates, he begins.

"I know you gave me some opinions on the matter before but I want you to reassess the pluses and minuses. The pluses outweigh the minuses *if* you go to Canada. It's not too late to leave the country. We've researched the mechanics of this for some time and there's a private plane and sufficient money to get you there before sunset."

"Right," Eddie cuts in, much to Larry's chagrin, and pressed by his need to elaborate and so convince, strikes an authoritative tone, "we've set it up with several influential relatives so you won't have any problems getting landed immigrant status or a job. In fact you can continue to teach theology if you want. There's a small college outside of Toronto that would be interested in you."

Marian doesn't comment, she merely nods when Eddie ends. She's hoping that Jared will be snared by the hook, *this time*.

Jared rests back into his chair, momentarily tilting it upwards, searches for his feelings. Deep inside him there's a desert, windless.

"As ever I really appreciate your concern and I'm a little flabbergasted you actually got into specifics, but no. No, it's both too late and I'm just *too damn tired*. I don't think I could put up with the strains and hassles of exile."

"Strains and hassles!" they spit out in unison, but Larry takes charge again.

“What do you think it will be like for *us* when you're in prison? Do you think it will be any easier on the family, on Mom, if you spend five years locked away? What can offset her five years of loss? Has that hit you yet? *Five years!*”

Jared exhales a windy sigh that almost deflates him. “Dig it, man, five years—sixty months, two hundred and sixty weeks, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six days, counting leap year. Do I need to do minutes and hours?”

The others withdraw, embarrassed by their blunder. Larry suppresses his fury. He had tallied these numbers and planned to use them against Jared.

Larry sips his water then redirects their attack. “Look, try and see it as a balance sheet—with assets and liabilities. For Christ's sake, Jared, you've posted enough trying times during the past few years. Just the trial itself skewed everything onto the liability side. Every effort at bringing up Vietnam was ‘Objection sustained.’ And at the conclusion—I'm sure you've memorized this because I have—‘You gentlemen are worse than the common criminal who attacks the taxpayer's pocketbook. You gentlemen strike at the foundation of government itself.’ Now you know that that script was written by Tricky Dick himself. As was the sentence, the max, five years, the longest ever slapped on white anti-war radicals. All that topped with a ramrodded appeal that was instantly denied. Now doesn't that tell you something? Face it, they've closed you guys down! Wiped you out! You're in a political Chapter 11!”

All pause and as if on cue sip some water.

Then Marian makes her plea. Actually declares it, pitches it. For Marian is a no-nonsense charge nurse in County General's ER. She's used to giving tough orders and boding no deviance from their implementation. As the oldest of seven, survival dictated that she take command or else the world would run amuck! Her temperament matches her looks. Although it irritates her no end, their mother never tires of commenting—meaning it as a compliment, a sign of her specialness—“Marian must have inherited every German gene hidden in the roots from my side

of the family tree!" To the point, she shows nothing of the fiery, Gaelic spirit that touches all her siblings, especially Jared.

Marian is in awe of Jared but it's awe tinged with fear—a fear rimmed with respect but also with a gut-wrenching foreboding. From him she always expects the unexpected. Curiously, in him she meets more of herself than in the others. Although she can't see this common ground, it's what drives her fear of him. Actually she believes, and has often stated, that she and Jared are polar opposites. Despite this blindness, they share a bond of soulfulness for which neither has words. Of all the brothers and sisters they feel that they are the farthest apart although they are near soul mates.

Today, she came determined to save him from himself.

"Jared you're our *little* brother. I remember pushing you around in a stroller. Look, listen, we bring both an objective and a very personal request. You're our hero but you don't have to be a martyr. You must take us up! Being in Canada will give you plenty of time to rest up, write, and find new ways to work against the war. That's true and you know it. We know it. I know it. *Get yourself back on track!*"

Jared replies quietly, in a deep, exasperated tone. "Do you really think that going it this far doesn't merit my going all the way? None of the others are planning to split. And—you couldn't be asking me to act like Corey?"

Rhythmically, the three lean back and away. The waitress comes and sets their drinks down. A beer glass stands tall and frosty in front of Jared. Its icy side casts thin spars out into the dim lighting. The sparkling, for some reason, cheers him up. This sparse reverie is broken by the weighty silence of his siblings.

*So, his mind monologues, so the questions are asked right till the last step Inside!*

Placing his right hand on the cold beer glass, Jared—eyeing each in turn—speaks to them from his gut.

"Larry, Eddie, Marian, I love you guys. You know that—" but he can't continue. He clutches.

What is for him a testimony of heartfelt words evokes a torrent of repressed frustrations from the others.

"Jared," Larry forays, "aren't you ever going to straighten out your chaotic life? Are you just going to abandon your calling as a theologian? You convinced me that being a theologian during these times means more than being a hero or a martyr or a political heavy. But now you're losing your nerve! You're backing away from your biggest challenge at the last moment. You're throwing away the fruits of your own and our family's lifelong investment in your education and service to the Church. How can you be *so self-centered?*"

Eddie, riding the crest of Larry's heat, swoops in. "*Christ!* Larry, stop treating him with kid gloves." He puts a hard grip on Jared's left arm. "You're the youngest, you were always Dad's pride and joy. He held you up to the rest of us. But he created a monster. *A monster who broke his heart!*"

The cruelty of his words boomerang and jolt Eddie himself, but his long-suppressed emotions numb him and he calls for the verdict.

"Don't deny it. Why do you think just the three of us came here today?" And he says to himself, *I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Larry, believe me!* "Maybe not Delores—she out of state— but many in the family have written you off, like Thomas—your own brother—they're just sick with your narcissistic strutting and pious self-justifications."

*Thomas is a fascist pig, flits through Jared's mind, Vietnam really screwed him up!*

Eddie is tearing into a vein of dark gold. "We've all had to live with what your leaving the seminary did to Dad." He pauses, knows the powder-keg he is close to igniting. Questions whether to say what will follow, then surges ahead "Face it—*it killed Dad!*"

Marian bolts and bristles, rattling the table and three water glasses fall over, two shattering on the floor. She is hiss and fury. "Stop this! Stop it, you two. *This* is not the time for *that!*"

The crash and tingle brings the waitress rushing from the kitchen. She expects to see a disturbance, but all she observes are her sole customers kneeling on the floor, picking up pieces of glass. As she sweeps up the shards and wipes the table, the four settle back down and with composure ask for another round. She can't figure out what's caused the rift. "I thought they were having a business meeting," is what she tells her boss.

"Eddie," Marian states and enunciates in her stern "little mother" tone, "Eddie, you've never understood Jared. You're just frightened by what he's done."

Eddie, chastised, sits simmering in his confused emotions. When he's confused, his habit is to wrap his long, long arms around himself. They are so long, almost unnaturally so—truly extraordinary in their double-jointedness—that his hands lock. No observer would question why his playmates teased, "Rubberband ! Rubberband!"

Larry grabs hold of what Eddie has unleashed but twists its anger into sugar. Ever the master tactician.

"Geez, Eddie put it kind of sharply there. But you do have to admit he has some half-truths. Dad was really blown away by your leaving the sem. You might've had all the right intentions but don't you see how wrong you can be about what effects your actions can have on others?"

Larry's manipulating an unresolved tension among the brothers. Only his fearsome love for Jared protects him from the poison released by tapping into the sinister heritage of all the sons—patricide. "Who killed Father?" could never be directly asked, for it was a slaying question.

Larry deftly uses Eddie's tactless rendition of the mythic event to trick Jared into doubting himself. To surrender himself to the wisdom of the family. Eddie's thrust drew blood. Larry dons the mask of the smiling, benign Big Brother.

"In your defense, I think he was just reliving what he always believed was his own failure—his own leaving the seminary when he was a kid."

Larry touches Jared's fuzzy cheek. "Don't feel too bad about all that." As he does their food arrives and they begin to eat. A jittery calm settles around them.

To Larry's dismay, Jared eats wordlessly. His trick has not worked. *Damn!*

Larry nervously strokes his own smoothly shaved cheeks and adjusts his tie several times in sequence. Then he uses his napkin to mop beads of sweat from his forehead and upper lip. After an endless string of such taut, mute moments, Larry puts his fork down and with conscious affect stares at Jared.

"It wasn't easy for me to accept your self-appointed role as 'theologian.' I used to think all your talk about being a marked man, a condemned man, was romantic bullshit. But I've come to accept your vocation. I've reassessed all of my past judgments and actions. Now I accept that you're a genuine laborer of the Gospels—but an odd one. One who doesn't have the option to turn back."

He continues, "I can't count the times you've ramrodded me with that biblical phrase, *No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God*. That's why I'm confused by the three-sixty you're doing on us."

Jared can definitely appreciate Larry's point of view. Canada had been an option, once. At a time when he convinced himself that he was too valuable to the Resistance to go to prison.

*"Pride," the Novice Master emphasizes over and over to the new group of novices, "pride is the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. For Pride wears the mask of Humility. And it was Pride that made Eve first sin!"*

When deep in his cups, Jared, himself, has found the points that Larry's making to be sound. In such drunken reveries he argues and plots for a life Underground—*on the lam*. "What good am I in prison? My task is to preach the word about Peace, to stop the war. After the war, *then* prison. Maybe."

But he could not then or now be comforted by *after*. So he listens silently, cloaked with a heavy resignation.

Marian recasts her call for action. Her body is tense, her arms wave back and forth as she speaks, pivoting at her elbows. She's a human tank, firing at will.

"Look, you *must* go to Canada. If you don't, nothing makes sense! Why set yourself up, let them render you impotent by putting you in jail?"

She pauses, keenly aware of the target she wants to hit. "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

Jared flinches as she quotes. He moves with instinctual riposte to foil her strike.

"Oooh!" He clutches his heart and fakes falling into his plate. "Got me! Brilliant! You're hanging me by my own words! Ah, treachery of memory! Great! Fitting. A renegade preacher hoisted on his own petard. *Dear, dear . . .* death by scriptural quotation!"

Jared surveys their eyes. There is no mirth. The intensity of their fear truly matches his.

"Look, the deal I cut with Jesus was negotiated long before I was born. I know you three have a hard time with my interpretation of all this but I know it to be true. In Baptism I was *anointed*. I am condemned."

He says "condemned" as if describing an apple as "red."

"I must do what I do and do it thoroughly or I will perish."

Eddie blanches. He's heard this monomaniacal statement before—but at this moment it sounds fairly true. *Can it be so?* He struggles with the question. It's infested with wild terror.

Marian knows that Jared is right but she doesn't want to accept it, not affirm it, not right now. Despite her self-control, his words force her to flash back to her little brother's First Communion. How that day had affected the family! The littlest and last of the seven. Jared, dressed in white, small and skinny in body, seemed wrapped in an angelic aura. He'd been so excited about the day. His first day with Christ. So earnestly had he memorized his Catechism. So piously had he prepared himself in prayer and penitence that the Sisters were drawn to contact the family. "We think Jared will be a priest someday. He has great promise."

*Great promise*—how the family whispered and talked about that when Jared was asleep. They all knew that Jared had the mark on him. None of his three brothers had shown such an interest at such an early age. True, as with most Irish Catholic boys, all had had a long talk with the Vocation Director, but not until the eighth grade. Here Jared was only seven, ending his Age of Innocence, and at Mother Superior's insistence, the area's vocational director for aspiring seminarians made a special visit to their home.

Larry observes the mist rise in Marian's eyes, watches it form the slightest of droplets upon the ridge of her cheeks. She dabs at them quickly, nervously. Larry reflexively tightens the controls over his own internal feelings. He loves his brother very much. He knows his other brothers and sisters do, despite themselves. *Who could doubt Marian?* Yet he can't shake the foreboding that this is a truly foolish act, a reckless expenditure of life's non-recoverable assets.

As Jared grew into Resistance—first as a conscientious objector, then draft resister, and now draft raider—Larry escalated his assessment of the element of risk from "manageable" to "unnecessary exposure" to the current "foolish." Jared's actions forced him to stretch his own beliefs concerning what is morally acceptable.

His best instincts tell him to cut his losses and walk away from this madman, but he just can't do that.

"Look at it this way, Jared. If this was a matter of great consequence—say, that the war would end tomorrow if you went to prison—or say that a great theological doctrine was going to be promulgated in response to your action—then I could see the merit of your sacrifice. But all you're able to do now is dramatize your political viewpoint."

"Right. Right," Eddie opines, his brooding over, "they've taken the moral high ground *away* from you." He follows with a non sequitur, "How many young guys have resisted and still the war isn't over?" In Eddie's mind, quantification validates action.

Larry tactically waits several moments before going at Jared again. "You know, you're just being Irish about all of this. Bad-tempered and mule-headed stubborn. You're being arrogant about your theological interpretation of what you're doing. Look, I heard theology justify what I did in the Korean War. I heard priests tell us that killing the Commies made God happy! Nothing—none of the slaughter, the terror in the eyes of the women and children uprooted by our bombings—*nothing* changed their theological certainty!"

Larry's stories about Korea never fail to fascinate Jared. His imagination plays them out like John Wayne films. Larry and John Wayne—Jared gets them mixed up at times. So this line of talk taps his attention.

Larry keeps going. "I'm beginning to think you don't want to leave because no one else has picked up your line. Who else talks about destroying draft files and offices as sacramental acts? How is it you phrase that exactly? 'Sociopolitical sacramental acts,' right? I haven't heard any of your friends talk that way. It hasn't become a flag for the radical Jesuits. Tell me if I'm wrong, but I see you as I saw those chaplains—you simply don't want to go to Canada because it would shatter your theology of Resistance. Your raid would be reduced to a simple act of political resistance—a *highly* ethical stance. I don't think you could handle that!"

Larry has Jared right where he and the others want him. But his slickness is not lost on Jared. In his mind he is crediting his brother for staging such a fine performance. *Logic. Point and counterpoint. Assets and liabilities. Shit, Larry must be pleased as punch!*

Despite all this, Jared is royally pissed. *You fucker!* is what he wants to say but he doesn't.

Larry has swooped and torn the lid right off one of Jared's most private secrets. Just like Char so often does. But Jared, as ever, is quick to parry, using his self-deprecating wit as a shield of defense. "Yeah, Big Bro, that's me—narcissistic, self-centered, spoiled, wild-assed and wild-eyed—a fumbling innocent whom everybody wants to help! *If I'm so screwed up, why not just let prison do its job on me. Maybe I will be rehabilitated!*"

Eddie misses Jared's mock message and says with a touch of macho, "Maybe he has a point there! Like the army made you a man, eh, Larry?"

Larry winces at that insidious slogan, for only he of all the brothers knows the reality, the kiss of evil that lies behind it. Contrary to Eddie's intent, his words make Larry more desperate to get Jared to desert.

"Hear me, Jared, I'm ashamed. I *am* ashamed of you! You have so much promise and you're so damn smart but you're taking the coward's way out, fleeing the field of battle. This is *not* what I know you are up to."

"Up to?" groans Jared. His fists tighten. "Up to?" He slaps the phrase back at the three. "Aw, c'mon, for Christ's sake, you guys, gimme a break. It'll be just hours before I'm locked up and you want me to remove myself from all I've been doing for years? *Up to?* Shit, I've been handling that criticism for ages. Spare me! We've run it down before."

Eddie breaks back in, unable to restrain himself. Arms flailing like a jellyfish in flight he speaks from confusion, from bitterness mingled with fear and a curious hope. "The life you've been living, the life of a teacher and a theologian, is pure

bullshit. It's a deadening way of living. Day by day giving people words on which to hang their social sanity and go out to exploit and war against others. Believe me, it's true—you give people a vision, a justification *for* war. All this 'nonviolence' crap—hell, you preach it and they make someone an enemy. *The Establishment*, right? Don't you see, you've been snookered? Don't you see, they hear what they want to hear? The congregation is fickle! It blows with the wind. You've been duped into thinking that vast crowds of people have been following you. You've begun to believe your own underground press—that there is a *counterculture*."

Eddie presses both arms onto the table. Rigid. Jared recognizes this habit. When the arms stop whirling about Eddie is about to say something he feels strongly about. "Take my word for it. People are people. Nothing ever changes. Nonviolence is just another excuse for subtler forms of violence!"

Jared: "If that's true, then no one should do anything?"

Eddie: "No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that . . . that when your dream breaks down, get another dream. Don't hang on to broken dreams. Broken dreams are what nightmares are made of!"

Marian pounces with indignation. "You're just a real stupid jerk, Eddie. I should've let you drown in the bathtub years ago!" She turns to Jared, clearly moved by deep affection, but it's all carried in her eyes. Her voice is dry, almost academic.

"Your trial, Jared, the public witness—*that's something*. I realized it the first time I heard you preach. I realized that all you had previously done as an academic was to carve bits of words from books and glue them back into yet another book. Like model airplane building. But I know that just can't be what it's all about *for you*.

Lord, Jared, when you preach, then I know the Presence. Then I can feel the meaning of Jesus's words take deep in my heart's blood! You've just got to understand . . ."

The gush of emotion sends her words in all directions and once again ties down her tongue.

Larry positions himself into the split fracture of time. He's now beyond desperate. He's being driven by a need so subterranean that he will never understand his guilt over failing to get Jared to desert to Canada. He tears the short end of an envelope, taps it, unfolds a letter. The paper is old, yellowed, with frayed edges.

"Believe me, I didn't know if I'd read this, but it's something you wrote to me when you gave up your Conscientious Objector status and burned your draft card.

The war is not an academic matter. Yes, research is done on campuses and policy is determined by intellectuals but war itself is the abandonment of words, it is the step beyond into blood. A warrior doesn't carry a book with him, he carries his body and soul into the battle. He wagers his limbs and eyes against the limbs and eyes of the enemy. War is the enactment of the word, just as Christ is the enactment of the Word of God. Christ is peace, the word peace. War is the Devil made flesh. It is hatred and evil. When I preach the gospels I know this, know this, because a hand, yes, an actually sensate hand touches my head and my heart and my bowels. This hand heals me, strengthens me, and shakes me. Challenges me. Taking a stand against the war is not merely a matter of shuffling words, of allowing the ruling powers to let you use your words, chanting "Peace now!" Shit, I wish it was that easy.

As Larry reads, Jared's words fly around the room, circling back to draw them together.

Dealing with war means getting into the blood. Truly getting the blood on your hands and into your eyes and caught in your breathing. Dealing with the war is not getting deferments or people to sign protest statements. It's getting into the blood. And here in this country, now, it means destroying the military system. Means ripping out its heart. Means robbing files. And destroying research centers. And encouraging desertion. And working, working hard to pick up the tempo of nonviolent sabotage. Oh, Christ, what does it take to make this clear?

Larry settles the pages on the table, neatening them as his executive habits demand.

"*I want you to desert!*" He articulates the sentence word by word as if there was a magic behind, linking them all together. He says it and as he does he hears it echo in that deep part of him where little has entered since Korea.

Jared's head sags, lowers into his shoulders. Without voice: *Here I am standing on the platform as the train comes in and people—my family!—are still asking me whether I want to go. Can't you see that I can't but go? Can't you see that? That the war is not over. That the Resistance is only begun, only the first thoughts acted on? That I must go further inside the belly of the Monster? I must be eaten by the Devil. I must be intimate with evil. That unless I experience this, I will never be free? Yes, fucking yes, it is the curse of my generation to suffer such intimacy with evil. To dance so nakedly before the ravisher's eyes. Accept it: Our lives are only and ever ones of Resistance. There is no peace. There is not even the rumor of peace. The Day of the Abomination is on us. Our wandering has no end.*

But all Jared can muster in memorable response to Larry is a softly mumbled mutter. Nothing intelligible. Just a fist of muffled grunts.

Larry can't stifle the wailing love in his heart. He wants to protect Jared, to whisk him away from the prison danger—*it's my role!*—but he can't. Jared won't let him. At the same time, he's pained by the contempt for Jared that lingers a bit too precariously at the edge of his heart. Always, what Jared names as acts of freedom and conscience, Larry struggles with as disobedience.

In some ways, for Larry, only his dreams permit a counter scene to be enacted. *He's shutting a jail cell door behind Jared. It closes with a metallic thud. Clang! Larry pockets the key and walks back to Control.*

After this dream, something howls in terror and Larry wakes. He must cross himself and pray if sleep is to come.

The four have eaten—food and words, images and emotions. They are filled and depleted. Each has wound down into a hard silence. The waitress came and cleared the table during Larry's reading. She's been invisible to them. She noticed that they did not notice her. She's perplexed by what is happening. Disturbed, she forgets to ask them about dessert.

As she leaves their table, it's as if another presence has just arrived and joined them. Truly, a presence touches each one with a kiss on the cheek. The four look at one another and as one spectral eye behold *him* now present with them. What more could any of them say? Why should anything else be said?

Eddie is the one most clearly aware of the change. He knows that familiar presence. It's their Dad. He was about to speak but the presence alarms and overwhelms him. He's not one to surrender to tender moments but this he cannot control. He begins to weep, ever so lightly and softly. The others notice.

Larry is unnerved by Eddie's tears. He fears a breakdown into maudlin sentimentality. Artfully, he seeks to regain the moment by moving center stage with a toast.

"Let me speak for our collective heart." He lifts his cocktail, holding it a short distance in front and motions with it to all three. He offers, "A toast to ourselves. A toast to the struggle that is our family. To the memory of Dad who loved all of us so deeply and who is here in our hearts, and—" the solemnity of the memory is lighten by Marian's completion—"to Mom, who like all good Irish lassies is in church right now lighting candles for her wee one!"

Each glass to the center of the table, there met by the other three. "A toast of hope. That we may all be together in common heart again soon."

With this swing in their mood they call the waitress back. More drinks are ordered and consumed. The boys burn offerings of cigar. During this time Eddie talks about his kids and how they are adjusting to living in a rural Iowa community. Marian reconfirms her long-desired hope that all four will someday create a family restaurant. Ever the Town Crier, Eddie checks his watch as he drains his third martini. "It's one o'clock . . . almost time, no?"

Jared has never worn a watch but the whole day has felt like one-thirty, the Time of Surrender. When he awoke and rose to dress he felt the temporal demand of surrender. Time is curious today. Each moment feels auspiciously proper as if self-aware of its service to him on this final sweep of freedom. In appropriate response he acknowledges that the clockwork mechanism is setting his life's course into its turnings, and with that sense of relief that comes to those completing a long, long journey, he lifts his hands as if to sign a benediction and says, "Right, guys, I think we should walk down there."

The four stand up together, don coats together, walk out together, almost stride in cadence down the city mall together. Nearing the Federal Building, a cluster of well-wishers comes into sight.

"Looks like some people came anyway," Marian comments. All knew—like Sean the week before—that Jared and Matt had requested that no one be there

when they surrendered. Each wants the day to be his own. A day with family and loved ones. A day of personal meditation. However, as is the case with political situations, some had not heard and so they came. Rather small in number—so few that compared to the swell that could have been assembled they look apologetic.

Jared is sure that the Feds will once again interpret the small group as a sign of a debilitating, waning interest in the Resistance. But he doesn't want to think about that. Instead, he walks through the crowd touching faces, holding arms, kissing lips and hugging.

Several TV cameras are recording the event. A cluster of newsmen break as he comes by, each reporter soliciting comments. Jared doesn't feel like saying much. After all, after these years, what has he left to say? Most of the media people know him, a majority have become friendly over time. But no one has ever had the guts to "take on the System" as he constantly prods them to. No one has ever drawn Cronkite out into the open, pinned "Uncle Walter" with the true meaning of his, "And that's the way it is . . ." No one has spent time in the streets with him struggling with nonviolent Resistance to the rulers of the Warrior State. Not one has thus seen, through that discipline, the militarization of their own voice.

Who among them would name themselves "Good Soldiers"? Yet despite it all, there had been small victories. The initial "Commie baiting" of the early coverage became tempered through personal contact. *How soon do you think the war would end if you guys stopped doing damage control and exposed the government for what it's worth? How many body bags has your cowardice produced?* But he never says that.

This day, Jared merely utters the bland, "Yeah, man, I'm feeling fine. It's a great day isn't it? Hope to see you when I get out." Among them, he is looking for Burston. He would talk with Burston. "Is Burston here?" Jared asks one, then another. No answer.

*Burston's just another casualty of the war, man.*

Several of the supporters are part of a local “guerilla theater” street troupe. For years they have provided a “people's theater,” commonly acting on street corners, providing a creative outlet for radical anti-war sentiment and biting satire. Right now, their “Hevy Gunz” takes the meaning of the day to its symbolic heights. They march around with protest signs—which in itself is certainly not unusual—however, these signs only have pictures of bugs on them!

As they march, they say nothing, which *is* highly unusual. Instead of their customary chatter, preaching and demagoguery, today they mime their protests. The absurdity of their signs is highlighted by this weird muteness.

They perform under the banner, “Thanks for the Pie!” Two who do not carry banners present themselves cloaked and painted as Death. It’s a riotous mix of gloom and the absurd, effecting a release from the somberness of the Federal monolith before which they perform. Their message is the message war conveys, that “Humans are only insects!”

But no one has to say this, not today. Idiotically, Jared knows that the Feds and others of the Warrior mentality are scratching their heads, baffled and bewitched, not getting the message. The tone of the mime fits Jared heart and spirit to a tee. It etches a smile on his soul.

One reporter cuts out and corners his two brothers. He wants to know how they feel about Jared's going to prison. Eddie has become so uptight that all he can do is peer darts at the questioner. He stands rigid, arms folded, shielding his heart.

Larry reacts hastily. His stifled energies find release in a blurt that shocks him with its self-disclosure. “How do I feel?! Christ, how do you think I feel? My brother's going to prison for being a nonviolent person. *I . . . I killed* people—and got a medal for it! My brother's being locked up and taken away from me and my family because he doesn't want to kill. How the hell do you think I feel? I feel ugly. I feel angry. I feel . . . I feel . . .” His voice cracks. “I feel so damn proud of Jared. I love him. He's my brother. How else do you think I feel?”

None of these comments will reach the paper. The reporter knows that there's an FBI lock on making these guys look like some kind of heroic anti-heroes. He covered the trial, has been to Resistance parties, has listened to Jared preach—more, knew him when walls bore the cry, “Hang the fag Pinkos! Death to The Four!”

His reporter instincts drew him to this event. There's true drama here. Humans laughing and weeping. Families broken but loving. But, *so what?* He knows that the only story they'll approve will mutilate the day's truth and beauty. *No doubt, sure, there's a great American story here*, he chides himself, *but only the historians will ever put it in print.*

A smattering of clapping draws attention to Matt walking up the sidewalk towards the crowd. His ex-wife is at his side. Matt feels and shows little emotion when he sees the crowd. Neither anger nor peace. He simply desires to begin the time so that it will end.

Jared has only seen Matt twice since jail. Both times Matt has refused to recount any part of the memory. Jared has had to accept that Matt has no need to relive those events. That somehow, through his own way, whatever happened, he has handled it.

As Matt walks up to Jared, a guitar strums and a single voice begins singing. It's a song that the straggling flock picks up. It's a hymn of The Movement, “All we are saying is give peace a chance.” They sing off-key and the strumming is erratic. Jared is warmed, however, by its faithfulness to itself.

“Matt,” Jared whispers, “Matt, when do you think we should go? Do you want to stay here and rap? Do you want to speak to the press?”

Matt nods a *no*. On this point Jared knows how his ever-placid brother in crime feels. His worldview is unencumbered. He simply hates war. He simply abhors all and any kind of violence. He would suffer any outrage inflicted upon him without violent reprisal. Matt simply wants to act. Act against violence, true, but act *for*

nonviolence. And so together in action, towards the closing act, they stride side-by-side.

Matt reaches for the handle to the building's huge glass doors. He pauses, waiting for Jared, who is detained by the final embraces of his brothers and sister.

As Jared finally joins him, Matt braces for the huge canopy of flesh, face, and kiss that is about to fall upon him. Jared, ever the bear-hugger, picks him up, holds him tightly like a lover, and after a long moment, gently releases him.

Together they look once more, finally, towards their friends and families, raise their hands in the familiar V sign of peace, open the doors, step inside, and walk down the corridor, leaving themselves as distorted images on the eyes of those straining to catch their last goodbyes.

Larry stands stolidly, gathering the last felt holdings of his brother into his arms and across his neck. Gathers them to scar them deeply into his soul. As Eddie takes his arm and Marian touches his shoulder Larry moans, deeply, from a bitter pool of revenge.

Only in the testimony of dreams was the count made of how many family members and friendly hands had reached out to slam the prison gate shut. Only in the Canada of broken dreams did they all sit round in circle and bewail their cowardly deed.

## PART II: PRISON

### 10 - THE FIRST NIGHT BACK INSIDE

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

No, that's not how Jared wants to begin! *But how else?* They never taught another way. Really, why not start like that? Is he too proud to say, *I have sinned?* Is that it—he's simply too arrogant? Is it pride that keeps him from using the old familiar words? *Yes, pride—that probably is my sin.*

Jared is meditating, lost inside New York City's massive monument to American Catholicism—St. Patrick's Cathedral. He has come here on his final trip back East before entering prison. Here he has sat for hours, fighting his own self-judgments, his internal biting ridicule of all he is and has done.

*St. Patrick's!* As a kid he marched before this place in St. Vincent's Drum and Bugle Corps. He came here with his dad as a special treat and privilege just to hear Mass. Always, he's been impressed by the majesty of this House of God—the overwhelming presence in stone of He Who Judges Us All.

*Judgment.* Truly, he has never felt God's love here, only His wrath. Here, into the pit of his country—*Gotham, the Big Apple*—that wild headache of the restless heart of mankind, Jared has come once again to confess. He hadn't intended to come here. Certainly, he had wanted to visit New York but it hadn't consciously occurred to him to go back to St. Pat's.

"Bless me, *Father . . .*"

*No, I can't do that!*

But he *must*—confess, that is. For his is a confessing faith. Confessing his unworthiness to even kneel before God and seek His justice. *No, not justice—mercy!* The State has rendered justice, it is for God to be merciful. Although he's never sought mercy from his God before, now he craves it. He whispers, "I confess that I stood up and proclaimed your Word. No, no! I confess—I have *claimed* that I

*am your Word! Isn't this pride, Almighty Father? I stood as a prophet and claimed that breaking their law proclaims your Grace. Isn't this arrogance, delusion, conceit—even worse, idolizing myself?" Bitter whispers, lip-bitten utterances.*

Yet another soulful, insistent voice urges him, "Resist!" It repeats, echoing, *Resist! Resist!*

Jared sits back, not registering the austere discomfort of the pew, and surveys the church, straining to see the flickering sanctuary lamp that indicates God's presence. *No, I won't say "Father." I can't go back to that narrow, male religion. Never! I won't whimper in front of these arrogant, death-blackened priests.*

He buries his face in his hands. *Why am I so afraid? Why do I shudder, sitting here?*

Jared sighs and kneels again, holds his back ramrod straight, his eyes locked on God's altar, that slab of atonement.

Growing up, Jared always envisioned himself as a priest. So it was a surprise to everyone when he left the monastery after his novitiate year. But it wasn't so much that he rejected the path of priesthood as that he couldn't live with priests—they were the problem. After college when he went to study theology in graduate school, it was another attempt to be faithful to his priestly instincts, what he's always felt was without doubt his calling—his soul's task. *Karma, man . . . karma!*

At this moment Jared feels like a wayward priest, one of those so often decried by the Novice Master as drunks, apostates, womanizers. All his failings with Char, Bruiser and Dikbar are wrapped around his self-doubt about the "holiness" of his sacrifice of draft files on the altar of the draft board. That's how he sees it. Yet, he realizes that his may be the most peculiar explanation for doing draft raids ever concocted!

Who else was charged up to commit “sociopolitical sacramental acts”? Other activists, even other Catholic Radicals, thought he was an odd bird. Unlike the others, Jared is driven by the uneven passion that grips those who seemingly throw away their lives, who give up the world in obedience to the specter behind the queer word *God*.

Jared is still on a priestly mission, seeking to fulfill a spiritual, *sacred* duty: to destroy all false gods and thereby to be a witness to the power of his God, His peacemaking power—“Peace that surpasseth understanding.” *Blessed are the peacemakers*.

What troubles him here in St. Patrick’s is the other hand of God—the hand that lies heavy upon him, the one that sends a cold shiver of doubt through the body of a newly ordained priest. Although he has assessed that his act of raiding draft boards bestowed the priestly ordination upon him, there is no celebration in this because he judges the raids a misfire, his sacrifice unacceptable. He’s heartbroken, devastated by his failure to do God’s will. *Have I really failed?* he soulfully pleads. Agonized, he waits for a sign. *God, is even this expectation a condemning evidence of my pride?* His insides twist in anguish, he feels he’s being gnawed on.

*Jesus, oh sweet Jesus, have I trod in thy footsteps? Have my years been in your service as I’ve told myself? Have I been righteous? Have I been a servant of servants?* Thoughts jam and ram his skull, each gaining cunning entrance to torment his mind, all wailing and screeching so that his head throbs near explosion.

For uncounted moments Jared hangs heavy in the pew. Perspiration beads his brow. His legs feel leaden. A cool chill raises the hair on his nape—ethereal fingers tap him, probe to find an entrance into his soul. *God have mercy on me!*

He can’t move, can’t stand and walk out of the pew. Anger, fear, pride, seething rage paralyze him. In despair he confronts his only choice—he must surrender and submit. With a last desperate prayer he feverishly whispers, “Oh Mary, Mother of God, help me! Give your son strength! Take me under your

guidance, and please—oh please!—make me worthy as you were worthy to receive God’s love.”

With these words cleansing his mind from irresolution, Jared pushes himself upright and without hesitation strides over to and enters the Black Box.

“Bless me”—he does not say *Father*—“for I have sinned. It has been . . . it’s been quite some time, about five years since I’ve confessed.”

The figure shadowed by the screen doesn’t move or speak. Jared continues as trained, actually lets slip a *Father*.

“Father, I’m having a difficult time examining my conscience. I’m confused over my own feelings and self judgments.” Lip-licking pause. “See, I’m about to go to prison.”

The shadow moves closer to the screen, but Jared can neither hear him speak nor breathe.

“I’ve been sentenced to five years . . . for destroying draft files . . . in defiance of the Selective Service. But I did this because I believe in peace, because I want this insane war to stop.”

A sharp question shoots through, it smolders with irritation. “Are you a priest?”

Jared hesitates briefly. “No.”

As if checking off a prepared list, the confessor continues his line of questioning. “Have you ever been ordained?”

“No.”

“Have you ever been in Orders?”

“No.”

"Have you ever been in the seminary?"

"Yes."

"Where and when?"

"Back in the minor Sem, with the Franciscans. I left from the Novitiate."

"What is your job?"

"Job?...Well, I became a lay theologian—you know, with Vatican Two and all. I got a master's from the University of—"

The confessor interrupts, doggedly pursuing his path of inquiry. "Did you teach?"

"Sure. For several years on the college level and—"

"Ever preach?"

"Okay. Yes."

The interrogation stops abruptly. Jared waits in silence for a moment. It irritates him that the two of them have fallen into the "I'm the priest, you're the layperson, I'm in charge" routine. But before he can express his pique, the priest resumes.

"You have assumed the role of preaching and teaching within Mother Church. That is a *serious* obligation. Clearly, your lapse in receiving the Sacrament of Penance indicates a greater lapse in your obedience to the Church—is this not true?"

With rising anger Jared mentally indicts himself. *Trapped! Why have I let myself get trapped again?* He wants to snarl, "Father, I don't know how to talk with you. I feel bitter toward the Church—filled with venom toward priests like you who gloat with judgments about the sinfulness of their fellow Christians. I came here because I don't even know if I believe in sin anymore. Not to be grilled!" But

something deep within restrains him, as if a firm hand were placed on his shoulder. His muscles are tense, ready to flee, but he's unable to push himself away. He came here having waged a fight against his own better judgment, and now the fight begins anew. *Who is this priest? What do I care about what he says? How can he possibly understand me? How dare he judge me?*

Again, the confessor's voice struts through the grate, now unblushingly confident of itself. "You accept your obligation as a theologian, of that I'm sure. I'm also sure you have *succumbed*, through your exposure to advanced studies, to the temptation that damned Martin Luther and his unfortunate disciples—that of private interpretation of Scripture."

The priest doesn't pause to solicit Jared's comments. He moves steadily forward, so accustomed to deference to his authority that he assumes Jared is arrested—and humbled—by the mere sound of his voice.

"I am well versed in the *sloppy* theology of those who consider civil disobedience a call from God. I'm extremely pleased that the Lord has sent you to me today because I know well the place where you are going." A hint of nostalgia seeps into his condescending tone. "I was a prison chaplain as a young priest . . . Those were truly blessed days for, as you will find, prison is filled with wayward sheep and one can truly be the Good Shepherd."

Jared is quietly choking, feeling strangled by the tone even more than the content.

"Shut up!" he growls. The confessor's voice halts. "*You*—you are everything I was supposed to be. *You*—" a slight pause, "you stupid fucking asshole!"

With that, Jared lurches to his feet, swats the curtain aside and exits the confessional. He doesn't stop to genuflect or touch the lip of the holy water font or hail the sanctuary light as a beacon of His Presence or pause to savor the eternal odor of incense. Furious, he strides out of the cathedral, marching with an acute awareness of what he is shedding. *It is done*, he proclaims to all the protesting

voices within. Out loud, shouting to the distant reaches of the cathedral, "It is *done*, now and forever. Amen!"

Jared plunges out of the church—an observer might think he'd been thrown out—from its darkness into the moldy light of Gotham.

Jared propels himself five blocks before he realizes he's going full steam ahead in the wrong direction. He pivots abruptly to reverse and at the first opportunity turns left. Hands in pockets, eyes counting the concrete lines of the sidewalk, only the weight of his primary purpose for visiting New York gradually begins to slow him down. *Prepare! Prepare!* warns the sentry within.

*Prepare!* For Jared has actually come to New York to see his Uncle Sam. *Funny he's called that.* In fact his Uncle Maurice took the name Eugene when he joined the Franciscans but Jared has never called him Uncle Maurice nor Uncle Eugene. He was Friar Eugene before Jared even knew he had been Maurice and—a bit stuffy most thought—he insisted on being called *Friar*, never Uncle. Now just a couple of years ago, he ups and leaves the Order and joins the Jesuits, takes the name Samuel. Calling him "Uncle Sam"—especially during these war years!—feels just a shade too weird. But Jared doesn't want to deal with that on this trip.

*Knock, knock.* Uncle Sam opens the door and waves him in as if Jared were a daily visitor. "Jared, my beloved nephew. God bless you!" is said as he strokes the air with a priestly sign of the cross. Jared, half-resisting, blesses himself in response.

The two sit down in large over-stuffed chairs and begin to chat as if they had just returned from lunch and were picking up an earlier conversation. A glass and a bottle of spring water are chair-side. Both men easily settle in.

"My son, God is Love. Rest assured that you have come at the right time. You are meant to be here. God's grace will enfold you even at the moments of your greatest despair and self-doubt. Please unburden yourself."

“Unburden myself?” Jared snaps at the bait, engages, locks onto him with the same blistering energy he had the last time, almost three years ago. “Me unburden me? How about God unburdening Himself! How about Him? You tell me why He’s taken war and evil onto His back and walked the earth with it?”

The poison in Jared’s convictions causes the blood to drain from Uncle Sam’s face. “My son, seek to know the unfathomable ways of God. His Son became flesh both as a light and as a stumbling block. In Jesus, the glory of God has shone forth, as has evil’s many black hearts. My son, my brother, be steadfast in these times. Trust that all you have seen in bounteous light will reveal itself even more greatly in numinous darkness.”

Jared says nothing. *What is there to say?*

“My son, my brother, are you afraid to trust?”

“Afraid?” The question slowly strangles itself in Jared’s throat. He repeats, “Afraid . . . to trust?” He pauses, pours himself a glass of water and starts to respond but then doesn’t. He’s so pissed he can’t move!

Jared strains to pull himself together but his only desire is to abandon this place. End it all with a sacramental sign of *Fuck you!* slinking from his erect finger. Just like at St. Patrick’s, all his past, even his familial past must be damned!

Uncle Sam rises, tugs at parts of his attire, shifts and pulls at his trouser belt through his robe. He’s employing the repertoire of deft, minuscule moves that must be mastered by those who wear flocking drapery over trousers. Primped, he sits back down, rocks a bit this way, a bit that, like a mother hen settling in her nest, spreading her feathers and her heat over her brood.

“My son, my brother, during the darkness at the beginning of our Atomic Age, I was a newly ordained chaplain at a convent in Japan. I was quite young and filled with an ardor for the conversion of the unbaptized. My years of work found me debating ceaselessly with brothers of different faiths. Often I spent long hours reading through the testaments and scriptures of alien religions. I labored to

understand the Buddhists, the Confucians, the Jains. I was sent there mainly to clear up a health problem, and now to my shock I was confronting my first intellectual defeat. Sadly, I was forbidden, for matters of health, to pursue academic studies.”

Uncle Sam takes a sip of water, draws it out, putting some time between his words.

“Truthfully, I was driven by the kindness and compassion of my pagan brothers to question the roots of my own belief. I was so cast astray that all I could do was request to be brought home, to be returned to the Mother House of my Order. To return and to die. Verily,” his voice breaks, “verily, I sought but to die.” A pause . . . quiet breathing, intense eyes.

“Before I could get the letter sent, American pilots dropped the Bomb. I, out of hundreds of thousands, was spared any pain or hurt—not the slightest wound on my body although the streets next to mine were burned to the ground, although fellow priests and nuns were scorched to death in my backyard. I was too staggered in those hours to ask myself any questions. I did not pry into why God had spared me. My days were filled with walking the streets and healing people. I attest, my son, my brother, God chose me to heal.”

Oddly, Jared is aware that a faint odor of chrysanthemum scents the room.

“In the midst of that blinding light of man’s self-discovery I plodded the streets, dispelling the darkness it instilled into people’s minds and hearts. My tongue took on the power to touch people’s souls, people who spoke a language I had never mastered. My hands were vehicles for healing wounds that no medicine could soothe. My whole body became a reservoir of grace, a lake of peacefulness and trust for hundreds whose sense of life had been shattered by the blazing fireball of human light. Why did this happen? Why did a feeble cleric with an ignorant mind become such a chosen vessel? Why was I able to finally reach out and bring a true light to those I had considered pagans?”

Uncle Sam pauses in such a manner that Jared knows that he has asked himself these questions a thousand times.

“No, my son, my brother, it is not because of anything within me myself. No, I became the vessel of light because I had opened myself to the *darkness* of God. I had opened myself in ways that I had not understood. I could be with these people because I’d been filled with the darkness, not the light of their beliefs.”

Uncle Sam’s story sends goose bumps up Jared’s arms and down his back. But a big wearied *So what?* echoes in Jared’s mind.

Uncle Sam pushes himself up from his chair with the difficulty and grunts of a fat man lifting himself out of a pit. Wordlessly, the priest takes his most valued gift—the crucifix presented to him by a group of *hibakusha*, survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—loops it from his neck and presses it into Jared’s hand. “It is the presence of Him salvaged from the wreckage of a melted Buddha by a craftsman whose creative light the Bomb could not extinguish.”

Jared cradles the twist of metal. Uncle Sam blesses it, speaks the word, “Hibakusha.” At once Jared is taken aback by its lightness—it is thin, something that can be worn under a shirt, next to one’s heart. Curiously, he also feels a leaden dread, conjuring a memory of a presence that he had felt as he knelt before the Novitiate’s replica of Grunewald’s *The Crucifixion*—a presence that sends a teeth-chattering chill into his every bone.

*Strange*—as he holds the cross and dimly hears Uncle Sam talk more fully about the *hibakusha* it mesmerizes him, draws him into itself.

*Whang! Whang!* The jailhouse cell gate automatically slides and slams shut, *Whang! Whang! Whang!* Five times, his being the first in the row of five. Somewhere an unseen hand guides the massive lever that closes the row of cages one by one at each evening’s Lights Out. Jared is back Inside, back in County for a brief stay before he’s escorted to prison.

He turns over onto his right side, savoring the remembrance of his visit with Uncle Sam. As this blessed twilight fugue vanishes, there is a residue of stinging regret. *Why couldn't I ask him? What would he have said to me if I had told him about Bruiser and Dikbar, about Char and Aaren? How would he have understood Burston? Would he have urged me to go to Canada like the others?* Questions and more questions that sting, then as now. Non-answers that reach all the way from St. Patrick's, some fifteen hundred miles away, right into his cell.

*My first night. Five years! I must accept this, I must . . .* He kisses the *hibakusha*. He prays—prayers which mercifully calm him like a bedtime narcotic. The bitter reality of his new life as a convict slowly starts to ebb. Here at the end of his first day back Inside, here in a darkened cell in the Hennepin County Jail, Jared abandons himself, softly crying in his abandonment, "My God, my God, why have I forsaken you?"

It is an abandonment to the trust of a god he questions exists.

Losing Arthur—the agent has thought about that before. Losing Arthur was hard, for it had been hard to enlist Arthur. Not many of his color really have the markings of the brotherhood. And how Arthur had made it—Lord, what a great fellow! Hardworking. Persistent. Right, that was the term, persistent. The minister even used it in his last words: “Arthur was *persistence*.” And he was going places. Just bad luck he died young. Dying young was often marked with a sense of tragedy. More so in Arthur’s case, Lord! He was *going* places. A fine guy, a real Guardian. The agent likes to think of their role as Guardians. Somehow it has a scriptural tinge to it that’s fitting. And he knows Mr. Hoover is fond of it. “Guardians of America” sure sounds better than FBI.

But that’s not his task. His is this young fellow. One of these “radicals,” high in his ideals but quite odd in how he squares what he thinks with what he does. All told, an easy day, a PC run. These guys in Protective Custody are heavily chained so there’s rarely a hassle. As he passes the road sign, “Millston, FCI 7 miles,” he knows that this one will be out of his hands in a small bucket of minutes.

When he lets himself feel it, he has a liking towards this young fellow. There’s a pressure about him as if the air is highly charged and weighs more than that around most people. As if he could reach out and touch the spaces around the guy and his fingers would tap the density of some substance. But as has happened before, his type of discussion while drawing him to agreement in some spots, loses him when these types jump to their conclusions. They just don’t understand national security—or the average American. I mean, if this guy had met Arthur! No doubt then he’d have changed his tune.

Definitely, his own sentiment expressed at the burial site said it all, “Arthur was a walking confirmation that America is great—the greatest.” Arthur would have set this radical straight on this war and all his mixed-up ideas about racism. He, a

black man who had experienced bitter discrimination while in the Special Forces, would have given him the proper perspective. "Sure prisons have a heavy concentration of blacks. True, a higher percent of those dying in Vietnam are men of color. But don't screw up those statistics and make them say something they don't mean." He can hear Arthur stating that again, right now, from beyond the grave.

Arthur would have told this kid the real history of the blacks. Gee, how he hated how people had taken to rewriting American history as "black" history! It irked him that they imposed a self-serving interpretation on the facts and statistics. Arthur would have told him about his great-grandfather who had escaped from slavery to the North. About his cousins lynched in the South during the '20s. And name his friends who were bludgeoned and beaten in Civil Rights demonstrations. But he would tell it as it was, the Story of Hope, chapters in the history of a democracy where people—*People*—wield the power. For what's more evident of the actual working of democracy than the success of the Civil Rights movement? While others counted blows and dead bodies, Arthur celebrated the freedom that *people* unleashed. He knew that freedom could only come from the people, not from the government.

That's one of the problems with this fellow. He just doesn't understand and he tells him so. "You still don't understand, even standing at the gates of prison! That your imprisonment is your freedom. Someone who did what you did would be dead by now in most parts of the world. Your type just doesn't understand that prison is the proof of the truth of our democracy. Otherwise, I'd be driving your hearse!"

All his thoughts are heavily weighted by memories of Arthur. It's a thinking that makes him *feel* good. *Opportunity*, that was Arthur's favorite word. He so often said—to white people and black people, to everyone—that "In America blacks have opportunity. They don't have that anywhere else. In America a black could and I say *will* someday become president. Look at me, working for the FBI! Sure there are problems but do you know of another country where the opportunities so

outweigh the problems? What other country could pass so much critical legislation as fast as ours has?”

“Young man, you just got to read the Constitution more often.” I’d bet Arthur would say that to this guy and probably draw out a thumb-worn paperback copy of the Constitution—a stack of which he always kept stashed in his briefcase—and read it to him, even behind the bars!

“It’s the balance of powers, that’s what makes it work, and that’s where you’ve gone all wrongheaded. You must trust the balance of powers, that’s for certain.” Arthur, ah, Arthur, he had the Flag tattooed on his soul! *What a guy!*

As the agent opines and muses, Jared quietly basks in the visual beauty of Minnesota’s Highway 61. Any time in County is tomb time, so he’s sitting back, letting the sun-bright farmland images wash over and seep into him. It is a wisp of humor that he enjoys, the fact that “Highway 61” was one of Bob Dylan’s early albums.

So much anti-war Resistance and radical counterculture germinated in Minnesota, a fact that always amazes him. A provincial East Coaster by birthright, the Midwest had been a rude awakening in his late teen years when his dad had been transferred. The summers are ghastly, allergy-infested and mosquito-dominated. And the winters—*winter!* God must have invented Minnesota to prove that people could live even when their brains are frozen! How Jared hates the stark clarity of below-zero cold. He certainly could live without a Minnesota winter. But at this moment he enthusiastically professes love for every cow and every barn, every car on the road and every mile of the highway.

As to this Fed driving him to Millston, “What do you think about the students killed at Kent State?”

“My view on that will be different from yours. But I have access to information you don’t.”

"C'mon, for Christ's sake, they were murdered by the National Guard!"

"Wrong, just deadhead wrong. Believe me, you just don't get the full picture."

Jared shakes his head at this nonsense. "Okay, who did it?"

The guy turns, a rather "typical American" guy—his travel bag in the backseat names him *John Brown*, someone you could see at home, see framed by a split-level picture window, with a beer and a cheeseburger watching TV, but in better shape than most of his middle-aged cohorts—turns and asks, as if his question is the answer, "Who do you think shot Kennedy?"

"This is your answer? Your question is the answer?"

"Yessir, that's it. That's my answer!" The agent smiles and accelerates the car.

*What does he mean by that? That they have a common killer? Some kind of conspiracy? That's so far out I can't believe it!* Jared wants to probe a bit more.

"Kennedy . . . King . . . Bobby . . . were all shot by some right-wingers, you can bet on that," Jared says confidently as if his conclusion is not to be doubted.

The agent looks in the rearview mirror and then side to side, forces a laugh.

"No one is listening, not even a space bird can pick us up out here at this speed. So kid, let me set you straight. You'll not be talking to anyone for a while, at least not anyone I have to worry about."

He slows down for effect. Once more glances up and down the highway then pauses a hard moment to look Jared squarely in the eye.

"The Chinese," he says without expression.

"The Chinese?"

The agent is amused by Jared's incredulity. He lets him dangle for several minutes and then turns the screw. "You've got to understand that nothing, *nothing* happens today that isn't a part of foreign policy. I mean *nothing*. Mao believes that to bring down democracy and capitalism he must 'heighten the contradictions.' Are you familiar with the way these yellow bastards think? What do you know about their Cultural Revolution? They're an ancient culture but they haven't learned much."

Jared is too flabbergasted to go on. *Maybe he's putting me on? God, he'd love Aaren!* Jared chuckles beneath his breath. *What does he think about me? What the hell, ask him!* He has nothing to lose. To emphasize his point, Jared starts shaking his legs and arms, making Kindergarten music with his full-body chains and handcuffs.

"What do you think of me? How dangerous am I?"

This is easy for the agent to answer. He pigeonholed Jared and his type long ago. "You're just dupes. Sorry to have to say that but a sparrow *is* a sparrow and not an eagle. You never had a chance. The schools have been out of control for too long and you just did what you learned. I think prison will set you right." In his mind he continues, *I think prison will make you more like Arthur*. He likes that thought.

They stop talking. Each withdraws into his own reverie. Like it or not, the agent finds himself falling into that feeling he dreads, the mood-shift that drops him into low gear as soon as he passes the final road sign, "Millston, FCI 3 miles." *The Institution*. God, how he dislikes that name. He can sense his own mouth getting a little bit drier every time he walks through the steel gates. When one set shuts behind him and the other one hasn't opened yet, just for an exotic moment, *he* is caged. His chest tightens and always he wheezes and coughs. This is what he so dislikes about this special mission, *Operation Gag*, where he has to play taxi driver to all kinds of political weirdoes, so-called *political prisoners, radicals* and *revolutionaries*. His only consolation is that he's not on the Inside detail. *I don't*

*know if I could ever work Inside, undercover. Never!* He is sure he'd never get used to it.

This worries him. *Why do I react this way? Does it reveal a hidden weakness?* After all he served valiantly in World War II and withstood the satanic temptations that the cruelest acts of the human heart summoned. If there has ever been a case for the existence of the Devil and the reality of evil, it was at Treblinka. He could never forget that place. He'd been sent as the Corps' representative on a special intelligence taskforce. He was to discern what motivated the Nazis on a day-to-day basis. Why the camp inmates did *not* revolt.

Hard as he tried, he could never shake off the contagion of the place, that sense of power—the power to crumple souls whose bodies would fall like ashes through his fingers. Power that lingered on the barbed wire. It was the temptation conjured by the pathetic—men and boys weaker than the weakest patient, slaves for anyone with a strong tongue. With a snap of his fingers, they lived . . . or they died! Women and girls with just one flush of beauty left in their souls, beauty that he could suck dry with a single effortless inhale. Beauty crushed by the faintest breeze. Ah, the ultimate sexual enticement, females as disposable as trash!

Walking through the camp he staggered with this burden of the gods. To see those shrunken, living corpses—*ash people!*—was to see a great darkness only a few would ever see. Yet at that time he also felt within a greater Light that even fewer would ever feel. "Everyone should go there," he would repeatedly tell friends, "then you'll understand Hitler and why so many followed him." Entering the Institution always stirs up this memory. He's forever asking himself *Why?* But no answer comes.

The Institution. Agent Brown never doubts his own courage. Time and again events have underscored the quality of his character. But being captured and caged evokes instinctual fears that ensure he will be forever deterred to the right side of the law. "If push comes to shove," he has said to himself within his dream but never out loud, "I *will* be the executioner, not the victim."

It strikes him how good, most definitely, prison will be for this fellow. He's someone who can be rehabilitated—a middle-class kid who's taken free speech too far. *Too much of this hippie free love. Too many young men and women swearing and using indecent language.* Surely, the Institution will get to someone with his background. Without a doubt, this fellow is in for a big shock.

Millston's Tower comes into view, just over the tree tops. Higher than high, gun barrels glinting in the sun, it's an anchor to walls and fences crowned by thick rolls of barbed wire. The Tower never fails to terrorize. It's both symbol and the real presence of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.

"Looks like the road to the seminary."

*What? ... Without a doubt, an oddball. But all this will soon be over, and I'll be home before dark.*

Agent Brown is waved through by the Tower guards. His routine is short and swift. Deliver the Assignment. Sign some papers. Pick up the waist-chains and cuffs. Then, *bingo!* Home free.

Delivered, the agent looks forward to spending some time in town at the *Bashful Viking Bar and Grill*. Spend a bit of time with a few locals he's gotten to befriend after these PC runs. Probably, as usual, he'll take out the Bible tonight and read—no, he'll pray tonight over the phone with his wife, for Arthur.

He almost knows Psalm 23 by heart. "Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." This is his favorite part. This he knows he'll read tonight, for as often as he has heard it read at funerals while in the Corps, still it brings difficulty to his voice and damp wetness to his eyes as he bows to the mystery of death and all the weakness it cloaks him with.

*For sure, tonight I'll call Betty and read the psalm and pay my respects to a fine brother. And say an extra prayer for this young man who once had such great promise—that the Institution will teach him to value America and its Christian ways like Arthur did.*

So it begins. Jared exits the car, exits from profane, everyday time and enters the sacred space and extra-ordinary time: *Inside*. As at Treblinka and other holy sites where the gods of cruelty celebrate their rituals of violence, somewhere deep within the Inside, an altar of sacrifice is being prepared for him.

## 12 - SEGREGATION

The keyhole is large. It's the biggest keyhole Jared has ever seen outside of one in a museum. The key is the size of a large screwdriver. It looks like an antique gourmet wine bottle opener, one of those corkscrew poppers fashioned like a large skeleton key. And here is the Corridor Captain taking this toy key, separating it from a ring crowded with all sizes and shapes, and actually opening a door. Dwarves in Toyland.

This guard is called Corridor Captain. "Wait here for the Corridor Captain." That's what the Admissions Officer, Mr. Erickson, ordered. So he waits. Waits dressed in loose-fitting khakis and glossy black shoes. Waits in his deodorized and disinfected body, having been sprayed for lice and bugs and whatever. Officer Erickson has purified him with an insect spray can. *Pump, swish*. Even around the balls and the asshole. *Pump, pump, swwwiishh!* Up the arms to the pits and into his hair. "Hold your breath." Swish and swish. Baptismal aspersion for the new order of the ages, "Novus Ordo Seclorum."

Jared had wondered if he'd be hassled about his hair. His scraggly dark beard and neck-tickling black tresses, a witness to the time between capture and caging and to his desire to once again look like a radical—these he submitted to a friendly barber several days before the day of surrender. He kept a moustache and broad-based sideburns—still looks good in a radical chic way. He was told that the lip hair and sides would pass prison muster. Still, he anticipated getting some flak, just some shit for disciplinary reasons. "You think *that's* short?" They'd show him "short." But no flak came.

What is more curious, if he'd had time to think about the rapid process, the mechanical answers and motions that he's just undergone, is the total lack of hassle. His admission, purification, registration and allocation have been routine—by the book, as with any bureaucracy. No drama, no hazing, no screaming, shouting or beating. No Greek chorus at the Gate to Hades raising his conversation from the mundane to the sublime. He waits here—*no place to go, no place to*

*hide!*—like standing in line at the Greyhound Bus depot, waiting for an ever late departure.

Most curious, it is monastically quiet in the Admissions area. Jared is the single aspirant. The guard is lean on comments, more of a steely-eye than a talker. All in all, Jared is ready-to-go, as he supposes they see him. *One new commitment, ready to be released to the population.* These words float in his consciousness as he scans up and down the empty corridor. It's empty because it's chow time, a timing he doesn't know but will soon. And this emptiness annoys him. *Where is everybody?* he wonders.

The windows before him don't frame a view of too many people either. Furtively, a figure or two dashes at distant sight. *Inmates,* Jared surmises because of the khaki blur. *Where is this population? How these guys play with words! Me, a new "commitment." Damn, I'm not committed to them.*

"*You,*" an authoritative command snaps at Jared's consciousness. "You there. What's your name and number?"

Jared pivots towards the figure appearing at his right, a six-foot-five tower of military hewn flesh. Clean hands, clean face, cleanly shaved, cleanly pressed trousers and shirt, cleanly polished shoes, cleanly groomed hair. All clean.

Eye to eye, Jared reflexively starts to greet him, "Hi!" and takes a step towards the Captain as if to shake his hand but something powerful holds him back; he freezes. *No, no, it can't be!* The pains from the night of capture burst out all over his body. *Corridor Captain Quinn? Is this what you did after serving with the paratroopers in Nam?*

*Quinn:* The name, the spectral face pops up again, and once again Jared's consciousness pushes it, stuffs it back, deep down, way back into horrific memory. *Are you going to burn us?*

*Shut up, kid!*

*What did you do . . .*

*Me . . . Dad? No one believes me!*

But now it's worse even than Quinn's terror, for it's a fright and a torment suffered only by those humans deemed disposable, worthless, expendable—society's social excrement. "You're nothing but dogshit in here, boy!" For the first time ever Jared is beyond being powerless. ". . . number?" He simply doesn't exist. He's been processed. Institutionalized. Digitized. Tagged. He's nobody, invisible to all and to everyone he's ever known. He's being stored, stowed away, placed inside the alchemical vessel of social correction: *Inside*.

Again: "You there—what's your name and number?"

His lips part but nothing comes out. His arms can't move, remain locked around a bedding bundle against his lower chest. He's at a loss for a long moment and an embarrassed blush flits across his face. But this too is sucked back. What stumbles out is, "Jennings . . . err, 88 . . . 67 . . . err . . . 147."

Unfazed by the faltering answer, the Corridor Captain motions Jared towards the large keyhole behind where he's standing. Holding up his cluttered key chain, the Captain isolates the giant key and with two hands in a practiced motion turns the lock.

Jared steps into a single-bed cell unit. There's only one other door on this floor, so this isn't a cell block. *Isolation?* he wonders. *Whatever*, after the sweaty, cramped and odiferous cell block in County, Jared is delighted to see that his stool comes with a lid. He holds on to his bedding bundle, turns towards the guard, and says nothing by mouth or face.

"Supper will be up in 'bout five minutes. Make the room."

Then Corridor Captain Clean leaves. *Quinn drops the match on the paper stuffed between his legs, up his armpits and throws on more sticks. Threatens, "Stop moving or I'll break your arm!"*

Alone, unmoving, Jared eyes every corner, wall and facet of the unit. He is immobile, a sculpture lost from a museum. *So this is solitary? The hole? Why he's in solitary baffles him. More of this Protective Custody crap?* Like a statue he doesn't flinch or even squint when the food grate opens with a rattling squeak.

"There's books here, if you read."

He doesn't answer. The grate closes on a ten-by-twelve-foot pastel blue cell: one sink with safety-glass mirror, one iron-frame bed, one barred window situated slightly above average hairline, covered with a length of steel screen, also pastel blue. The ceiling holds a recessed, wire-mesh-sealed bank of fluorescent lights—the on/off switch is outside the cell. The mesh is a matching pastel blue. *What the—?*

He demands to know as if addressing a bellman, "Is this the fucking Holiday Inn?" No one answers. Jared remains at anchor, stuck there, bedding bundle sagging in his arms, scanning nervously, inspecting every detail, checking out the room like a wary traveler in a foreign land.

As the Institution intends, his is a fast check-in into depression. Ten minutes inside and already he's sinking into despondency. Pastel blue depression—a solitary color. Pastel blue and warm, inoffensive fluorescent lighting.

Mockingly, from the sole window a beam of sunlight cheerily gambols into this cell, delighting in the play of color, wrapped in a chuckle of sky, a bit of Minnesota's chilled washed heavens.

Rage boils and bubbles from deep memory. *Powerlessness—absolute, utter powerlessness. Quinn's terror. Prisoner again—no way out.*

“Jesus Christ, why are they fucking with me?” He tosses his bundle on the unmade bed. Its summer-camp bedsprings creak and squeal. Motionless again, he remains fixed to the spot.

Black, not blue—Jared wants black. *Isolation. The Hole. It should be dark as sin.* He needs a touchstone. Blue’s all wrong. Blue is for babies, christenings and celebration. Blue is for wedding garters and silly escapades. *Blue is for the helpless. The weak. The powerless.* All he gets is wimpy blue, pastel blue. Right now he desperately needs something hard, harsh, painful, even punishing, to uncap the pressurized expectations he has brought with him.

*It’s all wrong!*

This is not what he expected. It’s unlike everything he was told. This is some demonic trick, fucking with both space and time. This is the Inside cruelty that he fails to recognize. It’s everything he thought prison was not; as such, it’s what prison *is*.

Everything looks normal. *Kids playing in an empty lot.* Everything looks tidy and smart. *Quinn stuffs the kindling neatly all around Jared’s body.* Everything looks just like everything always looks. *Quinn is a good boy, he just has a bit of a temper.* Everything is pastel blue. *Crack!* Broken arm.

*Fucking pastel blue!* He whispers. Mutters. Spits it out. Yells from the bottom of his gut, “Fucking pastel blue!” But it’s more than just angry words—it’s a phrase of savage rage. He can’t bring Quinn into this place. Big enough to deal with him now, he’s *still* powerless to do anything about it. His fury over his impotence has to go somewhere else. Deep inside he knows he must turn his rage to *protect* himself, not harm himself. *Not in here.*

He booms, “God! I’m gonna be managed to death—*just like they manage the fucking war!*” He twists and funnels his rage at the war. “Vietnam isn’t real. The bigwigs in D.C. don’t want it to be real. They just want an exercise in Game Theory.

No passion, no heart, so no need for tears. Just numbers and numbers and *numbers.*"

He splats fury onto the walls: "Numbers! 8867147—I'm a number!"

Powerlessness oozes from his every pore and he rages wildly, rages systematically. As if driven by ritual obligation, he turns and faces each wall: North, South, East, West. Ceremonially, a minute here, a minute there, he kicks and kicks and kicks against each blue wall until his legs hurt. Wobbly, lurching, he opens his fly and starts to ritually pee. Zips out his cock and pisses a stream here, a spray there, as if marking out his territory, setting warnings to intruders.

*A little nuts. Okay, man, I'm a little nuts.* Spent, he flops down on the bare mattress. Suffocates his face with the naked pillow. He needs not to be here, needs darkness, not pastel, just for a few quick seconds.

Act II begins: The Meal. The grate slides open, rattling a bit. The edge of a steel cafeteria tray gleams at him, flashing a toothy smile in the day's soft light. Jared gets up and pulls it in quickly. It's a reflex. At County the guards would toy with guys. "C'mon, c'mon, I can't wait forever!" There were nights he went to bed hungry. *Damn*, he's hungry, right now. But, tray in hand, he can't move. He's immobilized, standing there once again on *Pause*. He's stunned, confounded by what he sees. He's staring at a huge red T-bone steak surrounded by a wreath of potatoes, corn, bread and butter, broccoli, jelly, a couple pieces of carrots and celery. *Christ almighty!* Jared doesn't know what to make of it.

"Want coffee, milk or Kool-aid?" coos the guard.

Something in Jared snaps. "Fuck you, motherfucker!" accentuated with a digital gesture.

Right after the grate slams shut, he takes the tray and smashes it against the back wall. Picks it back up, turns and slashes at each wall with its steel edge.

That done, he grabs a spoon and begins randomly but with intensity banging on the tray. *Blonk! Bing! Thwack! Thwack!* Nothing harmonious, but slowly increasing in energy as he hums louder and the clanging gets louder. Then suddenly he jerks to a full stop. Drops the tray on the floor. *Clunk!* Then starts to strip and tear his clothes. Fumbles at buttons, rips, whips off shirt and pants, BVDs and socks, he's birthday naked. Once again he freezes, static in time and space, almost a Grecian alabaster.

Jared does not want to accept anything, wants to resist everything. So he rejects the bed, chooses to lay on the floor, tasting its coldness, its harshness. He wants his body to feel deep pain, searches for whatever sensory punishment is possible. He grinds his shoulder into the concrete floor, tosses and moans. *"Three hundred days of indulgence are yours, My son, for suffering these most sacred pains. Suffer with the Crucified One! Save yourself from the pains of hell."*

Jared strikes blood, bruises bone and in this tomb he challenges all the minions of Divine Savagery to take him on. Attack him, fight him on territory he knows. He is desperate to escape Pastel Blue. Scarred, scratched, bruised, knuckles swollen from ramrodding the walls. Spit and piss and globs of slop all around, Jared rolls and smears it all over his body. So adorned, so marked and tattooed, he finally approaches exhaustion.

Heart pounding, no breath left, he hugs the floor, wishing it could defy gravity and push up against him, crushing him to death. This wish unfilled, he hurls himself up, assumes the starting stance from his long-ago basketball training camps and begins furiously doing knee-to-chest pumps. *Faster, faster!* Now jumping jacks. *Faster, faster!* Push-ups. *Harder! Harder!* The spectators cheer; the cheerleaders are agape. Everyone's deliriously yelling, "Faster! Harder! Harder! Faster!"

These frenzied words of chant, of incantation last unmarked minutes until he implodes into a heap of parts in the middle of Millston, FCI's Segregation Unit.

From the *Visitor's Guide*:

Our Segregation unit is considered to be among the most progressive examples of the Philosophy of Rehabilitation. Here at Millston we are not interested in causing pain. We deplore those old methods made so famous by Hollywood and Mr. Cagney. Here at Millston we pride ourselves on our Warden's Philosophy of Normalcy. It is, in brief, our goal to situate the resident within an environment—a humane ecological niche, as we call it—where he has nothing to reject, dislike, rail against or revolt. We make it *nice* for him. As nice as home is. Or, at least, should be.

From outside the cell, the shift guard nudges the slide and peeks in. He has a front-row seat to Jared's antics. He knows this guy is a "CO," as all Resisters are labeled in simple bureaucratese. He doesn't know that CO stands for Conscientious Objector. He just knows that COs often end up in Segregation as this guy has, simply as a control measure. "*Protective Custody*. As much to help you adjust as to assist us in adjusting you." The Warden wants to gauge the impact of Jared's presence on the population, especially the other twenty-odd war resisters. Not that, to him, Jared is a special case. Just as a precaution. The President made it known down the chain that it's time to turn the screws on these peacenik types. The Warden has long felt that he is over quota on screwballs. He doesn't need this wacked-out radical preacher to become a catalyst for a riot.

What he watches Jared do, the guard knows, will be valued by the Warden. "These guys really have problems." That's what he'll tell his wife. "Dear, I can't tell you some of the things they do. There was a new one in today and he went bonkers in Seg. I think we'd better remember him—and his unfortunate mom and dad—in our prayers, tonight."

When the Corridor Captain gets the report, he decides to let Jared sleep in his own slop and craziness. Without complaint, Jared snores on the floor, bed unmade, only gobs of rejected dinner slumber upon it.

### 13 - TROUBLEMAKER

It's Friday of the first week in Segregation. Jared's just eaten another pastel blue breakfast. He didn't shower, as usual, or brush his teeth after eating. His hair's uncombed. He's being overcome by an ambushing funk. Tries to shake it away. Doesn't want to give in. Gets up and goes over to the window, reaches as high as he can, sticks a fist of fingers through the steel screen holes and pulls himself up to look out at the sky. Fuck, it's beautiful! Slowly, ever so slowly but steadily, inexorably, the heavens swirl and twirl down like a gigantic blue lid crushing a solitary pincher bug, *squuuuissshhh!*

*Dead.* Jared knows he's dead to the day. He drops down and goes back to bed. Blankets wrapped around pillows wrapped around his dreams.

An hour later he's awakened by the duty hack banging on the door with something—a *gun?* Pushing his paranoia behind him, he listens as the hack tells him that he's to be interviewed around 10:30. "It's 8 now," he's told without asking—the guard knows he has no clock. Jared rolls back under his covers. He wakes again, time unknown, as someone's scratching at the keyhole. The cell door swings open. Two other guards appear and brusquely order him to "Get up! Dress quickly!"

As he starts to get ready, one taunts, "You're a demonstrator! You going to demonstrate?" This challenge wakens the dull-eyed Jared and spreads a wry smile across his morning face. Ignoring the jibe, which is repeated three times, he buttons his shirt and casually walks towards the stairwell, mute. Downstairs, another guard motions Jared into an office to his left.

As Jared grabs the doorknob, he reads the nameplate: CAPTAIN. When inside he counts four men already seated. No one rises to greet him. Three are civilians, the other is the Corridor Captain. As he sits down, one of the civilians says, "We know you're here for your political activities. We want to set you straight at your initial footing. Millston is a good place. You'll like it here. The men inside are not troublemakers. Anyone who makes trouble will get transferred—to some place like Marion or Leavenworth. There are plenty of things to do while you're in here and

you can put your time to good use, *if*—if you use your brain. There’s no reason why you should get into trouble, if you pull *your own* time.”

Another civilian instantly picks up the conversation. “We don’t like agitators and we won’t put up with any funny stuff. This is a fine prison. The food’s better than at any other Institution. We’re quite proud of how things are going.”

The conversation—*is it scripted?*—is maintained solely by these two. They take chorusing parts as in a rehearsed performance. The Captain and the other civilian remain silent.

Jared listens to what they are telling him, time and again, about what a good place Millston is, how much it offers, and that they hope he’ll put his time to good use. Something, however, isn’t settling just right. So he asks, “Do you want to know what I think?”

At that, both officials abruptly terminate their duet. It is so abrupt that he realizes this is what they want.

“Just what do you intend to do?”

“I have some preconceived notions as to what prisons are, but basically I’m open to the experience.”

This simple remark catches them short. They look at him with intense expectation, waiting for more.

“Okay?” he says.

“Don’t be a wiseass with us, sonny,” the Captain slaps at him. “We know your background. You can play chameleon with us but rattlers can’t change the pitch of their rattles.”

Then the last civilian breaks his silence. “There’s no room for political speaking in here. This isn’t a place for soapbox oratory.”

“Hey, man,” Jared stands up, “I’m not in here to organize.”

This reflex gesture of standing is straightaway defined, as only prison can define even the simple act of standing, as aggressive and one hack escort steps quickly and positions both his hands on Jared's shoulders, a slight downward pressure clearly indicating his wishes. Again, in reflex, Jared sits back down, unaware that by so doing he has defused the situation. He continues with a steady tone.

"Unless . . . unless there are some civil rights being violated. If you do that, then I can't tell how I'll react."

The room stills and quiets. All four captors shift, rub hands, scratch noses, pull and tug at ears, chins, ruffle hair. Then the first civilian, who Jared later learns is the Associate Warden, warns him, "I should tell you we have many FBI reports about you. We know *everything* about your kind."

Jared wonders what "kind" he is. As if responding to his internal question, the Captain tells him, "You're a bad soul. It's that simple. You and your friends—the Berrigans, Mulligan and the Milwaukee 14, the Chicago 15, the Beaver 55—you think we don't know *everything*?" He waits to see how this affects Jared. He doesn't flinch.

Then the AW continues, "I'm a Catholic. I consider myself a devoted son of the Church. I want you to know from the start that I have a special interest in you. You're a bad soul." Castigating, nasty, "You've been Called and you deserted your Call. You desecrated the words of Jesus and the teachings of the Church."

Following that, the Captain half-stands, crouches across the table, comes within half-a-body of Jared, successfully effecting a closeness of communication—private eyes.

"*I know* . . . I know about the Underground. *I know* about how you have helped deserters get into Canada. I know about the stolen draft cards and stamps you sent to Vancouver. I know about your theology." He screws up his eyes. "Know this, I've even read what you've written and *I know*," as he backs away, stands

straight up, full height for emphasis, "more than any others in this room—I would say more than any others in the System—what you've done. How you've done it. Who you've done it with and why. *I know how you think and how you dream!*"

Erect, the Captain is one impressive figure; monumental. He's clearly the posturing jock. Now with moral power pulling from within his words, he is Michael the Archangel become flesh. The Captain is a master at conducting these Adjustment Committee first meetings. Although not aware of the group's title, Jared knows that he's not the first nor will he be the last to appreciate this guy's talent. The cadence, the confidence, the ability to summon power either angelic or daimonic, it all has a familiar ring to Jared. Then it comes to him: *Will he conclude by stating, "I'm a former Jesuit myself"?*

"He was that good?" others often ask.

"Yep."

Back in his cell Jared immediately slinks back under blankets and pillow. Says out loud, muffled, mocking himself, "Fucking-A, how you dream!" He pulls a blanket tighter over and around his head. Speaking back to the Captain, "Fucking-A, you don't know how I dream!"

Jared doesn't want to admit that anyone can get that far inside him. But on another level he knows that this is just what is happening. He doesn't know *how* it's happening, doesn't know if he'll ever know, but he has to deal with it. He doesn't know if they have special powers or whether being caged cracks open one's soul and spirit without one's being aware. He imagines them stabbing each con with a big, candy-striped straw and then sucking . . . *sucking and fucking sucking and sucking fucking until they have sucked every inmate's mind and soul out of his body.*

Although not physically ill with a doctor's handbook illness, Jared, this day, feels sucked dry.

He falls back to sleep, dreamless.

## 14 - THE POPULATION

Jared's been in Segregation three weeks when they tell him to roll it up. It's been three weeks of alternating periods, fragments of a life marked by nonstop reading of the trash novels and *Reader's Digest* book summaries that are the bookmobile's only fare for Seg. Later he'll be impressed by the unlimited access to library materials that's available in prison but for now these pastel blue weeks have introduced him to a pop culture world he truly hadn't known existed. If there was something that could move his alienation from "normal society" an iota towards crazy, these reading materials did the job.

Pastel blue: He's been suspended at the border between animated life and mere rock existence. Little could he anticipate how his time in Seg is but a foretaste of what his time at Millston will be like. Right now, however, by some fiat from Mount Olympus, he is judged fit to be "released to the Population" to begin Act III.

Evicted from the fancies and pastel blues of Seg, Jared is brought to the A&O—"Admissions and Orientation" dorm for new commitments—where he rightly should have been three weeks ago, and then for just a day or so. Now he's already done three weeks, so it's just a way station stopover as he hears, "Roll it up, Jennings. You're getting released to the Population." *The Population*—more amusing Inside jargon! The guard leads him to bed number 23, the lower bunk. *Just like the Seminary!* On top of the mattress is an array of supplies: toothbrush, bar of soap, tube of toothpaste, and a razor with five blades—not just an array, amusingly, but an array in perfect sequence by size. His mind fastens on the disciplined display, snared by both its evocation of perfect Institutional order and its magical transcendence of time and place.

*Christ, institutions!* Amused, he's momentarily transported back to his first day in the monastery. "Possessions," the Novice Master instructed, "are held in common. From this day forward you own nothing!" Now he looks at his Inside riches, chuckles, "Mine!" Fascinated by this booty, Jared picks up the razor. It's an odd kind unlike any he has seen. It has a small screw that he must turn in and out to change a blade. *Preter-technological*, he concludes, *some Army-issue relic.*

*Aha!* Everything in front of him, *everything*, is old Army issue. “Magical!” he whispers to himself. He turns to the clothing, picks up what’s clearly a previously worn, full-length, thickly insulated Korean War jacket. He slips it on and *bingo!* he’s war hero brother Larry!

Jared flashes on his big brother as he pulls a Korean-issue cap with large square earflaps over his head. It’s a style he’s seen only in photos among his brother’s memorabilia. He plays with the long straps, tying them under his chin. He feels like a prop in a military museum, a manikin in an Army Surplus window. *It’s Fucking-A Minnesota February, so what the hell, stay warm, be a soldier!*

Exploring further, with a tinge of romanticism, *Maybe this blanket was in battle.* He likes this linkage to Larry. What he doesn’t know is that he’ll be now and forever with Larry in the land of battleground dreams: daymare and nightmare.

Jared runs his right hand around the coarse bundle, now his—but more than that, now he’s *theirs* . . . to wage nightly battles here, wage them while snoring under the emblem “US.” *Ha, U-S, us, meaning me and you, Larry!*

Packing up, Jared stuffs a set of glove liners, two stocking caps, and three pairs of calf-high socks into the jacket’s pockets. All are dirty brown with a tinge of grey—metallic grey. He stands here a moment in Korean War dress, posing, wanting this to be the picture he sends home. He imagines it printed on the front page of the *Trib*, headline: “Jared Jennings Battles Korean War in Prison.” *Ha, what a gas!* But his parodying is short-lived and his soul darkens again, knowing too well how that war is still being waged in Larry’s and his generation’s dreams. “At least I won’t be cold,” he murmurs as he disrobes and throws all the stuff inside the jacket which he then balls up.

Jared’s fanciful escapade dissipates in a blink and for the first time he scans the dorm. His instincts kick into surveillance mode. He watches the others, *only six*—observes their small movements like he did as a freshman on enrollment day

at Saint Clement's. Back then he was fearful of hazing; now it's more sinister things. But stronger than fear is the touch of wonder as he realizes that he's seeing *actual criminals! In the flesh! Step right up and see real convicts!* Not just the accused of County but the hard-timers of the Big House!

Jared doesn't think of himself and Resisters as convicts. Today, possibly for the last time, he makes this easy distinction and separation. He observes these dorm residents as if they're a breed apart, people who—not through acts of conscience or he assumes even conscious acts in most cases—reject the greater collective. They follow their own rules, real solo flyers, and from his distanced perspective they have a smattering of the romantic around them.

Nevertheless, Jared has been through the disillusionment of monastic life and he knows well the dark soul that lurks beneath the demeanor of even saintly ones. *Saints and sinners*. This somewhat comic comparison brings another slight grin to his face. *What if it's true?* His smile broadens as he pictures the sextet grouped in the back of the dorm coming forward to introduce themselves as monks of a peculiar Holy Order dedicated to the stimulation of the human soul. Individuals whose Holy Rule is to act, somewhat in kamikaze fashion, on a mission to keep others from boring themselves to death. "A little crime to keep everyone prime," is their blessed motto. *Just a silly thought*; he dismisses the scene. Then he spots Sean entering from a far-end side door into the A&O.

Sean arrived at Millston a week before Matt and Jared turned themselves in. As he approaches, walking the length of corridor that bisects the dorm, Jared wonders what he should say. *What's prison really like? What will we do tonight, this first night? Has he heard from home?* A list of questions rapidly stream through his mind.

Sean looks trim in his khakis. His bantamweight wrestler's physique carries the cloth well. He does look a bit comical though—it's been quite a while since Jared has seen Sean so closely cropped and spit-clean. Even his sparse pate glints! He's a

diminutive knockoff of the Corridor Captain—but then Jared realizes that Sean might be having a similar reaction to seeing him.

Sean embraces him, once, with a muscled, belting embrace. Then, with no greeting, he holds him at arm's length, palms against Jared's chest and peers straight and hard into his eyes. "Three weeks in Seg. You must've been a bad boy in County?"

"Nah, didn't do a thing. Where's Matt?"

Sean presses his question.

"What did they say to you about Seg?"

"Hardly a thing. Just that they wanted to adjust me." Jared mimes being cranked and adjusted.

"What did they *do to you* during the last three weeks?"

Jared's confused, tipped a bit off stride by Sean's intense probing.

"What's going on, little fella? You seem to want me to say something. Truth? I just sat in that fucking vomit of pastel blue world and passed time. Like a perverted session of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It was tedious as hell."

Sean doesn't immediately respond. He sits down on the bed's edge, pulls Jared down next to him, then grasps the tips of his collar and jerks him into a tiny private space. He whispers, "Prison's a rumor mill. There are rumors of rumors. It's really weird. So let me fill you in. There's about twenty-five draft resisters here, mostly induction refusers. Not a lot of heavy mental machinery, but good hearts. When you first came in and went to Seg, most saw it as just another trick of the Warden. The COs here—that's what they call us, believe it or not—have been in the Warden's face lately. There was a suicide last week, of just a regular con, over in Woodwork. He electrocuted himself. Just a middle-aged guy, I think, in here for tax evasion or something like that. Just got turned down on parole, and we're badgering the Warden about how guys who get turned down are handled."

Sean releases Jared as he shifts around, tightening their private space, almost a lover's space, breathing together, conspiring. From this contorted, awkward position, Sean strains to look around the dorm at the other inmates. He notes what the others are doing, checks for hack shadows—whispers, "The fucking guards are everywhere, man. Remember that, some of these hacks are spooks, invisible, I swear!" Feeling secure, he continues, "The word came down that you went berserk—true?"

Eyebrows flinch, pleading guilty, but Jared moves to cover his embarrassment. "Aaah, I just did a little dance, yeah." He doesn't want to admit that he heard later that everyone had gotten steak that same night, and that he had flipped out over nothing. "Great steak, eh?" the guard had said innocently as he passed the breakfast tray through the slot the next morning. "Lucky you came yesterday. Great PR for the Duluth meat house." Just stupid banter but it made Jared realize how idiotic he had been. *Paranoid motherfucker!*

"Again, this came down as *they* were fucking with you, and some felt you must've done something really wild in County. But then, as the grapevine works, it came down that you were just lying around reading."

"Yeah. Right."

"See, everything you do in here, man, well, somebody is interpreting, making a prediction, fucking with his mind over it. Then I heard you were brought up here by the FBI. Something special and strange there. Really. Matt and I came by the normal route, federal marshals. So it's out that you're on Protective Custody and won't ever be coming out. See, I'm out here defending you, telling everyone you're not a snitch."

Jared pulls back, a touch dizzy. The room tilts and whirls. He rubs his eyes, stands and stretches, slaps his own face. Sean laughs.

After three weeks of solitary and its self-conversational solitude, Jared has been listening to Sean as if he were a soap-opera character.

"J, now that you're being released, everyone's confused."

Before Jared can respond, someone yells from down the dorm, "Hey, Schneider, that your partner?" It's a command-yell, shouted by a guard.

"Yes sir," Sean stands and booms back.

"Okay, take him over to Dorm Four. Get him straight on things. He needs to be in Education by ten."

Sean is in dutiful motion before the last directive is completed. Jared hastily grabs his roll and follows, hustling to keep pace. "*Friars, surrendering your will to the Master means dropping whatever you are doing the instant you are called!*"

"Dorm Four"—his gut sinks at the sound of it. *I've lived too long in dorms.* Having a dorm number makes it all just too real. *You're here, man, dig it. You're in prison!* During Jared's seminary years it was all dorms. Then in college he started out in some renovated World War II barracks. Even countercultural commune living was its own version of dormitory life. And now this, to his eye about thirty-five double-bunkers—*God, I hope I can get a lower bunk*—with only a lockless three-by-three cube for all his worldly possessions.

Sean walks up to several unmade lower bunks. He's not even thinking, *Big guys on the bottom.* Just knows. Pounds on the mattresses. "Just testing the springs!" Then he smells the blankets and sheet rolls. Minutely inspects the pillows. "You won't believe what some of these have been used for!" Checks the handles on the cubes. "Don't want doors that squeak." In answer to a question not asked, "Best for sneaking food out when everyone else is asleep!" Finally, he evaluates the view. "Every little perk counts! Also, you don't want the sun in your eyes when you rise." All done, Sean settles Jared's things on one of the lower bunks that has passed his inspection and varied tests.

"This is a good area. Most of our guys are here."

"COs?"

Sean blanches a shade lighter. "Err, them and—shit, white guys. I meant white guys."

Jared immediately starts making the bed. He pulls the covers taut, expertly making hospital corners, one domestic skill the Novice Master drilled into his head! Just as he finishes he catches Sean's drift.

"Are things that crude?"

"You can bet on it!"

"Geez, back to square one. Bayonne, New Jersey, and racially segregated neighborhoods! Hell, we even discriminated against Polacks and Wops, especially Protestants!" Jared doesn't savor this memory, especially since he remembers all the turf wars he saw his older brothers fight—one getting a lip with fourteen stitches, another throwing bricks. He remembers all this as one reason his father accepted the transfer to Minnesota.

Just as he had dealt with that then, Jared feels he can handle this now. More, after Seg, he's not surprised to find himself reversed in time. *Korea . . . Bayonne . . . Pretty soon I'll be back in Mom's womb!*

"Jared, my man, we need more time to rap but you've got to get over to Ed U for testing. Yer a rat now, ya know! And I have to get back to my day spot. But one thing, *don't* socialize."

Sean holds up his left hand forestalling any response. He turns the statement into a command. "Don't socialize with anyone. Just hold on to that thought and we'll rap after chow. Okay?"

"Sure, *Daddy*. Anything you say!"

Left alone, Jared tidies up as best he can. He has nothing personal to decorate his cube with, to make it his own, and no money to buy anything. *Ah, finally, true Franciscan poverty!* His mind plays with this, laughing at how such was the goal of religious life but oh how luxuriously he had lived in the monastery! *Divine socialism*, he jokingly called it, which actually was divine capitalism at its prime. *Clerical Economics 101: Rob from the poor in spirit to give to those who preach the Spirit to the poor!* He flashes on Uncle Sam, shakes his head, for even as a Trappist he'll have access to everything he needs: bread and water, a cell or hermit's hut, books if he wants, flush toilets.

"The embarrassment of Holy Poverty!" So he said to the Novice Master when asked why he was leaving the Order. That wasn't the only reason but it was a strong one. Now he finds himself in another Institution, another communal hermitage. *Ain't I fucked!*

*What shall I call all this?* he muses. *Or is there any difference between Clerical Economics and Prison Economics? Hmmm, either way I get three hots and a cot. Twenty-four-hour security, books, hmmm.* He lets these airy questions float away as he attends to more practical matters, though in fact it is his seminary training that kicks in. He's now not a *Resister* but *Inmate 8867-147*, and as his first act of Obedience he has to find his way over to the Education Department—and heed Sean's advice: not greet anyone on the way.

"What I want you to do is place these shapes in the proper holes as fast as you can."

Jared is amazed, truly amazed. For the past twenty minutes he's been completing Idiot Quotient tests and being run through a series of physical agility tasks. "Am I cutting it as a rat?" he wants to ask, but the piercing sincerity of his test-meister chokes off this levity.

"Good, good! Ex-see-lent!"

Jared smiles, a simpleton's grin. Then he submits to a typing test and assorted dumber tasks before Mr. Pence, Education Director, announces, "Finished! Good, good! Record time! Record time! Ex-see-lent! Quite ex-see-lent!" He quickly, almost eagerly, gathers up all Jared's tests. Jared envisions Mr. Pence running over to the Warden saying, "Record time! Record time! Quite ex-see-lent!"

Mr. Pence leaves and since Jared has finished in "Record time!" he has about ten minutes to kill. Pence told him to remain in the room until the siren sounded for chow. Slipping into his hack voice, Pence directed, "At that time, proceed back to your dorm for Count."

Ever the used-bookstore hound, Jared gets up, goes over to the small library stack and starts browsing. But before anything catches his fancy, he hears a quick, raspy "Ey, bud-ee!" Jared looks around the room trying to find the source and catches a fragment of a face over his right shoulder. Three fingers wave to him like a small fan. The guy talks fast but his hands move in slow motion. "C'mere, bud-ee! C'mere!"

The guy's an old black inmate. A bit stooped, lots of grey, with wire-rimmed granny glasses and a big, nearly toothless smile. There's a slight glint from a gold-capped incisor. As Jared steps towards him, the guy reaches out and grabs his left arm. He pulls himself towards Jared, making like he needs to lean on him for balance, which he doesn't. What he's doing is controlling Jared, who, still a naïve Inside newbie, unhesitatingly walks with him to a far corner.

The old guy positions Jared, wedges him into a corner, then stands at his right side. This purposeful action brings back memories of Sister Johanna and how she used to patiently and with such serious intent position each acolyte for the grand Christmas procession. Jared quickly surmises that the guy is an old fox. It's quite clear that this is the one place in the room where you can see who enters without them seeing you.

Big cheeky smile, "Hear yer—hear yer en fer a round nickel, so's ah knews ya needs me." He says it in such a way that Jared doesn't doubt that he does need

him, but for just what he can't say. "Peeple culls me *Supply Line* 'cause I'se get 'em ennyting 'ey wants."

With that said he waits, smiling and waiting, expecting . . . *What? An order?* Jared doesn't know what to say. Supply Line just smiles and smiles. It unnerves Jared.

"What will I need?" he asks genuinely. "There's not a lot to need in here."

Old Supply Line's eyes pop out, his right forearm rifles up to muffle his laughter. Jared has given him a true moment of amusement, one evoked by a display of ignorance and an innocence that the old con hasn't encountered in years. Oddly for the time and place but with grandfatherly concern, Supply Line places one hand on Jared's mouth and with the other pats his face. With that he slips from the room, vanishes so quickly that Jared looks at where he last was, trying to detect what must be a secret doorway. But he finds nothing.

*Oh well!* Too tired to chase the mystery down, Jared turns back towards the bookshelves but is once again interrupted, this time by a high-pitch siren. It commands, "Lock-up and Count! Lock-up and Count!" Jared obeys, starts towards his dorm.

There are six Lock-ups and eight Counts per day, two while asleep. Jared posts by his bed as one guard strolls around the dorm eye-checking and counting while the other hack holds sentry at the main doorway. As the Counter moves, Jared's eyes follow, studying each "resident" as he overheard a guard euphemistically call the inmates.

On the face of it, they all look normal. *But what the hell did you expect? Green monsters from Mars?* However, this review has a purpose, for Jared is looking, searching for the eyes, eyes that he believes will tell him things. He has a theory about eyes and he wants proof. *The eyes are the gateway to the soul. Guard*

*them and stand fast against the Devil!* But for now he sees only citizens who have erred—or, more to the point, who erred by getting caught.

After this Count comes lunch, then Mail Call, then some make-do work assignment—his “day spot”—followed by a Yard break, then another Count, ending with dinner, some Rec time, the final awake Count, and Lights Out. Two sleep Counts and one wake-up tally. He caught on to this routine in snippets of conversation with the bookmobile hack while in Seg. At the moment however there’s an eye-witness novelty to it all that he’s enjoying.

Once the hacks are gone, Sean comes over to take him on a short tour. He slowly walks Jared through the dorm, describing the “neighborhoods.”

“Look, the Admin’s into *integration* but it ain’t working! Gangs own the dorms, so though we’re a white dorm—*Honkey Heaven!* of course—there’s a small sprinkling of every group here. Same everywhere else. Look, Blacks in the back. Gays in the buffer area between the Blacks and Hispanics and Indians. Note the homey view!” he snickers, “All they can see is the Tower!” Turning another corner, “This is White-tee! Note the scenic vista!” And lastly, pointing towards but not going into the area, “There we have the slums—for the Floaters, guys who don’t belong to any group. Notice the shitty view—a South Side for all the homies from Chicago and Minneapolis!”

“Floaters” are those the hacks shift around when tensions get too high and groups need to be isolated, increased, or decreased. Sean warns, “Most are snitches.” Jared hears: If someone gets killed, it’s usually a Floater.

Jared learns that prison has groups within groups, mostly racial and political, although religion and cities also play a definite part. “The Black Muslims . . . see that felt picture over there?” Sean points to the corner of the room. Jared sees what appears to be a portrait of someone’s dad with a fez or some peculiar Lodge

hat on. "That's Elijah Poole. You'll get to recognize the Muslims by that picture and their impeccable dress. Next only to the gays, these guys are starch on starch, all creased and wrinkle-free in their prison khakis. You'll see, their special mark—shirts buttoned at the top." Jared has worked with Black Panthers but Muslims are new to him. He wants to ask about this button thing but lets it drop as Sean hastens the pace. "Among our blessed brethren in white skin you'll find your Vets and Bikers. This'll be most evident later."

"Later?"

Sean snickers, "In the Tattoo Parlor." He breaks into a full guffaw when it's clear that Jared doesn't have a clue.

"And now our gay brothers or as they want us to say, 'sisters.' Dig this, J—you are now entering the land where your body will be prized as it has never been prized before." And as they walk by, Jared notices several guys checking him out, up and down, affecting X-ray vision. Sean grabs his right shoulder, spins him around and, greatly amused, says while waving a naughty finger, "Not now, not now, big boy. Later, later you'll have the pleasure of walking that runway. *Later!*"

They end back at Jared's bunk and sit down at opposite ends. Sean wants Jared to pay special attention to his concluding comments.

"Look, I want to get serious for a minute."

"Okay, little man. You have my total attention. I've cleared my calendar just for you!"

"Look, some of the guys think you must be a snitch." He looks hard at Jared, pushing the unasked question with his eyes. Jared is at a loss for words. "Some even say you set us up for the fall."

Jared's mouth drops open but nothing escapes; he's too stunned by this unexpected indictment.

"They hold it's part of this Catholic Radical thing that raiders must get caught—go public. That your rap about sociopolitical sacramental acts has to go down as a public thing."

Sean stands up and steps over in front of Jared, lightly grips his left shoulder.

"I told them it was the purest bullshit I'd ever heard. But this Seg thing, man, and the FBI ride—well," he takes a deep breath, "I'd wager it's more paranoid in here than it is out there. You're going to have to deal with some of this. I just wanted you to know, so you'd have some time to prepare for what might come your way."

All Jared can offer is a soft, "Thanks, bud."

Sean starts to sit down again but reconsiders and resumes, still standing. "Look, this little introduction is nothing unless you understand the peculiarities. But first I need to hit the head."

Jared flops down onto his bed, bunches up a pillow. *Everything's so fucked up!*

When Sean returns from the bathroom he sits back on the edge of the bed. "About the gays, so I can get that over with. Even the hacks call them by their girlie names. So don't freak. He may look like a Charles or a Robert but he wants to be called Betty or Susie. You'll adjust. But more important is the party." Sean pauses.

"What?"

"I don't think you had this in the Sem, my friend. But just after Lights Out the meat market opens. You can visit or stay home. The party's open to everyone!"

Jared's curiosity is aroused but he's also more than a tad shocked.

"You mean they permit it? Right in the dorms?"

"Yup. *Dig it*. I think they really encourage it."

"I'll be damned! A warden with a Free Love philosophy! What else goes on here?"

Sean checks his watch and hops off the bed. "Chow!" he broadcasts, finger-tapping his watch. He motions for Jared to follow. Getting a good place in the dinner line is a push-and-shove, kiss-my-ass daily contest.

"C'mon, I can't tell you everything. You'll learn. You'll learn quick enough."

Although guys jostle for position there is scant advantage to getting through the chow line first. Food is as bad at either end of the clock. Quantity is the only possible reward. But getting ahead seems important to many. Of such trivial things Jared is to learn are prison pleasures made.

He and Sean pile their trays and are making towards the CO table when Jared hears it for the first time. "Hey, Big Man, are you lonesome tonight?"

It's "Big Man" that he's to hear, time and again. Prison is physical time; everything is measured in carnal units. Size and muscle are important. It's not unlike the world of jockstrap sports. But then it is very, very different because—it's an Inside truism—*the gun's a cock, the cock's a gun*. The violent macho quite often ends in violence, at times murder. Unlike in basketball, the loser often does not go home.

*Sports*—how that word has played out in his life. The only thing matching his lust for books and his craving for soaring ideas is sports. From early childhood he's been a "scooter," playing every sport he could—as Burston had accurately sketched. It led, in college, to visits by NBA scouts, invitations to special camps, but the war cut him out. He couldn't enjoy competition like he used to. He didn't want to support anything "The Establishment" venerated. Like many, he heard the call of

the Hippie '60s, "Tune in, turn on, drop out!" For him it meant time in the pristine woods that engulfed Saint Clement's campus.

What he learned during that year in the woods is that life is a Great Wheel. Everything comes back to itself. It was in the woods where the Wheel turned and he first re-encountered Quinn. Nightmares that were living daymares. Flipped, because this time Jared was the Big Man. He hunted Quinn down. Chased him through the thick pines, up and down gullies, across Monk's Creek—the victim now the feared one. Quinn slips, slides down a deep embankment, gets dangerously entangled in a thicket of briars. *Snared! Trapped!* It was then and there that Jared prepares to kill Quinn. He laughs wickedly, "Who's powerless now, asshole!" Arm locked around his throat, Jared hoists Quinn upwards and backwards onto his chest and pounds a bowie knife into his heart. "Die, motherfucker!" It was all just tripping on LSD and totally forgotten when he "came down." But it remained a killing he'd have to face later—just now put back on the Wheel for a future turn.

Here, the Wheel turns again and he's back on public display. "Oooo!" *the cheerleaders sigh and giggle; he flexes his biceps and winks.* His height, youth and brawn are once again acknowledged by hoots and hollers as are his gait, posture and attitude. A confident buck like him sends the sisters a-tittering and a-tattling. Jared doesn't have to ask if it's the gay table. While the phrase lassoed him, it missed Sean's ears or he paid no attention, whatever. Before Jared makes it across the room Sean is seated and half-finished eating.

Maybe it was Sean's forewarning, maybe nothing, but Jared clearly senses that the others are lying in ambush waiting for him to show his hand. As he sits down he flashes on the monastic table where no talking was allowed. All the monks ate in plate-scraping silence while listening to readings from the gory and gruesome tales of martyrs, as in *The Fourteen Holy Helpers*.

Thereupon a great block of stone was placed on his breast. The next day he was bound upon a wheel set with sharp knives, and it was put in motion to cut him to pieces. Whilst suffering this cruel torture, he saw a heavenly vision which consoled and encouraged him. On the next day, April 23, 303, Saint George was led through the city and beheaded.

At that table he learned the discipline of eating spaghetti and meatballs while visualizing saints being decapitated amidst rivers of blood. Fortunately, as he ladled the tomato sauce, Friar Otto heard that they were then miraculously re-headed. *Brother Ethelbert hand-signals Friar Martin for the shredded mozzarella.* Tonight, Jared's anticipating his own head swimming in a bowl of blood. Ready, he expects no miracles, except what he can save by his wit and bluster.

In this mind-set, Jared starts to eat. He does so slowly, deliberately not looking around. He feels their eyes stealing glances, spying. He hears them plotting in the code of silent table chatter. Without a doubt, everyone is in on the scheme. No doubt, the guards also sniff the downwind shift in mood. They can smell muted conspiracy like hounds sniff out the doe. And it's apparent that the CO table is strangely quiet in this otherwise raucous feeding room.

Jared's bluntness and directness are legendary. Many consider him rude in argument, a trait he justifies as *passion*. So after he's eaten enough, he sits full upright and back, folds his arms and looks hard, piercingly at them, drawing their eyes to him like a magnet. He knows how to snare Resister eyes, nonviolent eyes.

Matt is not in sight. Sean keeps his face stuck to his plate. *Big fucking help you are Sean!* Mentally he kick Sean's ass. Then he pulls the cork, "Speak!"

One guy, not looking at him, salting and peppering his plate with much ado, answers. "The word's out you're a fucking snitch. Tell me it ain't so." No false pleasantries.

Jared's stomach muscles cramp. A long moment passes. "What can I say that'll convince you—either way?"

He lets the question work its way around the table. He picks up and sips some water. Then he eyes them up and down again. Only furtive glances! *Ass wipes!* Jared knows he must control this crap, so he takes charge and sets the pace.

"My name's Jared. I think most of you know that. You know Sean and you know Matt. If you think they couldn't tell, then either I'm the best faker or they're a couple of jerks. You tell me . . . but not tonight, not for a while. You'll just have to wait and see." He pauses, clearing a space to honor his words. Then he moves to offense. "Now, what's your name?" he asks the guy who spoke.

"I'm Harley, from Toledo."

Around the table it goes, names he'll remember forever.

After dinner Sean and Jared go looking for Matt. He's been on kitchen duty which means he eats early and can eat late again when he wants to. When Jared catches his first glimpse of him, he's taken by how unchanged Matt looks. *Always calm and self-absorbed.*

Matt notices Jared, pauses, wipes his hands on his apron, then comes over and shakes Jared's hand with one while placing the other around his neck. "At last, you're finally here." And with what could only be a remark of genuine affection in Matt's world, he says, "Welcome!"

Pleasantries exhausted, Matt spins about and goes directly back to his task.

“Amazing—I can see prison has really changed him!” Jared chuckles as he and Sean go outside to start walking the Circle, the inner compound of the prison Yard. Around once, then twice, chatting. Suddenly, Sean stops and whacks his forehead as if struck by inspiration.

“I almost forgot to tell you the Creation Story!”

“What?”

“This you gotta hear!” And he begins, “*Millston, FCI* as you know stands for ‘Federal Correctional Institution.’ Ranked as medium security. But that’s not it, man, it’s a testimony, for —Ha! Look around! Look around!—this fucking place is built on the architectural plans for another prison. Guess where? Texarkana—fucking *Texas*, man. Now ain’t that rich!”

The more excited and into the story Sean gets, the faster they walk. “The cow-pie Texas inmates have the protection of double-paned windows, buildings that are all interconnected so you don’t have to go outside to move around. Believe it—yeah, dig it!—you gotta check our heaters, man, all we have are baseboard heaters. And those fuckers got full kick-ass forced-air heating!” Sean roars at this fact.

“You mean . . . ?”

“Believe it—Millston is a warm-climate prison. The dorm windows ice up on the inside, thickly. There’s nothing but those makeshift baseboard heaters. And all this heavy-artillery Korean shit we’re wearing?” He tugs as if wearing winter earflaps. “You better believe it, man, you’ll be wearing all that shit to bed come next December and January. That’s what the dudes who survived last winter ran down!”

With a flourish Sean ends as another Count siren blasts, “Velcum to Siberia. Did ya bring yar swimmen soot?”

"A fitting testimony," Jared chortles as he checks out the dorm walls and notes the single-paned windows, "to the *idjits* who brought us Vietnam."

Millston will always mean walking the Yard, always mean scuttling around with the briskness of below-zero air snapping at their cheeks, reminding them of their mortality. Jared harbors a fear of Minnesota winters which in his mind lasts all year. Spring and summer never seem more than a weekend illusion. He's been frightened ever since a buddy got drunk and froze to death in the back of his spun-out car. It's a fright he banishes to a manageable level but it still shoots darts of anxiety that open large pores of sweat—as does the heavy battle jacket that keeps him toasty and sweaty. He's always wanting to go inside, for Warmth, Heat—in capital letters—because he passionately desires them, adores them as if they were gods.

Jared breaks from their walk and says to Sean, "Hey, bud, let's head back inside. Catch the news or something."

## 15 - THE GAME

When Jared exits the Circle most any winter night, it will be to lace up for some roundball. At the first preseason practice, he made the team simply by being there—he's the tallest CO around. His height is welcomed, even though his moral stature casts a pygmy shadow.

*Basketball.* It could be his middle name, "Jared Basketball Jennings." For his first dozen years, he was quite short, a tyke next to his gangly schoolmates. But he loved the bounce, even if it came eye-high. What he lacked in height he made up with quickness. He came to find great pleasure in bouncing the roundball and floating it skyward.

He was delighted when he jumped into gigantism, returning for his sophomore year a foot taller and with the sinewy muscles of a mustang. That year he mastered a fall-away jump shot that no one could stop—it was simply unblockable. Each time, as he launched himself up and backwards, laid back and floated the shot into the rim, an irrepressible smile licked across his face as all the times he'd been blocked, whacked and humiliated by taller guys flashed through his mind. His shot was a talent conjured, prayed for by a once-upon-a-time playground shrimp.

It's not lost on him how much B-ball means to him. *Swishing it!* He loves it, and it's always been that way. Before and after the Sem, in the Sem, during and after the trial, while traveling, he always laced up his sneakers and donned his one permanent indulgence, a set of high-end sports glasses. These he got on the commissary's approved items list, at the first chance. Possibly, only really good sex can match the Game—protracted foreplay with pump-till-you're-exhausted screwing, *possibly*. The net slapping and yielding *Dunk!* bested her hushed surrendered *Yes!* But sex isn't as reliable a high. *B-ball just never lets me down.* So, as he laces up tonight, his eagerness to play overcomes any other concerns.

It doesn't take a genius to quickly scope that nothing Inside is like anything Outside. Things Inside are clearer, have their edges tidied up. More than ever, Inside sports is a racial and sexual contest. Until Jared's arrival a black team has

been the undisputed champion of the caged court. It's as much a testimony to the skill of the blacks as it is to the disarray of the whites. Socioeconomics being what they are in America only certain white classes get tracked into the joint. While many black cons are also up-and-coming athletes on the Outside, few college-trained white athletes are available for the Big House's seasonal draft. The emergence of COs on the prison hardwood changed that.

At first the COs just brought some competition. It juiced the black-white tension even more because the blacks gloated over their close victories. Considered their occasional losses just flukes. They liked the feeling of dominance. Before the COs arrived it was usually a no-contest blowout. Now with Jared's appearance the traditional balance soon becomes indelicate.

In the first game Jared starts by making all the mistakes someone out of shape often does. He hesitates and walks too often, fouls too clumsily, and throws up eight combinations of air balls and rim kissers before he sinks his first shot. Only at the start of the second half does he begin to hit his heralded stride. He bangs the boards, dunks and swishes himself to twenty points. *Dig it!* The air begins to buzz and stir. When the COs go up by five, the razz from the black section increases, moving towards "No way!"

Word spreads fast, especially the word of racial revenge. "Yo! There's a white dude over there bangin' the stinky shit outta the niggas!" It couldn't have been more electrifying if they'd announced, "The gates are open, everyone can go home free!" In an instant, the gym becomes standing room only.

Jared's lost in the fun and release—sweating profusely, heart hammering, and just feeling great when time-out is called.

"You're a one-man whirligig!" Harley praises Jared but then pauses. Something at the black bench catches his eye. "Fucking-A, it's Moses."

Jared is sprawled on the lower bleachers, sucking water and biting a towel. Harley's comment draws his eyes across the floor. A tall, thin tower of deep coal

blackness, possibly two or three inches taller than Jared, is flipping off his sweatshirt and doing knee bends and stretches.

Jared immediately knows the guy's M.O. He's a dancer, a smooth flash. What he lacks in body weight—which lessens his height advantage—he compensates for by being a shadow. Jared imagines Moses' swishes raining down, snapping and whipping the net.

Harley surveys the gym and makes a quick judgment. "Jared, sit out for about five. We've got a lead. Okay?" He says the "Okay" with a "Sit down!" tone. Almost Jared's equal in physique but not in talent, Harley is a better coach than player. He appears to be the leader of the COs, if *leader* is the right word to use among a bunch of anarchists and outlaws. Jared will get to know Harley as the Influencer. He's one of those guys who believes in *process*. He makes a big deal about getting everyone involved—then gets them to make his decision!

Jared doesn't mind the break. He's a bit more than rubber-belly winded. So he totally misses Harley's motive.

Quickly Moses leads his team to the Promised Land. He's much better than Jared had thought. What he learns later is that he started at Howard for three years and was in contention for all-American status when he took a fall for cocaine dealing. Jared will come to know him as a legend among the Joint's B-ballers.

Moses is staring down the final two years of a seven-year hitch. He's played his way around the Federal Pen circuit and arrived last year at Millston to instant fame and status. Now he's putting on a show, blue-ribbon and first-class.

Moses' first five baskets are of the *in your face!* variety. He also converts three shots with extra foul points. The only weakness, and the one Jared has exploited before on the school grounds of Bayonne, is the lack of team play. Moses is a prima donna, a thoroughbred. He touches the ball every time he's down court, and he shoots regardless of coverage. In almost comic contrast, the COs are

plodders. Despite the mocked “white man’s disease,” they move the ball around well and end up with a lot of easy shots.

“Put the Big Man back in!” A chant begins, leading to hoots and hollers from a gaggle of rednecks at the top of the bleachers. In no time, it’s a rant. They’ve been taking bets and are not at all happy about the change in the score.

“Big Man! Big Man!” the chant goes round. Guys take off their belts and start whipping the wooden bleachers, stomping their feet. The noise is working itself towards frenzy. Harley senses the trap. How can he finesse this?

The black side has been jumping and high-fiving and juicing ever since Moses walked in. Taunts now fly. “Oooooee, white boys, yo’ mommas ain’t safe now!”

At first Jared enjoys the jive. Its rhythm and heat take him out of the Joint, back onto schoolyard asphalt. He’s been a target before in tournaments and on the city blacktop. “C’mon, man,” he flicks his towel at Harley, “let me back in. I can take Moses down.”

Harley’s face registers mild shock, then drops to a gape. He’s amazed at Jared’s genuine athletic arrogance. “Okay. Sure. You can go back in. But don’t be too bold with Moses. He’ll eat you alive. He’s just been toying with us out there.”

As Jared reenters the game, ten guards stealthily slide into riot positions. They glide in with a disciplined motion. They’re hooked into the prison grapevine and are prepared for the worst. Few others notice them. All are focused on Jared and Moses.

Jared catches up with Moses as he comes down court to set up. He instinctively maneuvers him into body contact. Under the circumstances it’s a dumb, inflammatory move but he’s playing basketball, not being diplomatic. He takes Moses’ weight and gives him a shoulder. It states, “I’m ready. Make your move.”

Moses reads Jared's intention and as the ball floats towards him, he dips and fakes, goes left, pushes back right and leaves Jared waving his arms in the air like the guy flagging airplanes to dock. The black side roars and renewed scatological taunts flood the floor. "Up your ass, bitch!" "Suck my big black dick, honkey!" Ass cheeks are spread and rectal kisses bestowed from all corners. Tensely, the white section is closely watching, waiting to see how Jared responds.

Unlike the blacks, the COs don't rely solely on Jared—although they should! So even though he calls for the ball, it goes around to Sean who is the athletic sum and essence of everything Jared is not. He's not only small, verging on petite, but graceless—a great wrestler but he can't dance. When he shoots it's a hopeless brick that twangs the rim and rockets straight back up. Moses' fingers touch the ball before it plunges down towards the rim, but as he brings it to his waist Jared rips it out of his hands. With equal astonishment, Moses finds himself holding air, looking like a man who's just dropped his pants. Jared bounds back up and dunks, plops the ball in with gentle ease.

The gym rocks and rolls, both sides wildly cranking it up. Even the guards are watching the gladiators now more than the crowd. For the rest of the quarter it yo-yos back and forth, the score rising one way, then the other. Smartly, every time they set up, the ball gets into Jared's hands. He passes it off now and then but only Harley has a half-decent shot. The rest, like hapless Sean—"Wrestlers suck!" he yells at his bud after his third air ball—are simply out of gas. So it's Big Man time!

It's Jared fading away for "Two!" And Jared juking and dipping and just bowling over three defenders for "Another two!" It goes on. Moses is matching him point for point but he's not half as winded—Moses just doesn't bother to play defense. But not so for the COs—they need Jared's long arms and barroom bouncer defensive moves. Winded, he still has to hustle back and go manic in the paint just to keep things even. He blocks a jumper. He swats away a layup. It takes its toll—he's just flat-ass pooped.

Time-out is called with three minutes left. Jared is about to black out. He's dizzy and half-conscious. The time in County and the suspension in Seg are taking their toll. He wants to sit out for a few. *Can I go home now?*

"Sit out?!" The team freaks with a common voice and gesture. "This place will blow if you sit out. Man, you gotta ride it out now."

It's at this moment that Jared first scents the meanness in the air. Hot and getting hotter. The windows are steam-clouded, some beading sweat as the gym's temperature rises. An ugly vileness wafts up and down the bleachers.

Once Jared got into a push and shove match with a black way back on St. Vincent's playground. But it was the posturing bravado of youth. Here he sees, for the first time, the jerky wildness of caged eyes. They want blood. It doesn't matter whether it's white or black, just blood. They want nothing less than a duel to the death. *What the fuck should I do?* He wants someone else to answer.

Harley evidently can read Jared's mind. "Just play hard and play fair. Don't give up. Don't give in. But don't lose control."

Then he speaks the truth. "There's no way we can win tonight. Win *or* lose, we lose. This is not about basketball. But if we lose control, we'll lose whatever gains we've made as a group."

Jared doesn't quite understand all Harley's getting at but he thinks he gets his drift. With that, his sole focus shifts back to the Game.

As the story gets told later both sides won. It depends on who's doing the telling.

Moses' speed and gracefulness account for much laughter as he jukes Jared time and again. No one on either side can touch Moses' skillfulness. He's clearly the most exciting one-on-one player around. But the COs win the game by a point—a point made by Jared at the foul line.

There is no controversy but a lot of heated death threats made around the call. Jared was brutally and maliciously clotheslined. No one would deny that! Fortunately, the guy's forearm cushioned much of the blow but it put Jared hard-ass on the floor, looking like a kid who'd just had his lollipop swiped.

The foul appeared to be unintentional but it's all that the crazies on both sides needed. Even before Jared could respond by *not* slapping back at his attacker, a cluster of fist-waving, "Mother-fuckin' niggers!" white guys show up at half court. Their gesture is met by equal venom from the other side. More spit and feigned violence flies than actual blows because everyone's acutely aware of the guns aimed at and now moving towards center court.

Just as quickly as the inmates, the guards are there, whistles screeching, billy clubs waving. It's enough to do the trick. This isn't a planned riot, just a rehearsal. Nonetheless, the anger jumps and jives. "Watch yo' white boy!" "Betta protect yo' white boy!" as the blacks interpret the guards' presence as shielding their *great white hope!*

More wildly than before, all versions of the great scatological gesture and its flatulent verbal formulations roar back and forth across the gym. A swarm of *fuck you!* finger-flickings. Italian forearmed gestures of *up yours!* Hand signals that shriek, *Bend over and I'll fuck you in the ass, you pussy!* "Eat me!" "Suck this!" "You're mine, bitch!" It takes another five full minutes to settle things down.

Jared welcomes the release and this informal time-out. The energy of the exchange doesn't scare him. It's not unlike what he learned from the '68 Chicago Democratic Convention. From that outrage, he became familiar with the smell of bloodlust. Back then, he took home a lesson about reading eye-messages. Right now, he's not picking up any "hunting for fucking niggers" or "hunting for fucking hippies" energy from the guards. This flash of understanding comes then evaporates as he approaches the foul line.

As Jared tells it, the real story was Moses. As he steps to the foul line, Jared catches Moses' eye. All night Moses has successfully avoided Jared's stare. He knew

that Jared wanted to psych him out. But Moses is smart about white folks; he knows their tricks.

Moses, ebony elegant and polished by sweat, upright and at full height, lifts his head high and turns just enough to look Jared straight in the eye, boldly. Jared can't figure it out—*what?* Then Moses grins, full but not broad—not toothy or the racist watermelon smile, definitely not that. It's a genuine gesture of acknowledgment, a controlled and sly smile that says, "We've been a good show. I like your style."

Moses won: As the swish tells the tale of the scoreboard, Moses is in front of Jared. With that slink of speed that justifies calling him Shadow, he shakes Jared's hand. Not a pump, not a high five but that introductory shake, the type both sides could only interpret as friendly. A "Welcome to the neighborhood" shake.

Doors pops open and the gym deflates like a stabbed roundball, *sszzzz . . . ssshhh!* Humans stream out like crazed air molecules. Soon the Yard fills. The once inflamed mob slowly subsides into the chatter of small groups. Everyone's waiting for the day's last Lock-up and Count.

But this is Inside and what must be told is that hatred intensified with every bounce of the ball. Jared was being watched. The Black Muslims, for one, are certain that the increasing population of COs means something bad for them. Although certain Black Power advocates welcome the alliance with the white radical Resisters, the Muslims only see "white intelligence" as the mind of the slave master. They watched Jared and interpreted his Seg antics as a sign that he's trying to cover up something and create a false identity. They're suspicious of his radical posture and his reputation as an ally of the Black Panthers. True, they know that he helped ferry several brothers into Canada, but again they read this as the development of a tight, deep-cover radical bio, as an effort at misdirection.

As they heard it—or were quick to mine from every fragment of rumor—some with Chicago connections to Fred Hampton’s former Black Panther group had tagged Jared not as an ally and a trusted source but as the informant, the one who set him up with a hippie chick, the overdose of Seconal—and Daley’s death squad!

Tonight was just the sign they needed. Jared is a fuse on a powder keg. Why else, they argue, would they send a honkey jock to the same joint as Moses? Can’t the other brothers see this? Isn’t it clear? How much deeper and tighter can the cover get? “He’s a white intellectual, a teacher. A white radical, a preacher. A white jock, a hero. What else but a white spy? Can he be anything but trouble?”

From this game on, they keep a tightly peeled eye on him noon and night. They augur even the most trivial of details. Above all, they devise an *exit plan* for him.

Other eyes watch him too. Eyes not even the Warden knows are present. These eyes are quite pleased by Jared’s ability to incite as well as by his ability not to lose his cool. His stock, this night, has skyrocketed among J. Edgar Hoover’s undercover agents—the ones Agent Brown admired but wouldn’t join. For them, the ogling of the Black Muslims is not unnoticed. For the misinformation on Jared that he slipped to his brothers, Supply Line will certainly have to be greased, once again.

## 16 - EVENING REVERIE – *ESCAPE!*

The battery of fluorescent lights pops off in an every-other-one sequence. Jared scrunches his face as the darkness slowly blankets his vision. Quietly, immobile, he lies for several minutes. Then he carefully adjusts, fine-tunes his eyes to the dim night aura of the dorm. The inner Yard lights throw an indirect glow to the far side of the room. On his side of the dorm a similar hue is created by the exterior wall's spotlights.

Jared has trouble sleeping in total darkness, always keeps a night-light on or a candle burning in his room, so he welcomes these intruding lights, is actually grateful for them, these tufts of comfort, no matter how accidental. This is the sole comfort he's found in the Institution. Everything up to this time has been . . . *well, fucked*. "Prison is *fucked!*" He says it to anyone, everyone, and often during fierce inner monologue.

*Fucking boring!* is a truer sentiment.

Jared is a thin shade away from endlessly screaming and yelling and physically resisting every fucking thing. He's pissed, but even more pissed at himself. *I'm so fucked up!*

The fit he had that first night in Seg still bothers him. *What possessed me? Who was I then? Would Gandhi have acted out like that? Bonhoeffer? George Jackson? Other war resisters? Let's not even think about Jesus peeing on the walls!*

Jared would almost have welcomed the sight of the Torturer, that medieval public servant who poured molten lead into the raw joints of drawn and quartered convicts. There's something about the sensational with which the human can grapple. During the anti-war days there was the spectacle—the mass rallies, the card burnings, the sit-ins and hootenannies, all that public touch and feel. It's the trivial, the small of scale, the microscopic, the itch and the scratch that drives humans to madness. *Bored to death!*

He writes to Char, "What I have is a patch. Just like the Little Prince. The tiniest of tiny. The minimum of minimum. My shadow at times is larger than all of

my space and possessions. My bunk is but a wrap around my flesh. My stash is all contained in a three by three by three steel cube. That's it!"

Prison is "institutionalized violence." Sean likes that phrase. Not Jared—for him the border between violence and nonviolence gets slenderer with each day. "What isn't violence? We're *accepting* being here. Doesn't that make us collaborators? Good soldiers?" *Am I imprisoning myself? Am I my own hack? Wacky thoughts, but gut wrenching. The Canada of his dreams returns—escape!*

*Escape.* The thought keeps coming back. Right from the start he wanted to bolt and run. He heard "five years" and his gut instinct was to sneak into Canada. It's been a long internal battle ever since to obey and comply with the conditions of his sentence. How little his brothers and sisters knew about his own detailed plans for escape to Canada. How he had grown not to trust anyone, even them. He knows that this is the greatest sin against nonviolence, this not trusting. Trusting others to do good, to act morally, to seek justice is what defines the core heartfelt emotion of his belief in nonviolence. The raid itself was an act of trust in the moral goodness of those whose draft cards he destroyed. A guy whose card was destroyed became invisible to the system—there were no back-up files, amazing as Jared found that to be. He trusted this "invisible man"—who was now given a second chance—to make the right moral decision and not re-register. *Father, forgive me, for I know not what I do.*

The raid was an act of freedom. But here he is, accepting the shackles of imprisonment! "God, I *hate* . . ." and a rush of images. He despises the man who took his pen to write his name on the first report at the County Jail. He hates the guards who come by with such nonchalant regularity to take this inmate out, bring that one in. He hates the fool who hands out their censored mail, unperturbed by the violence of his deletions. He hates the invasive eyes that peer at his every move while in the visiting room. He hates the thoughts the hacks have as the slaves hunker around the Yard, chattering to the clanking of their spectral chains.

He hates the stupid priest who reads his breviary as he strolls the Yard as if it was a garden conservatory. He hates the cons who are here with him. Hates them more than he hates everyone and everything else because if they hadn't acquiesced, if they hadn't slunk into the cowardly posture, if they hadn't flung away their escape plans, he would be alone—and then have only himself to hate, whom he hates beyond definition.

He hates himself. He has wanted to escape from the moment he entered the first remote-controlled gate. Something deep within yelled, "Don't go in! Escape!" *Why didn't I run? Why have I submitted?* Isn't this a blatant admission of guilt and defeat?

Christ, he's never been able to settle that question. Can he now? Every time it lunges at him, it staggers him. With great effort he wrestles himself back into docile submission.

*But of course, Jared reasons to himself, it isn't submission.* He bends the word, convinces himself that what they call submission is actually his triumph. Surely his actions are the actions of the stronger man, the moral man, the unbeatable foe.

"Fucking-A yes!" he yells back to the depths within himself. "Fucking-A, I am free therefore I *can* submit. I'm not afraid. I can withstand all your evils, all your violence, all your prisons. Chain me and shackle my body, but you cannot defeat *me!*"

This inner dialogue recurs a hundred times a day—occurs at each clank of a key in a cell block lock and every night when the lights are put out by an unseen hand.

Lying here in the bottom of a double bunk, being dorm-caged with seventy-odd men, he is forever one with the rejects and outcasts of society.

*I came, but I don't have to stay. How to escape this place? A plan is seeded.*

The noise in the dorm has abated. The meandering conversations in the darkness have all but subsided. There's an occasional spate of snoring, a belch, an extended fart, a garble of sleep talk. Jared yawns, begins to fade, slumbers in the Canada of his dreams.

As the Wheel turns, inmate 8867-147 starts to dream the most ancient dream of the captive—*escape*.

## 17 - MOM'S VISIT

Jared's sister Delores steers them towards an empty row with four chairs, their friend Gene's arm quietly circling Mom's waist. The many others in the visiting room give only brief notice—their eyes glance up then quickly down in involuntary protectionism, defensive curiosity.

"Mom, it's okay." Jared sways her full-body side to side. She stifles her loud sobbing. Her head rests momentarily on his shoulder. The intense scrutiny of the visiting room guard, whom the inmates call the Watcher, makes her uncomfortably self-conscious. He walks slowly around the room stopping for a word with an inmate or a family member, even seems amiable, but she feels like he's looking at her all the time: examining her, finding fault with her. *Bad mother!*

"It's okay, Mom. I'm fine. Things are okay." Jared hugs her hard again, almost lifts her off the ground. His lips are moist and touch her forehead in soft markings. She has quieted. Slowly, she settles, composed. Then she wipes her heavy tears with the back of her hand. So it is. This phase of her mothering journey has begun. *My son is in prison.*

"Hi, Gene," a handshake. "Delores, my love," an embrace and playful kiss. Tears are held back. They find strength in being family. The foursome arranges itself in a half circle.

"You're looking good, son," as Mom rummages in her purse for a cigarette. "How are things going?"

Jared pauses then chuckles with a slightly audible sound. "Well," left hand smoothing the back of his head, "I've lost some hair—as you can see. More than even before. And I'm cutting some of this stuff off," as he rubs his stomach, "and all in all . . . it's a drag." He shrugs then self-consciously laughs at himself. "You know, if I get rapping about everything that's been going down since I've been here

. . . what is it, three weeks? Hmm, I'm sure that doesn't seem like much time to you all, but *wow!* What a month I've been having. But before I dive into that, tell me what's going on. For starters," he leans towards Gene, "what have you two been doing? A lot of sinning, I hope!"

Delores, the sixth of the Jennings seven, just eighteen months older than Jared, flushes as she moves her hand off Gene's knee.

Mom starts to say, "Since . . ." but is interrupted by a stern background voice.

"Sorry, ma'am, but you'll have to keep your seat in a straight line."

Mom is startled by the Watcher. He's directly behind her. She pivots slightly, confronts an expressionless face. "The chairs have to be straight all the time." Mom moves, obediently, reacting instinctually to his policing authority. "It's policy." A slight explanation, "That way all visitors can move around easily."

Dolores and Gene follow in lockstep. All their straightening is done before any of them can collect their thoughts. Jared glares angrily at the Watcher. *Fuck! What can I do? You fucking Nazi!*

Once the Watcher's gone, Jared's leans in, lowers his head towards the others to create some semblance of privacy.

"Why do they do that?" Mom asks.

A moment's silence slips between them. But the room isn't quiet. It's buzzing with skidding sounds of children running toys over Masonite tiles in concert with skidding sounds of dry emotions raising friction as they rub against drier emotions. Jared's answer comes quietly but laced with anger. "These fuckers have a rule for everything. And they love to come over and jerk visitors around. But don't worry, they really can't do anything drastic. I'm entitled to my four visits. All they can do is bug us."

Mom responds in typical mom fashion: consoling, comforting, ignoring his profanity, not wanting to correct him, not in this place. "I guess they have their rules, son. It's not such a big thing for me as long as I can see you like this. Remember how ugly it was in the jail? With that glass window between us. We're lucky they don't restrict us like that."

"Stop!" Jared raises his hand. "Let's not get into that way of thinking. You're going to be coming here for quite some time—five friggin' years—and you can't let those fuckers get you down. Realize this, to them you're as subhuman as I am. Since you're my mom, you're responsible for me. *Guilty!*"

Mom puffs her cigarette—not nervously but as she always does when Jared begins to lecture—puffing serially.

*She deeply loves him, yet there are distances always between them. Early in the moments of their first fleshly touches she realized how much he loved her. Just cleaned, from the nursery, he comes to her, oh so beautiful, a quiet beatific baby with small hands clutching her skin and his head moving so spastically side to side as if he's trying to imprint his face on her breasts. She loves him as she has loved them all but this time—with her seventh—she feels a strange distance as if he has come already speaking like a mature person, telling her that she is as much his child as he is hers. More than her flesh, he is part of her spirit.*

*During her hospital stay, as this strange sense subsides and she watches him melt into sleep, she determines that this her seventh is different simply because he is her seventh. After all there are six others at home. Six others who have such claim on her time and energy. This time, she concludes, I must be feeling more of being a mother than simply a woman bearing a child. Even so, this explanation never satisfies her.*

Now, sitting here in this strange place, watching him as he talks with his sister and her former fiancé, these memories serve to heighten her awareness of

how much she loves him, her last one. Loves him almost as she did Chester, the good man of her conceptions.

*Chester who had a special fondness for Jared, too, but never felt that he quite understood the child. How often it moved her that Chester singled out Jared for special attention. Paid him more mind in ways that didn't take away from the other kids but took some time away from her. As if Chester also realized that Jared was a full presence, even in toddler's clothes. And it had continued like that until his death. Chester spent incessant hours pouring his mind and soul into Jared. From the time the child's body was carrying a speaking mind his father drew him into deep conversations about God and the meaning of life. All through the years of education and bodily growth Chester sat for hours debating and discussing, baffled by his son's sensitivity and his arrogance. So many days had they started by praying at Mass together. And it was only with Jared that Chester had shared the anguish of Joey's death. Only with him that he uttered the question to which his life denied an answer, "Why would God allow a small child to suffer so?"*

*At his dad's funeral, Jared stepped into the pulpit and gave tribute to Chester, her good man.*

*My fellow Christians. Those of you who have known my father have said that he was a "dedicated and unselfish man in his love" and an "exceptional man in his integrity." But allow me to say that as I remember Father, and as I know Father, the description which he lived is that he is a good man.*

*With roses in their hands and cold white snow on their feet, all had placed their hearts upon the open grave. Truly, gratefully, through Jared had her own*

*words been spoken to him whom she so passionately loved. He who had been her true love. Oh, how often has this son brought all this forth?*

“ . . . and so they stand us up and make us take our clothes off. Everything—*everything*, totally naked. And then we go through this insane ritual of tilting our heads, opening our mouths, running our fingers through our hair, bending over and pulling our butts apart, picking up our feet,” Jared is talking feverishly, “and then they check all of our clothes.” He stops the hurried flow of words, suddenly getting a sense of the avalanche of emotion that’s coming through them. “Okay,” with his right hand running through his hair, “let’s break and get some coffee.”

After Gene and Jared go for coffee, Delores turns to her mother. “He always gets so wrapped up in what he’s doing. I certainly hope he won’t hurt himself.”

Mom catches that constant concern for hurt that this child carries so shamelessly in her eyes. Gathering her words, ones that she uses so regularly to soothe Delores’s fears for Jared, she says, “Now Delor, you know he has to do what he has to do. He’s come through a lot and always manages to balance himself out. That’s why I don’t think we should worry too much.”

Delores resettles herself in the body-molded chair. “I hope—I guess you’re right, Mom. But I can’t help but worry that someday he’ll push himself just a little too far.”

“Who gets the cream?” Gene asks.

“That’s mine,” Jared’s voice catches up with him. “I thought I’d better start using cream since I’ve been drinking coffee like a fish for the last couple of days.”

Gene and Jared sit down and hand the others their Styrofoam cups.

"Jared, I want you to know that I really admire all you've been doing," Gene pauses and looks at the three. "It's been a while since I've been back in the family fold and I haven't had any time to sit down and tell you how I feel. I want you to know I followed your activities in the papers and always respected the stand you took." Delores lays her arm on the back of Gene's chair as he speaks. "And I know you'll get through this wretched place in one piece. I hope that I can keep coming up with Delor." He glances towards Delores whose eyes close in a modest blush.

"Hmm, you two are really getting it back together, eh?" teases Jared.

"Now cut that out," Delores titters while leaning her head as far back as the chair will allow. She's embarrassed, as she so characteristically gets in front of the family when they talk about her love life.

"Mom, what do you think? Think we should let this scalawag back into our lives?" Before Mom answers, Jared says, "Hey, brother Gene what are you bringing to us? Did you get your master's? Are you prepared to support my sister in the style she's accustomed to? Let's see, the last dude she played around with was a millionaire or something like that."

"Jared! Stop that! You're *hurting* your sister."

It's big brother buffoonery hurt and it kicks in their mother's protective defense. She takes out a new cigarette pack, taps it on the table. She's building a space, a barrier in time, to shift connections, alter the levels of intensity. Methodically, she tears the cellophane band, pins back the aluminum inner sheath into winged triangles, then perfectly shears them with a fingernail, lastly tapping out a cigarette. Sometimes, five to ten taps, at others with just one. Here, she has it in her mouth by the third tap. Before lighting it she leans over and with her free hand pats Delor's left knee. "Delor's a fine woman and Gene's a lucky man. Right?"

"Right, Mom," Gene says in a *faithfully obedient son* tone.

"And you, Jared . . . talk about love lives, what's happening with you and Char?" Mom lights up.

*What should I tell them?* Jared slowly sips his coffee once, twice, a third time.

"C'mon, tell us, Jared. How is Char?" Delores asks with her usual sincere concern.

"Char's just fine. She plans to start coming up about every week. She's writing me now and then." Pause. "Things between us are *good* but they're *changing*." Another pause. "I mean, you know when you're away from someone for a long time—well, you can't expect everything to remain as it was."

"I know," Mom comforts and assures; her eyes see his heartbreak.

"She's going through some heavy changes. Her travels in Europe are strengthening her feminist politics. She misses us all. She regrets that my first month here is when she's there. The women she's meeting are giving her a lot of inspiration." Jared stops to drain the last trace of fluid from his cup. "I guess I'll know more when she comes up next month."

"Jared," Mom asks, "do you feel that she . . ."

"Now hold on, Mom," Jared breaks in, "don't ask me to judge anything about my relationship with Char. She's dealt with the things I've been going through in the last several years and I've gained a lot of strength from her. I know the family doesn't understand what she's doing with her life but she's a good woman, and we'll just have to let things stand with that."

"That's not what I was going to ask," Mom says, a bit irritated. "I was simply going to ask whether you felt that she was going to continue nursing. You shouldn't be so defensive about her!" Two puffs and a mist of smoke envelopes the group. "I'll agree, we're all still confused over the *form* of your relationship, but we like her—*very much*. She sent me a card from Dublin. And I think she has, from one spot or another, mailed a card to everyone in the family."

Mom pauses to crush her half-smoked cigarette then, "What she'll be like towards us is something we'll have to see when she returns. We have no great expectations. But we all like her—*very much.*"

Jared regrets his gush of defensive emotions. He doesn't want to bring Mom or Delores or Gene down. They're here for just a few hours and he wants the visit to be an upper.

"Yeah, okay, I guess I kind of feel ambiguous about Char and everything. Being here really messes up my feelings. Char's my only contact with the female world and I am protective about her. Yesterday Sean and I got into a snit over her while playing basketball."

Jared leans forward, elbows on knees, hands holding his chin. "Guess it's best that we don't go too heavily into my emotions about women." With that said he senses that they need a break from him. "I have to go to the john. Why don't you get some more coffee and, say, pick up a nut-roll. I'll be back soon."

As Jared rises he once again becomes aware of the room. He observes the movements between folks around him—hands on knees, women holding babies in their arms, men lunging into embraces, hard squeezes and kisses... the density of erotic substance scurrying over the walls and into the seats and out the windows...the darting probes of the Watchers. All swirls about him as he walks towards the inmates' john. Simultaneously, the other three look for change for the vending machines, open purses for more cigarettes, and stand to smooth their clothes, now damp from sitting so long in one position.

That night, Jared writes to his Mom.

*Dear Mom: This may be hard for you to understand. But please trust me. Having you walk in here, into this Cage, well, I hate to see you have to come here.*

*This is a cathedral. But to an alien god. Or gods. What I'm trying to say is that just as the Mass is a repetitious banality—one being said every minute of the day around the world with the same predictable gestures and holy grunts and groans—so is Prison.*

*No, I'm not being clear. Maybe that IS what I AM trying to say. It is not clear in here, and it is not clear when you are here. Trust me on this. I want you to come and visit but only for one-half hour. No more, no less. I feel that this is a dangerous place for you. Trust me on this. Just trust me even if it is unclear. I am unclear, I know.*

*Your loving son, Jared.*

**18 - CHAR'S VISIT: ELLEN**

Over the loudspeaker, "Jennings, report to visiting."

"Four ounces of anal droppings."

"Check."

"Right index nail, smudgy."

"Check."

"Left eyebrow, dandruff dots, minimal."

"Check."

"Posture, erect, point zero four."

"Check."

"Top collar, passable."

"Check."

"Stomach, in curvature two-seven-seven."

"Check."

*Check check check CHECK! K-rist, let me go.*

"Go, righteous eight-eight-six-seven. *Checked.*"

All checked out, Jared stands at the inmates' entrance to the visiting room. He surveys the room looking for her.

The Watcher says, "Over there. End of row two."

"Char. Goddamn, it's good to see you." Jared glides into an orange chair. Fingertips tingle with soft erotic touchings, eyes moisten. "Goddamn, Char, so glad you could make it today."

"Yes, my love, my brother, it is good to be here."

She combed her hair a hundred times in preparation. Scented herself: *Here, my love, stroke my hair, breathe in my heart's sweet yearning.*

HAIR: on all residents is not to exceed one inch above the collar of standard dress. Afros not to extend in width more than two (2) inches from the center of the back of the head. Sideburns not to grow below the earlobes. Moustaches: to be squarely trimmed to the edge of the upper lip. Drawings appended give clear indications of the applicability of this policy. Infractions punished by loss of Good Time.

Jared fidgets, settling down in a circular motion. He's uncomfortable in preformed plastic. Ever so slowly his thighs and buttocks settle in for the visit. From the far side of the room, the Watcher notes his posture. *Nothing unusual.*

"Char, what's been going on?"

"Hmm, really, not much. Let's talk about you."

"No." Softly, almost inaudibly, the regularized sigh. "No. I don't think that would be too helpful. You know things go on in a caged routine like squirrels on a treadmill, the peanuts come and go. It's hard to get a handle on this last month. Let's talk about you."

"Sure." Laying her slim fingers on Jared's thigh, "Okay."

*I told you, Mother, he's suffering! Goddess, can't you see that?*

"Sweetheart, let me talk awhile about the Sisters. Something interesting's happening in town. *Interesting*—gee, what a funny word."

Char coughs a pausing breath into her hand then returns her hand to his khaki thigh. "Last week, let's see, two weeks ago last Thursday, the Collective got together and decided that all the Sisters should separate from their men and live together. Now Jared . . ."

She expects him to fume, is surprised when he doesn't. She speaks before he can.

"Don't get upset. It was only a suggestion."

Dismissively, "Suggestion, yuck! *Ptui!* It sounds like a crock of shit to me."

A deep breath for control, then sharply, "Let me say more. The Sisters feel that the primal hostility for all violence comes from the sexual habits of our culture." Another deep breath, "Simply, if we can work in our lifetime to create new structures for male-female relationships then we can make some significant contributions to the historical struggle."

"Hmmmph." Indignation. "I don't know. I guess it leaves me feeling, err, *ambiguous?*"

Char stands and lifts her palms upward to frame Jared's face. Her full-length frock clings to the rounder parts of her slender body, evoking images of well-worn stones found on ocean's shores and tossed into the sea.

"I've gotta go to the bathroom. It's my time—my blessed lunar spell. Be right back."

She steps spryly past him.

While waiting Jared decides to get some coffee. When she returns he hands her a cup, extra light. She smiles, *he always remembers*. Back on track, ready, she sits and positions herself sideways in the molded chair. For some reason, the seats in this section of the visiting room are bolted down. She's more than a bit

uncomfortable but her posture conveys that she's serious and wants his full attention.

Prisoners are truly captives in that they can never move at an advantage when a matter of affection is concerned. Try as he might, for every con, no matter who he is or what his connection with his woman was before prison, sure as the sun rises, prison destroys that relationship.

Unaware and unintentionally, Char is experiencing her first day of conquest. Jared, her lover, her friend, her playmate, is her first conquest. She's driving him further Inside, into dark corners he doesn't even know exist.

But he moves first, obviously having to get something off his chest.

"I love you." Jared places his right hand on hers and tilts his head to watch her eyes.

"I love you too, Jared," Char responds as she pats his hand.

Fidgeting a second or two. "When I'm alone in bed at night I really know why I like being with you. There's an ache in my bones and muscles that I feel remembering how we sleep back to stomach." Pauses. Searching for clear words. "I lie there and shudder. I'm moved by an eerie sense of your power, which is there even though you're not." Excited, "It's only too, too clear to me how much you've become a part of my flesh. How my sweat is your sweat, my comfort your comfort."

She says nothing; he pauses, waits, hesitates, plunges forward. Angry and confessing, "One unhappy thing is that when I work myself up to masturbate, I can't imagine you."

He's comes to a full stop, shuts down. They've never discussed this before. Char's listening intently. He screws up his courage to admit, "At times I feel terrible. That I have to conjure up scenes of lewdness—fuck, practically rape. But the worst part's that as quickly as I ejaculate I'm nauseated by the feeling of

propelling death from my body. Throwing it away in the seed that's supposed to be life."

Jared can't seem to stop himself. *Why?*

"Char, it may seem perverse to you—it does to me—but if I don't masturbate I feel less than alive. Yet when I do, I feel so much of the darkness in here," knuckle-rapping his heart. "It's not guilt or sin, nothing like that. Probably though, if I'm honest, it's more a sense of my life being so utterly futile. *Goddamn!*" Jared knows he must stop talking. "*Goddamn*, I hate where I am and what I'm becoming."

Char frees her hand and with practiced fingers slowly but firmly rubs the back of his neck, the base of his skull. She doesn't speak for awhile. He sits there, head slightly bowed, left hand on her knee. He reaches to get his coffee, stops, then picks it up, tilts his head back and swallows half.

She stops massaging. Concerned, earnest, "Sometimes, you just have to follow what seems most healthy. Ugliness is sometimes all that life offers," she sighs, "but you don't have to wrap your identity up with what you're doing even if it is the most pleasurable thing to do." She shifts forward in her seat. "Sometimes, for a while, all you can do is fake it. Then hopefully, sometime, somewhere an opening occurs and you slip through and it's all past."

Jared looks at her quizzically, not quite grasping her point. He redirects the seemingly off-track moment by asking for a cigar.

"Did you bring one of those Italian jobs, like I asked?"

Char remembered, as she always does, to bring the little things he relishes. Sometimes it's bittersweet chocolate, at others, pieces of dried fruit, like figs. He never requests dope, although Sean's girlfriend says it's easy to smuggle in.

Satisfying a deep longing, Jared unwraps the elongated, finger-thick stick and mock-puffs away in pleasure. "Ah, for a little cognac my dear and the night

would be *es-plendeed!*" He mimes to her, *Later!* He's already savoring toking on this log later tonight.

While he's distracted with this small delight, Char figures it's timely to bring *the matter* up. As Jared blows on his steaming java, she blurts out, "What do you think about lesbians?"

He keeps blowing. Sips. Eyes her quizzically. They've talked endlessly about feminists of all stripes but lesbianism is an off-beat topic for him. Uncharacteristically, yet so expectedly, he doesn't respond with the tolerant philosophical tone and touch she's accustomed to.

"Lesbians?" is delivered with an air of, "Oh, *them*. Who cares about them?" He sips, then shrugs, clearly judgmental. "Just women cranked up all wrong. *Prunes*. Little gal homos who have penis fright, I guess."

His stupid and insensitive remarks throw her off her mark. She's momentarily unsure about how to proceed. After an unnoticeable pause she just pushes forward.

"Jared," Char touches his arm, "there's been just a *wonderful* surge in the Women's Movement since you left. It's really *exciting*."

The intensity and passion that explodes from "exciting" jolts him a bit since this is how she gets worked up when she's about to testify about an injustice. The topic "Lesbians" is clearly not a casual matter. Cautiously, he nods, "Go ahead." *As if I could stop her!*

"Women are really coming together as Sisters. All women. From all classes, religions and . . ." she hesitates, doesn't complete the thought. Then, "You won't believe how powerful our meetings are now. I'm just thrilled by a new energy."

Char's rhapsodic. Jared can almost hear her gasping at the remembrance of these meetings.

"There's something I'd like you to know. It might be painful for you to hear but it's very important."

She shifts her delivery, speaks deliberately at a slow pace, with short intervals between important points. "This is something that won't surprise you but you might react to the timing. Although, as we often agreed, I can't do time with you."

Resigned, "Fucking-A, it's bad enough one of us is doing time. Go on."

Char clears her throat. "When I returned from my vacation it became increasingly clear that I wanted to spend my life with women and women's struggles. In Europe the three of us met some fantastic women who were really at ease with being lovers. We had such fun times at night, drinking and dancing and rapping. The whole trip renewed my enthusiasm for our Sisterhood." She's oblivious to his unhappy facial contortions. "It was really inspiring, the freedom so many Sisters felt when they honestly dealt with their affections for one another. It might've been the distance and not being in places old and familiar but I felt so *free* being with them. I had no desire to be anywhere else.

"I love you deeply, Jared, and always will." She pauses, emphasizes, "Our love is something I will never deny."

Jared blows and takes a long sip of coffee.

She shuts her eyes. "What I'm excited about is the possibility of *our*—your and my—living this vision." Opens her eyes, checks for his reaction.

Jared breaks right in. "I'm not quite sure where you're going. We've talked about this before. I'm hip with the fact that we won't marry. That you might be living in a Women's Collective and me with other people. It's cool, okay?"

The immobile chair prevents him from sidling up right next to her, so he reaches over and takes her hands in his, kisses them. "Are you implying more? That you want to love a woman?"

Straightaway, "Yes." Pause. "While we were dancing and drinking I really felt ecstatic. Ellen and I happened to be alone. We danced and danced and listened to Laura Nyro late into the early morning." *Go!* "Honestly, we slept together." Emphatically but softly, "But I want *more than that*. For us."

Jared gets the message, knife directly hitting heart. He wants to bolt and race wildly around the room, up the wall, out a spectral chimney.

"I wanted to write to you, but knowing how they read the mail I didn't. I wanted to wait until we were together."

Damaged goods. "Sure," drawing upon the protectiveness of seeming logical, ". . . well, yes, of course, this is *not* unexpected. In so many ways it's the logical extension of all you've been struggling for."

Char moves closer to Jared, brings both of his hands to her lips. She sighs deeply as a tear snags the corner of her right eye. He can't see it, not her face or moist eyelid. He's in flight mode, eyes catching over her shoulder the time, 2:58, registering inside his mind, in a space not very conscious, *only two more minutes of visiting*.

Char breaks the silence. "Jared—" but she does not get to say, "While I'm eager to know Ellen and develop our relationship, I want you to know my vision—that the three of us live together. Oh, I'm so thrilled because I know you will love Ellen. And I was thinking that if you'd like, I'd bring her to visit one of these times."

She does not get to hear the response she seeks, "Sure, okay, sweetheart, of course, I guess, well, that would be fine." Rubbing his hands, "Sounds juicy to me!"

All goes unsaid as everyone hears, "Visiting time's over!" The Watcher booms again as he stands up, "Visiting time's over!" He scans with stealthy eyes to check that nothing improper is attempted, as so often is during these final minutes.

The time spent with a visiting relative or friend is a privilege. Accordingly, each inmate will conduct himself properly. He is not to engage in acts that might embarrass other visitors. Placing hands upon sexual regions, prolonged kisses, undue embracing, and sitting face to face with legs touching are some direct violations of this policy. All infractions will be punished by a loss of Good Time.

“Have a good time with Sean and the rest. Give them my love,” are Char’s parting words.

Jared idly waits in the middle of a throng of khaki men, all about to be stripped naked and arse-inspected again as soon as he can no longer see her.

Char turns around once she’s inside the iron exit gates, rises on her tiptoes to spy Jared, his height distinctively marking him out in that wash of common dress; waves and blows a kiss from the tips of her hands.

## 19 - CHAR'S VISIT: PREGNANT

During Char's weekly visits she wears the baggy hippie smock of the day—*paisley!* It amply hides her early pregnancy.

"Why can't I tell him?" She asks herself and so many others. Actually, she already knows the answer. "He'll try to escape. He's so overprotective. I know he'll suffer just knowing." Then her hope, "Won't it be such a fabulous surprise? He'll love having a child to touch and hold."

She is fully aware of the pain that *not* telling him might inflict and she doesn't fool herself about the risk. He might go berserk. Feel betrayed. Hate her. She's damned if she tells him while he's locked up, damned if she waits. Beseeking guidance from the Goddess, she heeds the warning that comes repeatedly in her dreams: "Do not tell him, not now!"

For Jared, visits from the start were bittersweet and quickly turned bitter. He had a rash of visitors once out of Seg—"Mostly guilty liberals!" Sean snorts. Everyone except Char and his Mom quickly got a "Please don't visit" note. His mother—ever his comforter—defends him. "He just has to do this his own way." But some, even family members, put him down. "Even in prison he's living in his self-centered world!"

His brothers and sisters—especially Eddie—are silently relieved that this obligation is wiped away. They love him, each in their own way, but visiting prison spooks them all; not to mention that it embarrasses them. That their kid brother is a *con*—a violent felon to boot— is not an accomplishment they consider a highlight of the family's biography. Only Larry and Marian remain stubbornly faithful, speak proudly about him every day.

When it comes to Char, Jared just doesn't know what to do. It's not this two-lesbians-plus-one-stud thing—he's not sure she'll stick with that. It's just that he's

locked-up, caged. *Jesus, I yearn to see her, smell her, just tingle my fingers up and down her arms.*

Yet when he sees her, he also knows he falls to pieces. He tells Sean, "Man, it's like choreographed time bombs. After the first half hour, inmate 8867-147 starts to become human again. Thaws. *Dig it!* The desire for a snuggle is wrenching. Then on the hour I start to believe there is something like intimacy. By the time she's ready to leave, inside I'm weeping, sobbing, condemning myself for having caused all this horror to myself and especially to her. I'm ready to crawl over to the Control Booth, pleading, promising the Watcher everything he's ever dreamed of, 'If—if you just let me go!' Fuck it all! The fucking hack—he'll just smile a sweet fatherly grin, pat me on the head, and lead me by the hand back to Char, just like a whipped puppy."

Jared knows this as the invisible spectacle. What actually goes on in the visible realm is the dance of inches. The Rules say, "You can embrace once upon meeting and once upon parting." In between, only rigor-mortis is tolerated. The unanchored, unpadded polystyrene seats are not to be moved—not a degree left or right.

"Turn your chair around!"

"Take your hand off her knee!"

"Drop your arm!"

Such are the routine commands of the Watcher who roves about like a coach working the bench, giving orders. Little reprimands, even at times praise and encouragement, "Jackson, you're almost out of here. Your wife should be proud. You've been doing well." Or "Nice kid."

Sometimes slips into kindness happen. After all, the hacks are human. They have kids to read to and tuck in at night. Despite that, they are artists of the infraction. They can spot a thought coming from a con's head that will turn into a

violation. Before the kiss becomes too prolonged, before the knees do what only knees can do in the visiting room, they are there, "Enough of that!"

On Char's third visit, it happens. As Mike would phrase it, "There's couple's karma. Man, that's hard stuff!"

As usual she comes camouflaged by a long and loose granny dress. Jared kisses her sweetly, ever ignorant about her secret. If he were more observant of the cosmetic, he would notice the puffs and roundness that pregnancy often induces in the face and arms. Char is an angular, slender woman and carrying a few extra pounds fills out her face in a noticeable way. Noticeable to most—not to Jared.

They chat for an hour about this and that until she senses she's ready. Jared picks up that there's something on her mind that she's working around to. Between cups of coffee, walks to the vending machine and back, he realizes that *something's different with her, this time.*

"Dear me, how can I convey all this to you? I can't tell you how many times I've gone over this, preparing to tell you. Let me just say it. I've moved into the Bread and Roses commune."

Char notes his puzzled eyebrow reflex. "I know, I know, they did have a different reputation when you knew them."

*Maoist Mamas from Hell!* Jared can't help himself, her name comes throttling out, careening off his teeth, "That's where Aaren lives!"

Char's patting his knee as if settling down a frightened child. "Right, but Aaren's been transformed. I mean, you wouldn't believe her . . . "

Jared chimes in, ringing incredulous, "She gave up Mao?"

"Geez, yes, sort of—she still finds a lot there. Mao's wife is a really strong figure for her, but okay, Aaren's still one of our leaders, working out the theoretical side of feminism. Like always."

Jared's tipped more than a bit off-balance by this *Aaren and Char living together* revelation. It stirs up his mind and heart—but not in a good way. How can he know that Char is just about ready to blow him to bits?

"There's something you and I have to decide, *today*." Char speaks with her teeth clenched and as if someone is banging the words out from astride her tongue. That declaration made, at "*today*" she abruptly stands, tugs and adjusts her dress, then turns towards the ladies' room. She leaves without another word.

Jared is baffled and perplexed. His male mind can only come up with the fail-safe conclusion, *Must be her time of the month again?*

Although the Sisters—under Aaren's direction—prepared her for this visit, her firm resolve and confidence was immediately shaken by seeing Jared. *His* condition—captive, prisoner—evokes deep sympathy, she wants to reach out and console him, not disturb him. *How can she go through with it? Say it?*

After ten minutes of waiting, he's certain that "the rag" is what's bothering her. But after another ten he begins to be concerned. *Maybe she forgot her stuff?*

He looks around the room to see if there's any other CO whose wife or girl is visiting. As he notices Harley and his wife, Char suddenly materializes back at his side. She's sickly pale and toting a wad of paper towels.

"Are you okay, honey?"

"I'm fine. We have to get on."

She looks straight at him, eye to eye.

"Jared, I'm pregnant."

No fanfare. No slow build to the climax. Just *pow!*

At first it doesn't register. Jared actually hears her say, "I want to get pregnant," and a flurry of ridiculous thoughts run through his mind. But then it hits him.

"You are?!"

"Yes."

He's waiting. The wait of fear, self-distrust—the wait of the withering penis where a guy dreads hearing that it is not his.

"We were blessed on our last night together or just before—at least its close enough that I feel this child came that night. This is our blessing." He exhales a sigh of relief and without uttering a word mentally yells, *Yes, yes, I remember, I remember! . . . Phew, it's mine!*

"I'm sure it happened then. I wanted to tell you as soon as I got back from Europe but things were, you know, things were just *strange*. It hit me that you were in prison, I mean, really far away. So I talked with friends. I even asked your sister Marian. Everyone—*everyone* agreed that I should wait until I was absolutely sure."

Char's feelings of guilt over this hesitation don't interest him. In the blitz of this ambushing joy, Jared is basking in the upside of it all.

*I'm a dad!* is the refrain singing within his spirit. He's smiling a goofy smile. Who deserves to be this happy in the Joint? No one! So—*hold on, bucko!* As Dylan's weatherman predicts, the wind shifts.

Jared slips back into being Inside, away from the visiting room and all its pretense of normalcy. Jared's switch is flipped.

"How far along are you?"

"Nearing seven, maybe eight weeks, if my counting's correct." *February's almost over.*

*Have to decide today, right now!*

Then something deep within startles him, he hears with inmate ears, feels with caged heart. *Click!* He is wild with terror, falling through the floor, crying out to be saved—*Over here! Help me! Come over here and rescue me. Throw the rope!* He sees himself in a pit. Sees his child—*it has to be a son*—looking down at him, watching his father in the pit: caged, chained, humiliated. Pathetically holding in his hand letters from Bruiser and Dikbar, a chastising telegram from Uncle Sam, a video of his wacky night in Seg.

It's all just too pitiful. *Turn of the screw.* He looks at her and doesn't see the mother of his child—he sees another captor. Char is Quinn with her special womanly instruments of torture, ripping out his heart.

"How can I have a son while I'm in here?" he snaps.

Powerless: *In here I can't have anything. Nothing!* He swings his knees out and away from her. His eyes drill her, barely masking his fury.

"How could you *do* this to me?"

In the moment, Jared's question comes across somewhat comically. She's amused at the cosmic reversal of roles. Now it's the guy playing out the hand of the abandoned lover, banged up and betrayed!

"Jared, we did this *together*. Remember?" Almost a tease; a fond memory.

He turns full face forward, sits ramrod upright in his chair. Strongly, clearly he's broadcasting messages of rejection, distaste, repugnance. The drastic shift in his mood jolts her. She's hearing him loud and clear, is stung by his repulsing energy.

"Oh, my god!" *What's happening?* "Jared," in despair, "we've got to talk with one another!"

Jared bites his words, "So talk." He refuses to hear it but inside he spits out a venomous *So talk, Bitch!* He can't hear the word but his left hand begins to tremble slightly, twitches then shakes, he grabs it, steadies it—this the arm broken by Quinn.

Char's fighting a heart-breaking panic. Slowly and methodically she wrings her hands as if scrubbing for surgery. This is an uncharacteristic act, almost neurotic. She's renowned for her unruffled calmness, especially in emergency room crises.

"Do you want this child?"

The sentence scrawls across Jared's mind as if he was watching a foreign movie, reading subtitles. He hears her speak, watches her mouth shape the words. They appear one by one, popping up on his mental screen. "Do . . . you . . . want . . . this . . . child?"

It's an incomprehensible question to Jared. Nowhere in his Catholic past, nowhere in his past in any way defined—genetically, spiritually, psychologically, historically, soulfully—could this question be a question. *I am a Catholic* is the only answer. At least the only one to Char because like him she's Catholic. Abortion was where she disagreed with her Sisters. "There's no 'right to abortion.' It's an act of violence against the child and yourself." He's talked with her about this often, and they were in complete agreement—being nonviolent meant no abortion.

Jared turns and interrogates with detective eyes. His fear of her escalates with every glance, every word, every breath, like water near boiling, slowly up and faster up, then frenzied. *Who is this woman?*

"What?" Jared snaps. It's more of a command to "Stand and deliver!" than an intellectual inquiry. Char hears what only a Catholic girl could hear in this question—the voice of the nuns pounding into her her dutiful role as mother. "It's why God made you a woman, to bring souls to earth." She shoots back just as

forcefully, "I'm not going to let you guilt-trip me. I *am* beyond that. All this Catholic past we share is pure crap."

Jared falters. *Who is this talking?* He reacts, "Wait—wait a minute, Char, I wouldn't count myself a 'true son of the Church.' Sure, I'm a renegade but even this hint of abortion—I mean, *you?*"

"I just don't know if you'll ever be able to understand because *so much* has happened since you left."

"Jesus, it's only been two months. You're pregnant, you went to Europe, what else are you talking about?"

"Goddess yes, you know, both wonderful events, but really incredible things have happened. I mean *incredible changes* among women . . . among the Sisters."

The anger, the fear, the specter of Quinn, hearing "abortion" as if being sentenced once again, he's more agitated and at bay than when on trial. He's not in control and it's overwhelming him. He fights the moment, pretends that it's a bad dream, but it clearly is not. She's there. This woman he loves, this woman he ....

*Escape!* He would if he could but the border to Canada has iron bars around it. Panicky, he wants this visit to end right now, but he's not even in control of that. He can't just get up and leave, the Watcher would hassle him no end. He looks around the room, lets loose a small sigh of relief over the simple fact that they chose a corner today. No one is paying attention to them. The Watcher has to strain to make out what's happening.

As for Char, what Jared just said has stung her with its power of righteousness, something she's admired when it's been directed at other adversaries. She's never been his target and despite her best attempts at control and composure she squirms.

He presses on, "You want to kill this child? Have things changed that much that now you're a minion of violence? Is this the 'transformation' you spoke of, the transformation of Aaren? Are you women now waging war? Is that the change that's taken place? If it is, it would be better if you killed yourself and let the child live!"

Char pales. His words carry that peculiar death sentence that she and all good Catholic girls hear from their earliest years. "If it's a choice between saving the life of the mother or the child, the child comes first." Birthing as death sentence. As a male Jared is judge, jury and executioner. Char's Sisters—most passionately those with Catholic backgrounds—tried hard to prepare her for this. They warned her that Jared would turn on her but she found their suggestion incredulous. "He's not like that. He supports me, supports us in our struggle. He'll understand the greater violence of having a child now while he's in prison." Few Sisters were convinced. Now she's devastated by the reality. She tries to reconnect with him by touching his shoulder but he recoils and spurns her.

Earnestly, she appeals for understanding, "Jared, you know what nursing has meant to me. How much I love being in pediatrics, love kids. I don't have to tell you all that. But is it the *right time* for this child? You're in prison and there are so many things I must do."

"Must do? *Must do!*" He tears at her heart like a vulture on a fresh corpse. "What's that, tell me! C'mon, tell me, what *must* you do that's more precious than having a child?" *Fucking-A!*

Char reaches within to tap the strength she draws from the support and love of her Sisters. With them she's gained insight into how and why women are the true slaves and prisoners within patriarchy and capitalism. "The all male trinity," Aaren says, "think about it. Three dicks and no cunt! Tell me, how can you create anything if you don't have cunt?" Aaren's language is rougher than Char's but her message is *right on!* "How can we accept their ethics of control? Control of our

bodies. Who here has taken a man's name? How many of you have lived as 'Mrs. Man'? We *have got* to be strong when we face these facts, for they are acid truths that burn our hearts but they free our minds."

At first, Char out-right rejected Aaren's "man-hating" refrain. They argued, heatedly. "You must stop thinking about your father as your protector. Didn't he train you to want a man like him? And your brothers, pimps for their guy friends. Trying to set you up with 'a good buddy.' For what? Some dinner and a fuck! We women have got to face it, *Men are our enemy!*"

Then Char realized that Aaren was calling for more than a revolution, as in a full turn of the wheel. She demanded an *involution* and an *exvolution*—the turning inside-out and outside-in of everything. "Sisters are bold! Sisters are strong! Sisters are one!"

*"You're not going to have it, right?"*

*Four other Sisters come in with Aaren. She asks them to grab some pillows and sit on the floor forming a small circle around Char. This is a Warming Circle, a common practice among the Sisters. These are formed when one or more Sisters discern that another Sister needs counsel, even if she hasn't specifically requested it. Char is a bit surprised but then not. It's clear to all the Sisters that she's in turmoil over the pregnancy. Although Aaren has avoided these Circles, she now finds it to her advantage to call one for Char. She takes Char's hands and sits down facing her, each on a large pillow in the center of the group. She states the question as if the answer is clear, "You're not going to have it, right?"*

*"I don't know." Char tries to draw her hands to press upon her womb but Aaren holds them firmly and she can't. It's a conscious ploy. "Look at me, Sister," she says, eyes locking, coldly and fiercely staring. Char is snared.*

*"You need to know. You don't have much time." Char knows this, she doesn't want to go beyond three months, she's read all the literature.*

*"Yes. I know." Softly. Halting. Char begins to flush, suddenly feeling very hot all over. Her hands are still locked in Aaren's. She wants to but can't wipe her forehead.*

*The Sisters begin to chant, slowly, rhythmically, becoming a chorus strongly but not loudly singing, "You are free! You are free!"*

*"Do you hear your Sisters?"*

*Char nods.*

*"You are free. Do you believe that?"*

*Char nods.*

*"Say it. Say it out loud."*

*Char swallows, tries to find her voice, she is uncomfortable and feels trapped because she knows what Aaren wants, understands what the phrase fully implies. She gets out a high pitched, "I am free," at which the Sisters hasten the beat and up their volume, start swaying and Aaren starts to slightly sway with Char pushing her gently back and forth. They do not sing, they are fully tuned into one another. Aaren lets the Sisters' chant work its hypnotic magic—she's in total control.*

*Aaren is reaching out through Char to strangle Jared. Her hatred of him is so fierce that she's willing to twist Char's soul till it shatters.*

*Still hand locked, "Tell us what it means to be free."*

*Char know the Sisters' code. "To be free" means free of men, everything male, all patriarchal morality. She's been in conversations-on-end about abortion. She's heard, "Having a child is a means of your oppression unless you choose the time and place. Unless you make it a truly revolutionary act, one that benefits all the Sisters." Aaren especially pressed all the Sisters to make having a child a communal decision, an act of solidarity, and in this way deal a death blow to male dominance.*

*"I know you, Sister," Aaren says firmly, authoritatively. "I can hear you inner voices. How that Catholic God threatens you with damnation. Curses you, threatens to make you sterile if you disobey. I can feel His hatred, taste his vileness. Sister!" she shouts, making everyone snap-to and pay attention, "Sister! Create yourself. Right now, right here, within the loving embrace of your communal lovers. We do not want you to be pregnant. You have a higher calling. We need you to dedicate yourself to the struggle, commit yourself to getting elected to public office. That is where you will serve us best. Where you will find your true calling." Sweetly, "Sister, love us. Love us as you stand and set yourself free."*

*The thousand arguments pro and con about abortion fly through Char's mind.*

*"It's just cells. It's not a person until it can live outside the body."*

*"You're young. You're fertile. You can do this when you want, not have to accept it as a burden."*

*"It's male morality, clear and simple. Male doctors, male priests and male judgments! They'll call you a whore and a slut just because you want to be free!"*

*Her head is bursting. Her heart is heavy. Then she is startled. It all becomes amazingly clear. She is hearing the Sisters' common voice. Feeling their deep love. She is being transformed, radically changed. She is free!*

*For the first time since she knew "the child—our child" was within her, she feels nothing. Keenly senses that her womb is already empty. Fantasy. Stupid romantic me! I've been tricking myself. Just wanting to hold onto Jared. She can feel the Sisters' love, their strength, their hearts linking with hers. She slips out from "Char, a good Catholic girl" as if shedding her skin and slips into the embrace of her Sisters, becomes one with their heart and body. She trusts them. She loves them. She and Aaren stand. Char raises her and Aaren's arms high, shouts, exalting, "I am free!"*

*Aaren's frees Char's hands but stays linked with her eyes, tethered to her heart. "He is how you, Sister, must speak to him. 'I must work for the benefit of my*

Sisters. I *must* dedicate my life each day, every day, to freeing my Sisters from their shackles. You, Jared, of all people should understand! This is how you lived your commitment to nonviolence, to stopping the war.”

Aaren pauses to let the words sink in, then continues. “Be strong. Say this with steel in your voice. ‘It’s become very clear to me that *if* I become a mother I will not be able to commit my whole time to the struggle.’ Then let him know that you are in control of your own future, say, ‘I’ve been asked by the Sisters to consider running for State office out of South Minneapolis.’”

Upon hearing this, Jared is as overcome by her words and all that’s happening as he was on his first Inside day in Seg. Instinctively, he reaches for the *hibakusha*. He needs some grounding. But it’s not under his shirt. *Why today, why now?*

Yet something does rise up from near his heart, a foreboding presence and a desire. He wants to break something, smash something to smithereens. *Damn!* Powerless, again: trapped, caged. His only outlet is a daydream skirmish—*he’s cutting off heads, witch blood stains his broadsword.*

“You would kill the child so you could run for political office?” Jared can barely believe what he hears. The absurdity of this turn in their conversation totally boggles his mind. His murderous fantasy vanishes as all his energy shifts to deal with the oddity of balancing the moral gravity of having an abortion with the seemingly irrelevant statement about running for public office.

Char doesn’t respond, doesn’t take his bait. Something within her commands her to not answer.

Silence. A full minute. When she breaks it, she’s in full self-control.

"I want to be a mother but not right now. You and I did not *intend* to have this child. In that way it *is* unwanted. I want to wait until you and I can want, together."

"You and I?" Jared can barely contain his outrage—it almost makes his head explode. "You and I?" *But I don't know who you are! How could we ever do that?*

*Bitch! Witch! Child killer!*

Despite the utter turmoil of this disastrous visit Char is desperately waiting for Jared to aid her, comfort her. When talking with the Sisters it finally became clear that the course she's taking is not immoral. It happened not within an airy intellectual discussion about right and wrong, rather it came as she grasped that "pregnant" meant her own body. "I'm pregnant." She says time and again in front of the mirror. Touches her womb. But what she can no longer say is, "I'm with child." Not now. Not this early on. The Sisters are right, the fetus is not a child. Maybe it's part of her person, but in that light it's her *personal* decision to make.

She anticipated that Jared could and would understand that. For she knows, as all the Sisters know, that she could have many children later. "How many eggs will you have in your life? What makes this one special?" Surely he'd want to wait too.

Crazy as it is, Char still needs Jared's consent, his affirmation. Even just a nod, an encouraging "You can do it!" Something that helps her make the final break with their shared Catholic past—not a leap into the void, not a jump from the bridge, rather a steady walk away, arm in arm. She needs a sense of emotional continuity. To hear a good Catholic boy like him say, "Char, you're such a swell girl! When I get out, we'll have a dozen kids!"

Jared looks at Char, peers with prophetic sight. He foresees only doom for his son.

Spectrally, he watches as another face of Char gradually appears— hideous, her hag face, ugly, crawling with warts and streaks of puss. Hatchet in her hand. She is the Evil Witch who pushes children into the oven, bakes them with the loaves and feeds them to their fathers. She who steals children and turns them into toads and wild creatures. Dreadfully, Char is Eve, the liar, the agent of the snake, befuddling, betraying, seducing. *Lying, lying, lying! to Adam.*

He weeps for his son. Weeps that he should die so young. Weeps for their ever too brief kisses. *God our Father, have mercy on us!*

He gives her no comfort. His words to this wretched woman are sharp, a rebuke, a condemnation. He barks at her, not caring that others can hear. "Go ahead, abort the child! You're unfit to have him! I don't want *you* to touch *my* child!"

*He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all . . .*

Jared rises like the first swirl of a whirlwind, stands with jaw muscles throbbing, fists clenching and unclenching, righteous, feeling the thunderbolts of Yahweh in his grip, poised to obliterate her on the spot—the sin offering, burnt.

"Hear me clearly, Char, you *cannot*, I mean it—I *command* it!—you cannot have this child. If you do—now listen to me, if you do, *I will ...*" He stumbles, falters, for even in the depth of his wilding rage he can't speak the word he's struggle so hard not to utter, not to act out. He stammers, "I will... I will ..." But he doesn't have to speak for her to hear the word because his heart is on fire with lust, the lust of the predator for the prey: *kill you. I will hunt you down and kill you!*

Char has never known this Jared. Never felt this Jared's savage heat. Doesn't want to know him, feel him. She's scared. Deathly scared. Her eyes lock on him, she's ready to scream, *Help! Help!* She remembers: "He's no different than any other guy. These 'nonviolent' guys are as sexually screwed up as any Marine or fucking rapist. Hear me Sister!" Char is hearing her Sisters. *Run! Run for your life!* She wants to but then doesn't have to, instinctively knows that the Watcher is here

to protect her, her and all women visitors. She's safe. After all, it's just a "visiting" room she can leave, so she does. *Never turn back, Sister!*

Char stands and as she readies herself she collects all his words, coolly places them in a distant recess of her heart, secure there, protecting herself.

She moves close to him, toe to toe, becoming eye to eye not in body but in power. She is rising up as a slave shedding chains. "This is *my* decision, not yours! I came here to consult you, not to have you command me!"

Touching her belly, "This is *my* body! I *am not* your body!"

*The Sisters are correct!*

## 20 - BLACK INTELLIGENCE AND IRON MOCCASIN

One morning, a week before the Jailhouse Playoffs, before he can speak to his aches and pains, Jared reads the typed note:

"Praise Be Black Intelligence!"

"Praise Be Black Soul!"

Handwritten under this typing:

"Praise Be Black Athletes!"

Though it's just two slogans, it's the third that makes it a dispatch. Personal. Hand-delivered. Fearlessly deposited on the sky of the bedsprings he eyes first upon waking every day.

*They know my habits!*

"Watch him!"

It's been noted that he lies on his back, reaches for his eye-glasses, yawns and stretches and then lies there momentarily meditating, exploring the anagoges set forth by the interlacing bed springs.

As Jared moves up to get up he takes off his uglies and inserts his contacts, he eye-rovcs a quick sweep of the area. Can he catch anyone detailing his reactions?

*No.*

*Should I be paranoid?* Slowly he stretches, arms high then touching toes, a few quick knee bends and a gargantuan fart. Mutters, "Fuck it, just some gambler's psych. They want to put me off my game!"

With a snicker at their—*whoever the fuck they are!*—limp attempt to fuck his mind, he crumples the message and sticks it in the back of his storage cubicle. Then he heads towards the warm welcome of a morning shower.

“The Land of Tattoos”: It’s as if a neon sign was flickering, demarcating the entrance to a ride in Disneyland or an esoteric archaeological find. The shower room—where the largest body organ disgorges its phantasmagoria. Undeniably, it is fun to read the skins—like cheating up on the car ahead to decipher a bumper sticker.

For some, theirs is a mark of brash youth. Just one phrase or line revealing either the power symbol of some gang or military group; the nostalgia of *Mother* or a loved one of long ago. Some have tried to erase a name, now married or living with Marge and not Mabel. Fatefully, they wear their affections and the folly of youth forever since erasing a tattoo leaves a welt of banded flesh, looking as if a giant slug slithered under the epidermis and nested. For others, it’s an attempt to speak using their skin as tongue. They bear slogans, attestations, images, visions, hopes, despairs.

Hispanics are the most revelatory, a cross between mythological and superstitious. One sports a full Virgin of Guadalupe covering his whole back, with side marks to his lovers, along with his gang’s symbol of a snake striking with venom-dripping fangs and assorted names down his legs.

Not having a tattoo readily identifies Jared as a CO. Even dopers are likely to have a small one—a chic reminder of a buying visit to South America or of an out-of-body trip on psychedelics. Jared’s virgin flesh says more about him to other cons than he knows.

What Jared misses this morning is that by the time he’s washing his hair, the tattoos have all disappeared. He looks over his left shoulder and realizes that he’s the only white blob in a bowl of black. Normally this would not faze him. He’s worked with Black Panther groups, been involved in numerous civil rights rallies, even attended Black church services as a resource speaker. But after the sunrise note?

*Be cool. Don’t bolt. Finish up. Walk calmly.* So, without a nervous twitch or tick, Jared turns off the water and starts back. It’s a pathway that narrows.

Narrows in that way things go Inside, in almost imperceptible units of physio-psychic measurements. They never touch him. Would not touch him naked and in the open. It's a choreography of slight movements, a turn of the head, a stance . . . and looks: the visual space narrowing to a squeeze.

*Hi, guys! and split. Fuck, that won't work. Shit, it's a long way out.* He wants to saunter, not freeze up. Like juice from a grape, they let him through, drop by drop. But in passing he is tattooed, carrying their warnings on his body. "We are watching!" is imprinted. *They are watching.*

Back at his bunk, Jared is a bit stymied and a lot uncertain. *Should I take this bull by the horns and hunt out a leader? Is it just a B-ball thing? Or should I talk with Harley about this? Scope out its political play, if any? Who'd be on my case anyway? Fucking-A, must be the bookies trying to rig the odds? Maybe, I should just say nothing?*

He chooses Harley. *This is prison, ain't it?*

Harley shares a work area with Jared. He's the clerk to the Facilities Manager and Jared's assigned to the Supervisor of Manufacturing. Millston employs a small percentage of inmates in the production of gloves and other clothing items used by the military and select Federal agencies. Most COs end up being clerks since they have, as a group, a college education, can write a decent letter, and some like Jared can even type.

Harley's already sitting down to his first coffee break when Jared walks in. With four other guys—just regular cons, no COs or dopers—he's being curiously entertained by a loud, boasting story of dering-do and "Slap that bitch!"

"Man, I finds my parole offiser humping my squeeze, I mean, bot' buck nekkit 'n gittin' it on in my digs. Man, that's bold if ev'r I don't says so's . . ."

For effect, he enacts the smart whip of his gun right up into the victim's nostrils.

“. . . so's I takes this guy's badge 'n I pins 'is dick to 'is trowsars, Jeeesus of Christ, don'ts he yells 'n hollars! Tells me he's gonna bust me far the forever. 'N my bitch she's gits so far-fucking rowtated by my punchin' this lettle puke away, she curls 'round ma leg 'n starts moanin' far me, so's . . .”

He pauses for a swipe of the black juice because he knows he's on a roll.  
*Inspired!*

“So's I grabs 'er by tha chin—like thiz,” he motions, showing his gentle cuddling of her face with his free hand, “'n I kneels her down, gettin' 'er hot for ma cock 'n then, BAAAP! I knocks 'er out with ma knee!”

He slaps his left knee, the instrument of deliverance, and all around him slap at their chairs and bang their cups in kudos. The moral of the story is quickly run out: “That's shows thad bitch 'n enny bitch taw fuck wid me! I's *the Man!*”

“Man,” another chimes in, “I once wasted a bitch once for ev'n thinkin' 'bout doin' that!” More laughter, all around.

It escalates, “Yuh, man, lemme tell ya, et's beter ef ya cuts 'em up. Den dey can't do et wid nobody, nevar agin. Deys 'ave ta *beg* fer et!”

*What else but blood and cunt?* Jared's heard more than enough of “Slap that bitch!” since he arrived.

“Thens I walks out, bud I gits a bright one up 'ere,” he taps his left temple. “Bad Dude, giv 'er whats she wants. Be's Meester Nice Guy! So's I goes back in, she bein' as conked as a mutherfuckin' rock, an' I flips her butt-beauty ups tha bed, rips,” and he demonstrates his strength by tearing her imaginary panties as he would a simple piece of paper, “rips 'er panties 'n fucks 'er ass so's hard thad I cums five times. Man, I swear it—by ma muther's kiss—mebbe six times!”

The four laugh and slap and howl and curse. Cups rattle and eyes bulge in awe and amazement. They have thoroughly enjoyed the story. *Of the small pleasures of life, one's cruelties, when drawn on a broad canvas, seem to evoke a bonding between so many.* Such is Jared's insight. *What does Harley think of all this?* He wasn't laughing, either. The other cons don't give a damn, even if asked. It means nothing to them that Harley gets up and walks out. Jared follows him to his work area, sits down beside his desk.

"Look," Harley, after reading the note, says with honesty and without hostility, "you just made a bad entrance. It wasn't anything you did. It was just those little things you got balled up with."

He hands the note back to Jared. "You're not a snitch. You couldn't have known about what we've been trying to do here with the Blacks. Face it, that game, Moses and everything, you just walked into a pile of shit." Both laugh, a small chuckle.

"Am I in danger?"

"I doubt it. Nothing like that. But there are strong feelings. The Afros are working hard to get some respect from the Administration. So they take everything more than serious. Dig it, your just outshining Moses *once*, even if accidental, puts you on their watch list. But, man, you're good. Moses showed them he knows you're good."

"Shouldn't that help?"

"Naw, not to the politicos. Moses is their card to play but he has no clout. Look," Harley finishes as he pulls out some files, getting back to work, "come to the Afro meeting tonight. Maybe we can nip this thing in the bud."

It all sounds too pat to Jared. "Come to the meeting" and this will be smoothed over? Maybe Harley's stitched in differently than Jared thinks. *Do I have any other recourse?*

Jared goes back to his own desk. When the whistle blows and the workday ends, he opens a drawer, pulls out his sneakers, quickly laces up and heads for the outside court.

"Big Man!" It's become a standard phrase of greeting. "Hey, Big Man! Right on, brother!"

It's a quite late-winter March day replete with layered banks of old snow huddling every wall, with only a few ice-free patches revealing the precious grass long ago given up for dead. He's in search of some quiet time, a private zone where he can be alone and bounce the ball.

Jared hurriedly crosses the Yard to the outer courts. He's bundled up: a scarf and cap, gloves but just the insides, knitted slippers with bare fingertips. All Korean War issue.

As Jared drops into his B-ball rhythm, warming up, he flings off the scarf and the gloves. Before his fourth long-range bomb, he's sweating, even enjoying the way his clothes slosh over his body as he jukes an imaginary opponent. Then, *plunk!* He jerks around as if expecting to be jumped from the shadows. Down at the other basket, *someone* . . . He calls, "Moses?"

But no, it's a thick-chested kid, almost roly-poly but moving about. A shiny head of long black hair flaps as he jumps. *Indian!* Jared's relieved it's not Black Intelligence.

*Plunk!*

"Hey, Chief, want some one-on-one?"

The kid doesn't turn or indicate he's heard anything. He throws up a really long shot from half-court, it bangs in off the boards. *Lucky!* Jared's not impressed. But he's game. So he dribble-walks down the court. "Hey, want to go one-on-one?"

The kid stops in mid-shot and stares at him. He eyes Jared as he does pool hustlers who come to the bars at the edge of the Reservation. He's seen Jared play and is up for some slick deal. But no words come. The kid nods an okay. No handshake. No names exchanged.

The kid's fairly tall, around six flat. Although he's just made a few impressive shots, Jared sizes him up as a "banger," a player who slams his body around and throws up awkward bricks. He fails to sense how the kid is reading him.

From the outset he downplays the kid's challenge, doesn't give him much respect. Plays loose defense. Unguarded, the kid sinks a few long bombs. That's okay because Jared isn't yet into high gear or fully juiced. Besides, he doesn't plan to pour it on the kid. He's feeling merciful! *Shit, he'll be a hero with the Big Chiefs just for taking me on!*

The kid, who he later learns is called Iron Moccasin, starts taking Jared to the well. As Jared expects, when the kid comes into his zone, he effortlessly swats the ball away. The kid hustles and grabs it, still inbound. Stepping back a step, he shifts sideways showing his big rear end to Jared, then dribbles to the top of the key and shoulder-dips towards the basket. Jared's already in the air waiting to swat this one when Iron Moccasin brakes hard, pulls up, lurches backwards and shoots one of the most awkward shots Jared has ever seen. As if in slo-mo replay, he watches the ball rattle the rim and fall in.

"Three points!" the kid whoops; his first words!

"Naw! None of that ABA shit, man!"

Jared chuckles under his breath. *God, what luck!* Then he takes the rebound, dribbles to the foul line and makes his signature move. He takes only one step and

leaps upwards into that part of the stratosphere that the kid will never breathe and lofts in a grand hook shot.

Iron Moccasin hustles to the ball, turns again—this time Jared isn't going to fall for the simple things, he's going to make the kid work. The kid drives madly towards the basket, face twisted in fierceness. Jared takes him body-to-body and stretches up and out full-length and is just about to explode skyward in a swooping embrace of air where he anticipates the kid's shot to be when, like a bug scurrying away as you try to smash it with your shoe, Iron Moccasin is back at three-point range. Ever so softly, again, he releases the roundball with a jerky quirk of arms and hands and it finds its way into Jared's hands, but where he is standing—under the basket. *Ploooosh!*

Jared almost says, *Thank you for your contribution.*

What appeared at first to be just a warm-up turns into a real bout. Iron Moccasin is the king of three pointers. Every time Jared moves a step further out to guard him, Iron Moccasin takes a like step backwards, heaves, and rings another three-pointer home. Some of his shots are real TV-highlight backboard bangers. Others just screech through the nets. Still others make it in by the oddest of bounces, defying gravity, physics, and Jared's belief that angels move the planets! Amazingly, Iron Moccasin is throwing them down at seventy percent.

These two would have never stopped except for the early evening's cold.  
"Hey, we've got to pack it up, kid. It's almost chow time."

The kid slings his last shot, a real David and Goliath-like whip and knocks out three more points! Jared is frustrated but in an amused way. At first he didn't want to beat the kid solely using his height advantage. So he responded to the kid's early challenge by taking only outside shots. Competitor that he is, Jared wanted to down him at his own game. But he couldn't handle the ABA's new three-point range. He lost!

"Damn, I'm good!" Iron Moccasin shouts as he slaps the basketball and proudly strides away from Jared.

"Seventy motherfucking ass-kicking percent . . . That Rez rat really stole my lunch out there!" he confesses to Sean.

After chow and the early night's Count, Jared makes his way to the visiting room. This is where all "approved social and cultural meetings" take place. Tonight it's reserved for the "Afro-American Study Group." Jared gets there just as the meeting is being called to order. He sees Harley and two other COs and joins them. As he sits down he realizes they are off to the side, as if segregated. *A bit ironic!*

Jared doesn't know what the role of the whites is. *Are we here to speak? To listen? To approve? To be whipping boys? What?*

But there's no time to ask these questions. The group has just sung the "Black National Anthem"—James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Jared really likes the lines:

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.

A short, stubby, horn-rimmed, middle-age man moves center-front. Jared notes that the guy's already sweating. He's worked up and begins working the crowd, waving with his handkerchief. *Must be a preacher.*

Folding and holding his neatly squared hankie not far from his lips, he launches into a sermon. "Prison has always served to educate and radicalize blacks. Prison has always served its political function. To snatch 'uppity niggers' from the street. In most times, the outlet for uppity was in crime. Any black who wanted to

get ahead knew the benefits of belonging to the 'other economy.' Of Crime, Incorporated. It was the only way to make big bucks. To make them fast."

Two beats of silence, then, "Scholars puff smoke from their waggish pipes 'bout the *socioeconomics of prison populations*. They snatch government grants by fantasizing about how this outlet can be shut down and its energies—of those they call *street blacks*—redirected to *socially ameliorative ends*.

What they fail to realize, what the Black Power movement is making clear, is that prison in the capitalistic mode is a socially ameliorative end!"

The man is mightily working himself up, mingling the tone of a highly educated man with the gestures of a street-savvy brother. "Academics forward statistics and conclusions with an air of innocence that shudders at its only true conclusion. That prison actually has a *permanent* place in our economy! *They* never say that. They'd lose their jobs!" He laughs. All the blacks laugh.

"Brothers, hear me, they discuss prisons as if they are mistakes. As if they are temporary shelters soon to be abandoned and crushed once the *source of crime* is fully identified and washed away. I ask, Brothers, do you feel clean?" Snickering again, all around.

"As we Black Power advocates—you know, any of us scholars who go against the tide!—as we show what W. E. B. DuBois showed them *way back* in the mid-part of the last century—it's the truth, prisons are never empty. They are ever busting at the seams with the poor, the near employable, the high-energy youth from the oppressed classes. They yell, 'Let's not get Marxist, here! They're not really oppressed, just *under opportunized*.'

Let me tell you brothers, prison has always been black. Hear the truth, the first man in the first real penitentiary—right in Philadelphia of course, refuge of freed slaves—was black." Most lean forward, having never heard the truth of this historical footnote. "And do you know what he got busted for?" They want the

answer. "His name was Johnson and he got five years for stealing a twenty-dollar gold watch! ...Ain't that something!"

He preaches and teaches and exhorts for another half hour. It's a performance that's replete with half a Baptist "Witness Bench" call to "Come to Jesus" conversion fervor and half the radical ravings of a riot instigator. Jared is moved and admires his stamina. When the preaching ends, the room rocks with a raucous, hand-clapping, hooting and metal-chair-banging standing ovation. Everyone's up: black and white.

Jared stands but is still wondering, *Why does Harley want me at this meeting? Where's all this going? Are they going to organize? Are they going to do something? Or just sweat and get hoarse?*

Then a partial answer is delivered as two Black Muslims, identified by their top-buttoned shirts and telltale neatness, jump up and down in sequence vigorously proclaiming, "Praise Black Intelligence! Praise Black Soul and Spirit!"

These words are like spark to gunpowder. From clapping the room begins to sway and soon rocks and thunders with wilder, more heated hoots, hollers, stomps and that high-pitched chatter that is not meant to be listened to so much as felt. It's that quintessential Black Holiness bonding epiphany.

Around the room some thrust Black Power fists upward. Others exchange secret handshakes. There are voiced praises to Allah. Lots of shoulder and hand slapping, a few hugs. Not a single solitary black approaches any of the whites. Jared, Harley and the two other COs just stand there, doing nothing, just being white!

"Black Intelligence." *Was it just a coincidence?* If Jared has any doubts, all the Black Muslims walk all the way across the room just to pass by the four white guys. Chillingly, they stare only at Jared. Harley and the others seem unaware. It's clear to Jared, *It's not just this B-Ball thing!*

As the COs start to leave, Jared approaches Harley. He wants to sit down for a while but instead Harley grabs him and says, "Let's hit the Chapel. We've still time to catch Group."

Group, Jared knows is the "Buddhist Meditation Group." It's the COs own "approved group." The title tells how cleverly they snaked the intentions of the Warden's directive on "Groups." He didn't want the COs meeting alone without standard supervision. He believed that they would go religious, and that would feed into his hands. Both the Catholic and Protestant chaplain hang from his vest pocket. But Buddhist? How could he justify sending in Christian ministers? It was a tricky freedom of religion issue and he knew no Buddhists. He had to settle for assigning a regular hack the task of peeking in now and then. He heard back that they just lounged around, burnt incense and listened to that wild music that has infected America since Woodstock.

Jared's never been invited. Either Harley is making a mistake or this is a sign that he's in.

His first impression tonight is that these "Buddhists" do just lounge around and listen to records. He follows Harley's moves, even attempts to sit in the yogic lotus position, but does so quite clumsily and unsuccessfully. The others are amused. Awkwardly and a bit uncomfortably Jared just lies on his side, propped up by a shaky elbow. From this "Buddhist" position Jared whispers questions about the Blacks. Harley whispers back.

"They need us there to fend off the Warden. He's been making a big deal about 'reverse racism.' If you can believe he uses such a perverse concept."

"That's it? We're just the white icing on the chocolate cake?"

"Something like that."

Jared is irked by Harley's ready acceptance of what he takes to be a sell-out.

"Is all they do just talk?"

"What do you mean *all*?" Harley asks, himself a bit annoyed.

"Fucking-A, man, are they planning anything?"

"Look Jared, the Black leaders have a harder job than we do. Do you realize how brainwashed and beaten down most black inmates are? I mean, man, they're tracked into the prison system right out of the cradle."

"Yeah, yeah, *man*," he bites the word, "I know all that shit. Who do you take me for?" Jared's now boffo pissed. "I could've run down what he was saying tonight but," and Jared sprinkles the phrase with sarcasm, "*Praise Be Black Intelligence!*"

Harley slips out of his lotus and lays out closer to Jared. He's angry, a bit shocked. This reaction Jared knows well. Harley's a draft *resister*, not a raider. As a resister he believes in his "place" in life, that his historic role is to protest, be a dissident. He sees himself as a moral man, not an outlaw, a criminal. This, despite the fact—or in denial—of his being in federal prison!

*I shouldn't be surprised by this*, Harley upbraids himself, feeling some regret for bringing Jared into the Group.

Jared doesn't pause. "I mean—*fuck it!*—do we have to put up with crap like that? *Black Intelligence*. As if there's any difference. Jesus Christ Almighty, that's really a motherfucker!"

"Okay," this is the only way Harley knows how to handle this, "okay, just don't feel obligated to come to any of these groups." Jared knows he means both the Black meetings and here with the Buddhists.

"Right on, man, sure, okay, I read you!"

Superbly jerked and more desirous of ass-kicking these "granola revolutionaries" than ever, Jared slams-dunks Harley with a threatening, challenging tone. "Look Harley, if they want to *do* something, ring me up. Otherwise I'll just pass." *Stupid fag-ass motherfuckers. All of you!*

As Harley rolls away and back up into lotus, Jared goes flat belly on the carpeted sanctuary. He begins to mull over and reevaluate this morning's wake-up message. *Maybe it's more threat than show? Wouldn't Harley have some indication of what's going down? Am I reading the Muslims wrong? Motherfuckers!*

"I saw you out there with Iron Moccasin." Clyde uses the simple statement as a lasso to rescue Jared. He's seen Jared blunder about from the moment he came in.

"Isn't that kid just a damn fine shot?" Jared throws back.

Jared's hooked. Clyde reels him in. For the next five minutes, Jared details and regales Clyde about his chess game with "the kid."

"He went forward then backwards, leaned way, I mean man, way back and launched this one, I mean, Fucking-A he heaved it. I've never seen anyone so awkward with the ball and by damn it bangs in. And not just once, but over and over again. Where the hell did he learn to shoot like that? I didn't know that roundball was so big on the Rez."

"It's not."

"Man, the kid really picked it up somewhere."

"Of course, in here."

"Really?"

"Yeah, he's an Inside kid. Been institutionalized ever since he can remember. Abandoned in foster homes, then picked up by Juvie Hall. Man, did you know, all crimes on the Reservation are federal crimes? Iron Moccasin's done a lot of time here at Millston. It's more like his true home. He's the type the socios call *State raised*. B-ball's been his babysitter for a long, long time."

Their conversation dies down after that. *For the better*, Clyde concludes. Jared fades into the music and the freelance meditation. But “the kid” is tramping across his mind, *The Fucking-A cruelty of it all!*

Jared’s never really spent time talking with an Indian. This is so despite his activism and the fact that Minneapolis is one of the largest urban Reservations in the States. But now, “the kid.”

Prison and “the kid” validated what the black preacher was getting at. “Look at our Indian brothers. Their Reservations are minimum security prisons. Millston’s their graduate school.”

Playing “the kid” was one of those chance meetings that marks a major turning point in Jared’s life. “The kid” never speaks to him again, they never play again, he never learns another dot or dash of biographical detail. Yet it is “the kid” who’s the kick that sends him reeling downward into unknown spaces, real and spectral.

It’s simply that Jared doesn’t want “the kid” to exist. He can’t take finding another Vietnamese gook wandering in his world. Blacks, Hispanics, gays, women, Asian-Americans are now linked with “Native Americans.” Jared’s gives up! “I can’t help you, *kid.*”

Back on his cot, just after lights out, just before he dozes off, the cosmos sings to him.

The night is lonely; there is nothing to *do*.

The days are lonely; there is nothing to *do*.

You are lonely; what is it you must *do*?

“Escape!” *Escape.*

## 21 - MAIL CALL RIOT

When Free World folks hear about it, when the reporters at the *Minneapolis Tribune* get the word, all are sure that Jared's in the thick of it. "Boy, didn't take him long to get something going!" How wrong, for he's only a distant observer. Actually, Jared isn't doing much of anything. Least of all, organizing a protest.

He's hoping *not* to get mail. His family's been regularly sending letters that say, "Thinking about you. How are you? We are fine? Did you hear about . . . ?" Letters that are boringly the same. He's come to Mail Call because he has to accept anything sent to him. Legally, when the hacks open a letter, it's considered "received." There's no way to stamp it, "Return to Sender."

Today, he's relieved when no mail of any kind arrives. He doesn't want anything. Not from family, friends, lovers, ex-lovers, bitches, queers, Marxists, Maoists, Catholics, fags, congressmen, assholes or saints! Especially Char.

It begins after Mail Call.

"Frankel. Phillips. Anderson . . ."

As soldiers in battle, men at sea, researchers isolated in the nether reaches of the Antarctic know, "Dear John" has slaughtered legions.

The guy who goes bonkers is black. At first it's his high-pitched tone, not the words that signals the others. Soon he's ranting and raving about "dat bitch" and "my fuckin' ass brudder" and "slicin' 'n dicin' 'em." Several of his buddies try to joke and calm him down but he doesn't. Then, the mistake.

"Hey, nigger, shut da fuck up!"

It's just some jerk-off white guy who feels secure with the guards in the room. But this *Dear John* is one mad-ass black brother with a temper more explosive than gunpowder.

Before anyone can say anything, the black inmate throws a chair at the white inmate knocking him to the floor. Then the Mail Call hack goes down, gets waylaid from behind. He's unarmed; someone filches his keys. Jared watches this begin and quickly gets out of the way, heads back to his bunk. Past him sprint highly excited cons: black, white, brown, red, a spot of yellow. *Fuck, even Clyde's hot for this!* But not Jared. He's already too far down his own lonely road to be drawn back by this. He chooses to ignore it all from his bunkmate's upper spot—safely, from inside the dorm.

How quickly the melee explodes from one dorm into the Yard and then into other dorms will become a fact that really pisses off the Warden. He had just issued a memo to all staff.

MEMO: WEATHER CHANGES AND INMATE  
OUTBREAKS. Riots normally occur from early spring  
to late August when the residents, having run off  
their winter lethargy, are feeling their oats and  
strutting around. Normally winter has a nerve-dulling,  
soothing, hibernating effect. With the first thaw, be  
alerted, it is advised . . .

True to his prophetic voice, it is the middle of an unusually hot week in late April and the Yard is a rumble.

Like the theft so artfully consummated, the guard's keys are rapidly copied and passed along. *I mean, who was locked up, seminarians? These guys are criminals!* But even faster than the cons, the hacks jump into action. The gun closet is opened and heavy duty hardware passed out. Four tear gas guns explode and warning shots start pinging off the tops of dorm walls.

The small revenges of prison life will be marked off on many inmate ledgers this day. Nail file-size knives, a refashioned screwdriver, a crude set of brass knuckles, and other assorted folk art of the inmate world will find their targets. Slashes and stabs, abrasions and bashes, such is about to go down. Fortunately, since Millston is a medium security pen, murder more than likely won't be on the agenda.

"Stop! Stop!" screams and booms and flies into the dorm from the Yard. It's the sound of a mob, of a hundred voices. Jared gets off his bunk and goes over to look.

With a precision belying their inability to practice the drill, two groups of inmates, one ten blacks long, the other ten whites long, form a moving barricade. They sweep across the Yard seeking out, isolating and directing other inmates to safe areas.

The leader has a bullhorn, *stolen*. "STOP! STOP!" rises as if this simple word chanted over and over will have a calming effect.

The guards hold back, watching, waiting. Angry, bewildered and confused inmates attack them. They are kicked and punched, screamed at, cursed roundly. But they are unstoppable and effective. To Jared's amazement they conjure some magic. Guys start to back off, move away, seek out the safety of their groups. The pacifying action of these inmates, matched with the growing awareness of the presence of fully armed guards, arrests the swell before it savagely crests.

"Why did they kill him?"

This is the prosecutorial question Jared presses against the dorm's pane. "Why? Why?"

Jared watches the bullet jerk him. Observes the body recoil as if to deny the bullet its ferocity, then collapse. He's remotely observing from within the dorm and

fantasizes that if he could just reach up and turn the dial that the picture would dissolve into electronic Never-Never Land. But it doesn't.

"Why?" is the question asked during the press conference.

Warden: "It was an accident. A ricochet." It's a feeble answer; cowardly. Most know it as such.

"But Harley's dead, that's a fact."

The CO Group is devastated. Not one of them has ever been in a protest that ended with a murder. The Blacks don't say it but they're absolutely shocked that it was not one of them. Some just believe that it was a mistake.

"That white boy must've shanked when he should have shimmied."

"White folk ain't got no rhythm!"

Still, the fact that they killed one of their own when it was as easy to kill one of them mystifies many blacks. For the COs, it says clearly all that they refused to hear was what Kent State said, that even white boys—*Bad, bad white boys!*—should be back-alley scared. *Slap that bitch!* means *us!*

As Harley falls, Jared bolts from the dorm but his steps peter out before he can work his way through the crowd thickening around the body. *Who am I? What do they care what I think?* His questions slow him down. He slinks back, away from the scene. But there's something greater, deeper that wonders, *Why wasn't I with them?*

*Hey, Jared, let us in!* Dikbar and Bruiser are just outside the fence, calling.

With Harley's murder, Jared has no ally inside the Group. *I'm off the train.* He feels alone, abandoned. Sean is here. Matt too if he needs them. But somehow,

*somehow goddamn it, I'm not on the train. These other guys are in prison but I'm in here.*

*Here: a place the bullet takes him. Jared knows that the bullet was for him. Black Intelligence! He knows that he's as dead as Harley is alive.*

From this day forward there's no need for sleep, though he does sleep. There's no need to wake up but he gets up every day. He's scared out of his mind, body and soul.

It's at this time that he swears to always wear the *hibakusha*. It—*did Uncle Sam know this?*—is his only safe grounding. Fitting to this strange time, he invokes its abysmal power. And so they come to him, these *hibakusha*. They sit at his bed's edge, assist him when dressing, hold his garments as if they were the priest's alb. They turn on the shower faucets with the reverence he displayed as he poured water over the priest's hand. *Lavabo me!*

*They . . .* they are now his new companions. Whose whispers about the suffering of the world, the cruelty of the world, the unexpected horrors that flash in an instance override the sounds that come from the inmates who walk about in the Yard. These *hibakusha* occupy stage front and center in his waking and his sleeping.

*Did Harley die so that I could live?* Harley is whisked away. *Was it a body bag?* Zipped and swished. His death spot sprinkled with disinfectant. Another con is assigned to slip into his used air and outdated dreams, for Harley is no more. Others have disappeared as rapidly from Millston. Some COs were beckoned from the chow line or a workplace and in a flash transferred to some other Joint. They were gone, but at least Jared knew they could be still found, if desired. But not Harley.

"Harley now knows the answers? Or has all the new questions?" is how Jared sums it up for Sean.

"What the fuck does that mean, J?" Sean walks away from Jared. Strands him, pissed off because he can tell that Jared has crossed some line. Sean has no clue about the *hibakusha*. "What's with fucking Jared?" others ask. All Sean can say to Group is, "Got me, man, he's out of line, off track. I guess he just needs some time to himself."

At the start, Sean was sure that Jared's past years in the monastery were going to make prison easier for him. Now he realizes that he's never fully grasped what those monastery years might have been like for his best buddy.

While all of this is going on in the invisible world of inmates, those who control at the macro level are pushing their levers. The Warden has finally convinced "up the line" that he must shuffle his "deck of weirdoes." He sees Harley's death as someone's act of revenge. More than likely it was a jealous lover, a bad dope deal or some other perversion. He knows that his guards are not all choirboys but he's confident that he would have known had it been something else .

*Did Harley die so that I could live?*

## 22 - BETTY AND FILBERT

It was a simple matter. All the fellow did was walk over, tell me he likes my cock and ask me to visit his bunk after Lights Out. *How many times have I asked myself the question?* Questioning the question. Asking whether my time will come. Whether it's just my fears or my personal distaste? Is it something out of the long forgotten past of my cerebral cells? Is it a cultural inhibition? Something carried around in my mental chest, my emotive Pandora's Box? *What indeed is it? What accounts for it?*

All I remember is my spurting hostility. Except for the guy's cool manner I expected to see my fist in his teeth. There he was in the stall. Penis hanging, ivory white thighs relaxed and enticing . . . *Aw, shit, I'd often felt strange inklings when in jock rooms. How many times did I feel the heat—the bitch's heat—of a basketball locker room after a game?*

After you've spent the evening hustling and working and straining with other bodies to achieve a goal, how many times then do you feel the lure of their exhausted thighs? Flit on images of embracing them? Or even hold their pride in your hand, stroking it?

Back then it all seemed so impossible. No—strangely, it seemed even more possible. After all, you had disciplined yourself to be One Body. To function as one hand, one eye, one reflex for so many months that the victory rightly drew forth the embraces of triumph. How we all kibitzed about screwing some of the cheerleaders or some other lucky filly. *Fucking-A*, how many of us knew the stalking terror of desire for each other? Sure, it was more possible back then. But here?

Okay, sure prison makes you horny. I mean, there are no females around. But it also lacks the lust of teamship. Isn't that obvious? I mean, man, in prison each con pulls his own time, no matter what he thinks. When you get up each day, you desire to be free. Certainly you don't desire that others be free first. *Dig it!* You might say that or hear someone say it but everyone knows that's a crock of shit. In prison it's clear and simple—Each guy wants out first.

There's no shame attached to that. After all, when they hang you by the balls you certainly can't free anyone else till you're free yourself. *Damn right!* I certainly want to get out. I'm glad when others get out, but I always want myself to be next in line.

*Hear me!* Doing time all alone leaves me ice cold, sexually. I mean, when I beat off at night it's an event full of personal longings. Longings to be back with the women I knew. Masturbation doesn't lend itself to teamwork. Although we do play a lot of basketball in prison. Yeah, man, but it's a different thing. *Listen up!* When this dude walks up to me and tells me in no uncertain terms that he wants to cop my dick, "I'll give you better head than any broad," *Fucking-A!* somehow it all repulses me. "Man," I say, "I don't have any time for that shit. Get your ass outta here." The dude, named Clovis, called Betty, walks away nonplussed. He just saunters out of the shower stall as if I hadn't spoken to him at all. As if I hadn't turned him down cold. As if he believes I've said no but meant yes!

I finish showering and go back to my cube. On my pillow I find a dandelion. *Christ!* Does that get a rise out of me. That hustling motherfucker. I certainly want to kick his ass. Who the hell does he think he's playing around with? Angered, I check the activity in the dorm and find Clovis to be nowhere. So I dress and get ready for supper.

Jared walks into the dinner line. "Eh, Strauss, how's thing's going, ya little muddafucker?"

"Not bad, man. Say, I've got this book on Minoan art that isn't due back for another two weeks. Do you want it?"

"Sure, man, cool, just drop it on my bunk."

Slowly inching through the chow line, Jared's mind starts to wander. It jumps aimlessly from trivia to trivia. *Did I get my letter to Char off last night? How many clean shorts do I have left?* On to things like whether he should get his hair cut or

moustache trimmed or what kind of stupid work he has left at his clerk's job. Near the third circling of trivia mountain, Matt steps up right behind.

"Evening," he says, "I've been trying to find you all day. Where've you been?"

"Me? Christ, I've been around in the open. At my job, reading. On the Circle. Where were you looking?"

"Doesn't matter. Just want to talk about this new guy, Filbert."

"Filbert?"

"Just a kid who's come in on a six. Out of Larson's court."

"Six months. Another one of those, hmm? Run it down, what's the beef?"

Matt moves in step with Jared, talking all the way through beef and spaghetti into veggie delights and en route to their table.

"This kid Filbert's really flipped out on Jesus. Since he's gotten in, he's been rapping about how he's going to die in prison. How it is that Jesus died in the clutches of the political powers like Pilate, and how he knows, really knows, he's meant to die in here. Gee-zus, what a guy! He got a guard really rattled since he ran this number down on him. How he's prepared to die. The guard didn't know how to take him. Whether he's psycho or something. I hear they're going to put him in Seg."

Matt pauses. "You should talk to him."

"Aw, fucking shit, you know I'm trying to get away from all that Jesus crap. The kid's probably a Jesus freak. All mind-boggled with half-assed quotations from the Bible. I doubt if I could get through to someone like that."

Both of them remain quiet as they inhale their skimpy meal. Finished and looking far away Jared probes, "Is it Jesus or something else?"

“Glad you asked. I can tell—I knew you’d go see him—man, I think he’s afraid of being raped.”

Jared curses himself inwardly, picks up his plate, taps Matt on the top of his head and leaves.

Matt knew that Jared couldn’t *not* see the kid.

Back in the dorm Jared readies his mind for visiting Filbert.

*Christ, oh sweet Christ, you motherfucker, why’d’ya allow yourself to get so fucked up in people’s minds? Isn’t it bad enough a few of us go out and hang our asses like you want us to? Why the fuck don’t you keep yourself away from the Devil’s magic?*

*What type of kid am I going to find? Someone who believes he has a personal relationship with you? Someone who feels he has met you—met you in some freaked out abyss of his shallow mind?*

Jared thrusts a fist skyward, then gives Jesus *the Finger*. “You crummy bastard, I wish you were a person. I wish you did actually exist in the flesh, right now. Fucking-A, dig it! I’d punch you in the mouth!”

Jared’s pissed. *How often has it happened this way? That I have to confront my own limits with a rush of mad words? When will I have peace?*

Since coming to prison Jared’s put himself to the final test. He spent his first months as if in graduate research. He read the Bible thoroughly, plowed through the standard theological texts, devoured Gilkey’s *Naming the Whirlwind*, spent tedious hours in the nooks and crannies of process philosophy and language analysis. After three months, after being driven to a state of haggardness and exhaustion, he concluded that he had to trash his theological armor.

All his life he's jostled encased in it. Flung its daggers of doctrinal and dogmatic insight. Even soulfully wounded his opponents. But what was it now, in here, but the language of mad monks? Those soulfully starved aesthetes. Hollowed-eyed flagellants flailing at the warmth from their loins? *Christ, what a bout that was.*

Often Jared likens himself to Job. Job wrestling with God. Job afflicted with sores and diseases, with all types of calamities befouling and befalling him. Job, the steadfast believer in his own powers of understanding. "Curse God and die!" How often those taunts of Job's wife seep from his pillow! *Curse God and die! Why don't you curse God?*

"I don't curse Him," he answers himself, "because He isn't there! As simple as that. The great Jehovah isn't there. When I utter my curse, it's just a breath on my own face."

Now he has to go and face a kid who's using God for all the camouflage He offers.

A few hours later, like a badly bruised survivor of a car wreck, Jared returns to his bunk. Having seen the Fear, now he knows that *he* has it, not Filbert. Once again the negative force transferred itself from a lesser body to his own. Once again his night will be the battle wherein the eagle claws his liver.

*The dandelion mounts itself upward, reaching with its golden feathers towards the endless shine of the sun. Its magnificence sheds a glistening shroud of gold. Towards Betty, Jared moves. Towards Betty, the ever-faithful. Aside the emerald stem she stands, right hand on its round firmness, she pauses and smiles at him. Not smiles—no, she radiates her intense pleasure. Jared is impassioned at her sight. Never has he seen a body so beautiful. Naked with but her hair combed forward touching her eyebrows, she is a cameo of the exquisite.*

*Closer he moves, but the distance between them doesn't lessen perceptibly as he walks. Energetically, he moves his feet, going from a walk to a stretching stride. But he still doesn't gain ground. A terrible shame rifles through Jared's body. A bolt of unworthiness smites him. Eyeing her still standing there, still radiant, still exquisite, he bends forward and thrusts his body into a run, moving himself faster and faster, straining as his arms fling themselves backwards and then forward. No matter how he strains, no matter how much he wills it, his pace seems not to move him any farther. A shrill anxiety overcomes him. He stumbles to the ground, face on the dew-wet grass, and a drilling pain strikes his nape. Rising to his knees he cups his mouth and yells, "Betty! Betty!"*

*Betty remains there, exquisite cameo.*

*Jared racks his lungs. "Betty! Betty! Don't leave me! Betty, come to me! Betty, oh, Betty!" He bursts into a bellowing sob, "Betty, I love you."*

*Betty smiles from afar. Painfully, it seems a smile he can almost reach out and caress. Then—gasp!—she turns her back.*

*Jared is forlorn. His begins to slide backward, backward, downward to somewhere he doesn't know.*

Kicking the covers off Jared lurches from the bed. "Christ!" he mutters lowly. "Fucking shit! What's going on in my head?!" Sitting at the bed's edge he fishes among images of light and darkness, casting with an almost panicked hand, happy to snare something, anything, even bottom grass, something to tug himself back up to surface reality.

As he emerges into a fuller wakefulness, he feels the dampness of his body, a total spray of sweat spotting face, hand, arms, tingling his soles, and so reaches for a towel. Then, as if the Novice Master has just jingled his bell intoning, "*Benedicamus Domino*"—response, "*Deo gratia*"—Jared stands up and with a faithful and practiced hand remakes the bed, hospital corners and all. It's his way of

working to banish the dream. Completed, he slips on his shorts and walks out to the TV room.

Luckily, the TV room is only partly filled with late-night movie watchers. Jared looks around for someone to pass a bit of time with. Sitting in the back at a table writing a letter is Matt. Jared sits down across from him. Matt nods and continues writing. With a signature flourish he finishes the letter. Then, as per censor regulations, Matt puts his name and number at the bottom.

"I talked to Filbert tonight."

"Good thing, how'd it go?"

"Man, much like anticipated. The kid's hanging on to some thin threads. He sort of picked up on Jesus when he found out he was drafted. He's quite freaked. Man, he didn't say it that way but I put it together that he was.

Matt puts his letter into an open envelope.

"See, he found this group of socially minded Jesus freaks and began to go to Bible sessions. What he's picked up is the usual amalgam of Christian tidbits wrapped in a mad emphasis on the Second Coming. Filbert, *sweet Jesus!* The kid actually believes Jesus will be coming back in—let's see, I think he said, 1981. Can you believe that? Dig it, one stone crazy motherfucker! Yeah, somewhere 'round there. He has this rap about how the war and corruption in government and all fits into biblical prophecy and that *The End* is near."

Matt doesn't respond. Finishes his task. Addresses the envelope but doesn't seal it, per the censor. He places this one next to two others.

Jared goes on, "The twist Filbert brings is really peculiar. His group believes they'll all die before Jesus comes again. Far out for sure. It gets better! Most believe they'll die at the hands of the government. Filbert believes he was sent to

die, *here*. But the kid's so terrified about everything—about dying, about prison—that all he can do is talk about it and pray."

Matt leans forward, places his right hand on Jared's shoulder. "Do you think he's worried about getting raped?"

"Fucking-A, you bet! Don't know though. It's six of one, half a dozen of another. He's small and fair-haired and all that. All the stereotyped stuff. But he feels whether it's rape or being beat to death—man, he's really zoned! He'll get it one way or another.

But I think he's so weird, no gay in here will touch him. The kid's so tight, I don't think an electric drill could bore up his ass!"

Matt lightly laughs then switches the topic. "Are you going to get a visit this weekend?"

"Can't seem to stop her. Char might come up. At least she's going to if she can hitch a ride with Sean's family."

"Good. Despite what you think, it'll make you less crazy—at least for the weekend!"

Done, Matt releases Jared, rises, snatches his letters and with a nod bids him a good night.

Jared hangs around the TV room until the last network goes off. He listens to the "Star Spangled Banner," even lends a tiring ear to some rabbi's "Thought for the Day." Finally feeling weary enough to try sleep once again, he walks back into the dorm, stopping momentarily to hit the head.

Absorbed within himself he moves robotically but within an unguarded instance a slight twist of his head captures a glimpse of Betty!

She's sitting on the can, all involved in a boisterous conversation with a black dude crapping in the stall next to her.

"You're lying, just lying!"

Their laughter unnerves him and his stream runs dry.

"No I'm not. It's true. They all love me!" This brings more laughter and purchases a loving tittering. It's just two dudes banging on the crapper walls as if stoned drunk and not knowing where they are.

"Oh, God do they ever love *me!*"

After the last urinal drop, Jared hurtles back to bed and rapidly binds himself with pillow and covers. To all accounts he looks like a mummy among so many in this jailhouse morgue. He falls into a deep sleep, head resting at the foot of the dandelion.

*Betty!*

### 23 - WAKE-UP: DAVITT'S OFFER

It isn't the flashlights or the cautious noise—both of these he's become accustomed to after Lights Out. Every night, for the first hour right after the switch is flipped off, flashlights peek through the darkness. Soon, whispered calls, muffled solicitations, and secret code names filter through the air. The blankets go up. "Ah, the flag is waving!" Jared mocks. For blankets with "US" emblems are hoisted to form a modest barricade for the bazaar of immodest acts. Although he has never "bought a ticket," he knows how to if he wants. Supply Line is Millston's walking Ticketron outlet. "Ven-ella or Chalk-late?" is all he says. Then, at a time that just seems to happen, guys start queuing for their gay appointments.

Sex has always amused Jared with its musical variations. *Some broads are like banging a grand piano—a humping cacophony. Others screech like suffering violins. My favorite is the saxophone, those lovelies you can run riffs on, from titters to deep base bellowing. Damn, playing a woman like the sax, that's my thing!*

In contrast, here, the "broads" are more like a drum section, lots of thumping, banging and cymbals clashing. Jared really doesn't want to know *how* they do it exactly, but he has witnessed, with more than a bit of uncomfortable fascination, the billowing of sails, the shadowy lines of waiting customers, and heard the squeals of the bedspring section harmonize its screeches, giggles, grunts. As such, he has come to accept the staccato of satisfaction, "Oh, yes . . . Yes! . . . Yes!"

What Jared knows is that the gay thing, like basketball, is something different Inside than Out. *But then maybe not?* His own experience with Insider B-ball makes him question whether his involvement—*addiction?*—with basketball means something more than he's ever considered. *Shit, Fucking-A Freud might have something on me!* As with just about everything, he's even reconsidering the function and meaning of gayness.

During the several months between capture and sentencing, a "Men's Movement" sprouted within the Anti-War Movement. All of a sudden his "Men's Consciousness Raising Group" began focusing more on "sexual politics" than the war. Those who pushed this agenda made a big deal about the continuity between "anti-racism, anti-war, anti-violence," and now "anti-sexism." Distracted by the pressing details of his trial, Jared was mostly an observer and listener. One day, however, he picked up a copy of the Twin Cities' underground press, *Hundred Flowers* and read the lead article by a guy he knows, Brian Coyle. Brian was active in SDS since its beginning, and also a flirt with all the deviations and permutations of leftist romance.

"Unless you suck cock, you can't be a true revolutionary," is the opening line.

*"Whoa!" shouts Jared's Novice Master. "You're not going to step over that line, are you?"*

This thought need hardly be answered because Jared's had more than enough struggles with the looseness Free Love cast upon his desire for Char to even consider this.

"He's got to be kidding!" Then he crushed the paper and trashed it. Although he's always been attracted to "strong women," there's utterly no place in his spirit for same-sex sex. He has a repugnance for the word *homosexuality*.

Here in Millston, seeing the unfettered movement and social visibility allotted to gays, he's taken it as just another quirk in a weird place. But it's definitely making him reconsider gayness.

"Nothing is what it seems!" is one of his key insights into prison life. This forces him to wonder, what exactly goes on behind those flags? Is it just sex? Orgasmic release? Or . . . what?

Even Char's *I am not your body!* What the fuck does that really mean?

Tonight he's off the agenda—the flashlights search for other loves.

“Get up. Now! Shut up. Just dress. Don’t take *anything!*”

These are different whispers of urgent commands. Jared starts to get out of bed. “Don’t move,” snarls a beam of light that blinds his eyes.

Jared passes his left forearm across his eyes, attempting to shield the probe while catching a glimpse of what’s going on.

*Hacks!* It’s clearly the hacks. Just moving guys out. They often do this type of thing in the early morning hours. Jared watches three go. *Jesus! Sean. Sweet Jesus! Filbert* —but he can’t make out the third. *Are they coming for me?* He waits apprehensively. Within minutes, the clearing out is over. Jared is left behind.

Right after they leave, Jared throws off his covers and scouts bed to bed. Others meet him with questions and fears. “Fucking motherfuckers, are they’re throwing those guys in Seg?”

“Man, when it’s this time of night it’s the Midnight Express!”

Meaning that Sean and the rest—*how many?*—are being shipped out. Sent to other federal pens. A whole bunch of COs have been taken! Fright overcomes him, a dark vision, and he rushes to the beds he knows, counts—*Jesus!* curses and prays. On Harley’s still-empty bunk he sits down, tallying the numbers and announces only to himself, “I’m the only fucking CO left!”

*Why?* The question goads him, keeps him awake all night. When the first Count comes, Jared is still perplexed, and absolutely terrified.

At breakfast Jared is stunned to find that he’s the only CO left in all of Millston! He rushed out on his way to chow and searched Matt’s dorm, found his bunk empty. *Jesus*, now more a prayer for intercession than an expletive. *What to do? Play dead?*

He sits down quietly and mechanically consumes his breakfast. No one comes by and sits with him.

During work's coffee chatter he listens to the Inside grapevine. "Hey, blood, they took your white sweetie away!" leads to the knowledge that only whites were transferred. One guy, a loner and a long-timer who works in his area and with whom he has spoken maybe once or twice since he arrived, warns, "You better be careful. Sometimes it's worse to be left behind."

He says no more. What's more to say?

"Thanks," is what Jared doesn't say. He begins to feel freaky, exposed, vulnerable.

All day long *escape!* is the only topic on his internal TV talk show. *Escape*. It's the only thing on his mind, in his heart, present to his soul. It's as if he won't be able to breathe until he's out. Although *out* doesn't have any specific geographical identity—it's just out, somewhere, anywhere.

*But how?*

Jared's mind races around the prison's perimeter. He has jogged the Yard track and knows every spot in the chain-link fence: a ten-foot-high, barbed-wire barricade topped with razor threads. "The best, Warden, just the best! They'll be sliced to the bone before blood even begins to flow!"

*It could be cut.*

*But how do I get from the dorm to the Yard's fence at night?*

He has never really thought about it. Without a doubt, dreams of escape are just that, dreams. More of those James Cagney or Humphrey Bogart type affairs where everything just seems to fall together. A crooked hack, solid Inside connections . . . but he doesn't have any of those. His only hope: Supply Line.

Jared approaches Supply Line with the same hapless naivety that propelled him into draft raids. He hardly pauses to consider the risks. Here, his "Do it!" virtue is truly a vice. He's heard that there have been breakouts but few where the cons weren't back within the month. *At least there is a way. I've just got to find it.* He's quite confident that he won't be as foolish as the regular cons, once he's on the Outside.

What Jared doesn't know, has never had a reason to ask is, "Who backs Supply Line?" Is he screwed in with some high-ranking hack? Or is he a third-party distributor for an inside "Mr. Big" convict?

"Look," Jared just rushes into the issue, "I need things and I need to know what you can get me."

Supply Line checks him out with his mental "short-timer" meter but he isn't short "Sey, y'er nut do outta 'ere fer five lung ones?"

"Fuck it, yeah man, I know, but look, they're going to get me. I mean it, man, I can feel it. They left me here to barbecue and be cut up for the Thanksgiving feast!"

Jared's urgency and recklessness are not uncommon convict emotions. It's his sincerity, his clarity of conviction that causes Supply Line to hesitate. It's a hesitation during which he sizes Jared up. *A fool? Er jest crezzy?*

Supply Line knows that the Black Muslims hate this guy but that they won't risk harming him. That would just boomerang. No, the word was out to "isolate him." He's a bit baffled. *Who's spookin' um, dis terrable? Mist be da time! Kant 'andle da time!*

Jared's getting more agitated as he waits. Supply Line judges him to be both a fool and crazy. *Bit biznes es biznes!*

Supply Line assures him that he can provide the fence cutters, perfect copies of the necessary keys, a length of strong rope, a flashlight—everything on his list. “Cept da drivar.”

Supply Line’s aging into senior citizen status while Inside for the past twenty years has dried up some of his Outside sources. But he knows who could arrange it. “Meestar Davit. Ha’ll do et fer yar.”

“Davitt! Shit, man, I don’t want to deal with him. Can’t you just do it for me?”

Davitt is a middle-level Mafioso guy from back East. Humorously, at least a bit of dark humor, Jared laughs when he finds out that *Davitt’s from my hometown—Bayonne! Jesus, I might have served this guy Communion. He’s freaking Irish and probably went to St. Vinnies!*

Davitt is doing time for an assortment of other bigwigs for whom he’s taken a fall. Given that status, he has unlimited Outside contacts. His time in prison is, in his own word, “recreational.” As anticipated, he’s set himself up as a jailhouse kingpin. Like the gays, Davitt gets special treatment from the guards. To be sure he’s one mean, nasty son of a bitch, this Jared knows. His skin crawls thinking about having to bargain with this guy.

*Bit ya gotta do wat’s ya gotta do!* Jared keeps repeating to himself, mimicking Supply Line, boosting his sense of rightness, masking his sense of desperation as he prepares for an audience with “King Davitt.”

“You really *are* a crazy motherfucker!” Davitt says more than once, almost giggling, but stomping it out by chomping on a lewd, obese cigar. *Maduro Maduro, 52 Ring, Private Stock, 12 inches!* Jared flashes on his dad’s fetish: mail-order cigars from Wally Frank.

The cigar that Davitt waves round and round as he talks glints the air along with spars from his chubby diamonded fingers. *He obviously watched more Edward G. Robinson movies than I did!* A fleeting moment catches them laughing at each other's Bayonne jokes. Jared's certain, *this asshole is from Saint Vincent's!*

"How much did Supply Line get?"

"I gave him one and a note for four."

*Holy Mother, kid, you must be desperate,* Davitt silently concludes, *that ole nigger usually gets only two spots.*

Through this bantering exchange, Jared unwittingly reveals his vulnerability. All the respect he tries to build through his appearance, use of educated language, calmness of tone—all that practiced charm which he believes *must* work on Davitt—goes straight down the tubes. Davitt's grossest street instincts begin to surface.

Davitt comes from Jared's hometown but flunked out of Bayonne High. He secured a good paying job being a mug for his cousin, "Wild Irish Matty," who ran whores and loan-sharked in Jersey City.

Davitt's early specialty was beating up lazy prostitutes, dope fiends and loan shark welshers. His rapid rise began when he raised kiddie porn from a perversion to an investment with returns greater than any from Wall Street. *"ROI! The bottom line! Cash is king! It ain't criminal to make money, now is it, sonny?"*

Fatefully, Davitt lacked the brainpower to reach the top. Even within the Mob, the Peter Principle works. As expected, when he took this fall for the bosses, he was rewarded with a higher rank than he would ever have achieved on his own. Inside, he outranked other mobsters and within his first few weeks he had a built a little empire.

"You're out of your fucking head, man!" Jared responds to Davitt's offer. This would normally have been a strong rebuke, revealing a respectable macho strut behind his polished appearance. It blares out, "Hey, no matter what, I'm *not* doing

that! I'm a man!" But in this situation it only underscores his desperateness. And the passion behind it—a mingling of fear and self-respect, of innocence—whets Davitt's appetite. He's beginning to enjoy the spectacle. He, the high judge in a place where he's both judge and jury, both sheriff and executioner. He can see Jared bending over. Relishes his cowering in homage to his overwhelming power. Inside, with no exaggeration, Davitt wields power over life and death. Ironically, it's a power that Jared unwittingly gave him the moment Davitt realized how desperate Jared was to escape. Just his coming to him required that he yield, submit, bend down for Davitt's boot upon his neck. Davitt knows this. Jared doesn't.

"No way, man," Jared repeats, fooling himself that such repetition will convince Davitt. "I'm not into *that!*"

Davitt is pleased, knowing that it's just a matter of time. "Think it over. If you find a better deal, take it." With that, he winks at Jared. A wink that telegraphs, "I know you know the game—strut and make yourself feel good—I'll be here!

"Fucking cock-sucking son-of-a-bitch, motherfucking ass-banging F-A-G!" is what Jared wants to shout, but he just bears the lash of the wink and slinks away.

Back at his bunk, Jared checks his hidden supplies. *Good!* No one has come. Sometimes the hacks just mess around with a guy's things for the hell of it.

"Do you enjoy your work?" Jared once asked a newly hired Correctional Officer, a sallow ninety-pound weakling who probably couldn't handle farming. "I mean, man, do you enjoy looking up assholes and watching fifty guys strip buck naked after each visit? Do you enjoy holding the keys?" How Jared drilled the punk! "Do you talk about your work with your girl?"

He asked this to a cat's-whiskered country bumpkin who, in due time, will become a brick no con can break. "It's just a job," is all he says. Only the gods of cruelty know that this is the secret code he shares with his kin at Treblinka.

Fairly soon, Jared has to make a decision.

*Am I really a deviant?* Spoken, thought, but not asked to anyone else. The acceptable academic word was a thin veil over the boiling cauldron called "Jared's soul." Having been raised Catholic, homosexuality has always been emblazoned as the "perversion of the perverse."

*Maybe . . . maybe I should read Uncle Sam's letters?* This, yet another desperate thought, a death-row scrambling for scraps of absolution. Jared has consigned Uncle Sam's monthly missives to an unread stash of rubber-banded letters, sealed in the box protected by the *hibakusha*.

Over the years, Jared and Uncle Sam repeatedly clashed when discussing (debating, haranguing, screaming) about the degree of acceptance of sexual perversity in the religious life and thought of the Church. Jared was ever the innocent-abroad who was shocked, jolted, mortified, angered, and ended up erupting into a frenzy of absolute confusion mixed with a heartfelt call for *Revolution!* His "Throw the bastards out!" included the Pope, cardinals and every bishop and priest in the world.

Long before Char and Aaren had stumbled onto the insufficiency of the image, Jared had discerned its *logical* weakness. "Even the Godhead, the Holy Trinity is all and only male! Can't you see? Can't you see how gay this is? How fey?"

Back then, Jared only wanted to tweak the noses of those clerical stuffed shirts. He didn't really intend to call for the rejection of the Male Religion, but he's had to revisit even that interpretation and consider the position of Char, Aaren and the Sisters. Now, as push comes to shove, deep within, he questions whether he would trade places, go back, even don the black hood of the axe man and attack Bruiser? *Burn and kill those faggots!?*

Matt's handling of his jail rape is an issue Jared now fervently wishes they had discussed. "Damn, Matt, help me out!" he utters, a fervent prayer. Jared needs

help, an intercession whether angelic or demonic, to face and answer Davitt's proposal: "I can guarantee safe pickup and passage to Canada. I'll even get you a job. Pay off Supply Line. And have some cash waiting for you." But the deal! *Oh sweet Jesus!* He hears Davitt but he simply can't believe him.

"All's you have to do is satisfy Sally."

It's that simple. And if it had been a chick, *damn, Char would understand. Aaren certainly. Christ, I could make my mother understand . . . but Sally?*

*"Simon of Cyrene, pick up this cross!"*

Jared has never really come to know the sexual terrain occupied by perverts and deviants. What he thinks he knows is but the simplicities given by novels and films. Even the two triple-X's never conveyed what the actors were really like. Now he's being called to not just watch but to *do* it! This is an act he's stone-cold ready to back away from.

Not surprisingly, Jared has a terrible night. There's one dream sequence so fearsome that he awakes gagging. The few spectral survivors who he glimpses are all decked out with frilly dresses. It's a headache vision, erupting with cranium-cracking throbs. For a flash he sees bodies jumbled, skirts flared, "girls" being humped and sucked . . . jerking and squirting—and he's one of them! He trembles and feels sure that *this cements the deal. I am not going to do that. Better to die here in Millston than become a catcher!*

Fatefully, the seed was planted in early caged dreams: "I am not your body!" *I am not your body.* Rejected thoughts—that the body is worthless, just a shell, not of value—register again, claiming recognition. He wonders now if he understands how and why concentration camp inmates just waited to be cremated. *They recognized that this life is not about the body.*

Yet *this can't be. No! No! I will never accept that lie again!* He knows that he's being prepared for degradation. But he won't yield. He proclaims over and over, *I won't do it! I won't do it!*

Though Jared's moral resolve is set in reinforced concrete, it's a block teetering on a precipice—a most fragile balance.

After chow, Jared's world shifts another astral degree.

"Roll it up, Jennings!"

*At last!* The words bring Jared some much-needed relief. They are coming for him. He's finally getting on the train, like the others. This rosy hope, however, is quickly lost as the guard takes him over to Dorm 4-C, formally called "Malcolm X," otherwise known as "Nigger Heaven."

Jared can hardly move a muscle after the hack leaves. His bundle is locked frozen in his arms. He jitters and hardly breathes as he surveys the room, finding it all black—ebony, dark, nighttime, pitchblende—maybe some Hispanics, possibly some Indians, a pastiche of mulatto . . . but totally not white!

Still holding his bundle, Jared bolts out of the dorm and into the Yard. It's finally May and the nights are getting longer, he can steal a few precious moments of security because final Lock-up and Count hasn't been called.

*What the fuck am I going to do?* How is he going to make it through the night? He knows that he will not, cannot, *must* not sleep.

The one protection Jared did not anticipate but which he quickly surmises he has, is that of surprise. His new bunkmates are clearly as shocked to see him there as he is to be there. So, as Count ends he slips directly under his covers, though still fully dressed, even booted. He tries to tent and bury himself under several blankets. Yet, and he knows this, his is not a disguise to fool the greenest con or hack. Obviously, everyone knows he's here. And he knows they know.

In the john, the Black Muslims call an impromptu meeting, bringing in guys from each ethnic and political group in the dorm. With Jared in their midst, it's hard for them not to believe the Black Muslim's analysis that it is a conspiracy. Pulling together the facts: (1) They had killed Harley because he was the one white leader the Blacks could easily control, (2) the mass exodus of all COs except Jared means that he's a snitch, (3) the recent rumors out of Hennepin County about a crazy nigger named Dikbar telling everyone that Jared is a Messiah—a definite smoke screen, getting folks talking nonsense and not about how dangerous he is, and (4) the Moses thing. "Brothers, it's the clear hand of Allah ripping the sheep's fleece off the wolf's body."

But how to act? Some argue that Jared is "a fortuitous opportunity for revenge." Others, "a trap from that sly fox," the Warden. Injuring or killing Jared might be just what they want, be an excuse for a lock-down or worse, possibly some late-night "accidents"—executions. At the moment, the more seasoned leaders prevail. "Hasty decisions often play into the hands of our oppressors!" For an hour, all decisions are evaluated and reevaluated. Finally, it's agreed that nothing will go down before dawn.

Jared can't wait till dawn—or at least the person Jared has become, or rather the body compelled by the uncertain identity within. Whoever he is, he gets up a bit before midnight and tiptoes past the showers and john out into the TV room. His prey is there. Nameless and enjoying the serenity of a quiet late evening, the guy's just another of life's innocent victims, an unintentional participant in someone else's world.

Jared grabs the guy from behind, jerks him up with a mighty grip of shirt. Spins him around, not catching the age in his eyes nor the fragility of his amble, and throws the aging con shuddering into the wall. Shocked, pained, and bewildered, none of his feelings or pleas register with Jared.

Jared picks up two metal-legged plastic chairs and shatters the Tube, bludgeons it. Then he swings and wields them wildly, attacking and cracking the full set of four large security-lighted windows—through which the hacks monitor Rec Room activity.

The monitoring hack hears the old man's screams, pauses, and at the first sound of the TV glass shattering and tingling to the ground, is at full bore. He flashlight-signals (so as not to alarm the sleeping Population) to a cohort who hits a silent alarm inside Control and before Jared is aware that the dragon has escaped, a crowd of hands pull and tug, maul him.

It takes six guards to completely subdue Jared. He's consumed by the ferocity of the role he's playing out within this great dream of escape. So, despite being hit several times by clubs and fists that would have toppled the fiercest among them, Jared achieves an unsolicited 15 minutes of fame in jailhouse lore as he takes blow after blow, thud after thud, kick and smack and crack on his head that should have cold-cocked him right at the start. As happens, Jared's performance soon becomes a rousing late-late-night TV special for the rest of the awakening dorm, who rate his performance as "one fucking crazy dooper," "that asshole CO," "crazy, wild-ass white man," "some ass-kicking dude, if I don't say so!" By the wisest, he's been written off as "Just a flipped out dude who couldn't handle the hard time."

Regardless, Jared accomplishes his objective. He is, literally, dragged all the way—a heels-scraping, butt-bruising, arm-twisting and shoulder-yanking haul and lug—and body-slammed into Seg. Thrust in with a fearsome thwack to the side of his head and a meaner, nastier bone-cracking kick to his butt.

When the Warden hears about Jared's escapade, he's furious. Not because Jared's a white guy who has attacked a black, nor because of the potential bad press Jared's notoriety might bring. No, because he knows, he sees it more clearly

with this day's event, that there is an FBI plant who's executing orders from memos and directives that do not bear "CC: Warden."

## 24 - CHAR'S LETTERS

FROM: OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR  
DIRECTIVE 437

TO: ALL CORRECTIONAL PERSONNEL

RE: WORDS!

DATE: {BLACKED OUT}

WORDS! These are the weapons of our adversary. What looks like a simple word can carry many meanings. Letters from wives, girlfriends and family members often appear innocent but are not. Pay special attention to "love letters." Exercise your right of censorship to its fullest. Inmates do not have the right to subvert us. They will stop at nothing. You must be vigilant and on guard against even the most innocent looking adjective or adverb. Do not be lax when confronting a complex sentence, especially the subjunctive. For in the twists and turns of the tiniest phrase, the misplacement of a comma, the use of a semicolon instead or a period—all of these have the greatest potential for subversion.

A case in point: the correspondence attached (re: J. Jennings, 8867-147). She says, "I love you." Watch it carefully. You ask, "Is it code?" Consider. The "I" is upright and can indicate the prison tower. "Love" means heat and can mean the

furnace room which is adjunct to the tower. "You" may stand for "U" indicating that around the tower behind the furnace there are some guns, explosives or other devices. Never fail to check out these insidious clues!

Again, she writes: "I will keep the child." This sounds like an innocent statement. One filled with affection and love. But who is "the child"? It means something within, something inside that is growing. For subversives it may mean "The Revolution." Here she is informing him that the Revolution continues. "I will" may mean "Eye Will" or a nickname of an inmate. Check out any "wild eyes," "willy eye," or inmates with last name of "Ewald." There is no end to the contortions subversives will use to foment trouble.

"The Sisters disagree"—clearly her revolutionary cadre. "But I love them more because they still accept me although many see me as an unbridled individualist." This means that she's readying to go on a solo mission, one of high risk because "love" to these radicals means a willingness to die heroically. "The child has always been a child and not a fetus. You have always been present to me, right from the moment I realized I was pregnant." This sounds a bit poetic, even romantic but "pregnant" means ready to explode—she's planning a bombing! "I have in every way renounced Catholicism and all its male oppressions ..." Need more be said? She's going to bomb a church or assault one of the hierarchy. The Vatican must be alerted!

As to his Uncle, who is also known as Uncle Sam! Although his letters contain only one word, it is fraught with meaning. "Tetelestai." While it appears to be Greek, and in that language means, "It is finished," Chaplain Cray says that it is the last word Jesus spoke. But don't be fooled by this pious reference. Note that it is for certain an anagram. There are an infinite number of words which can be combed from it. This Uncle is a clever man, and there is definitely some cryptic meaning to his sending just this one word, month after month after month.

This Uncle is a political turncoat and considered by many of his former allies to also be a religious apostate. Do not underestimate him. He has immense connections.

Consider some permutations: dropping one of the e's, you get, "Let's eat it," "Tie last tee," "Ale test it." Is this gibberish? Hardly. "Let's eat it" is definitely a code for a drug shipment. Here, experts say, is a perversion of the words of consecration in the Catholic Mass, "For this is my body."

"Tie last tee" is, in this vein, a reference to "Thai" in his drug connection. Possibly meaning that they have concluded the contract by "tying the last T"—a version of "jotting the last i."

And "Ale test it" is a reference to their testing laboratory—possibly in Alabama ("Ale-bama"). All in all, the phases of an international drug shipment can be discerned. Needless to say all of his notes have been copied and turned over to the DEA.

Be on your guard. Words are not words! Words are time bombs, ready to explode at anytime. CENSOR widely. CONFISCATE whenever possible.

In conclusion, in this light, it is appropriate to reroute both correspondents' mail (re: J. Jennings, 8867-147 and Char Clark) using the powers granted to you.

END

{written in long-hand}

May 18, 1971

Dearest Jared,

I am at a loss as I try to write this letter. It's been months, now. I know you're angry. We left—it was a disaster pure and simple. I didn't know who you were. Are you still the Jared I know and love? I didn't know if you wanted me to write, I don't know. I waited for you to make contact. I felt that you had to work all this stuff through, about the pregnancy I mean. I know your Mom visits regularly, but I haven't talked with her or your family since then. I had to figure it all out on my own. Then the Sisters—several who are in contact with Sean and Matt and others—told me that they were moved out. I thought—some heard that you were moved back into isolation, I mean, the Hole. Did that happen? Where are you? Another horrible thought—that the censors are destroying my letters or yours or both. You bastards! Read this and know that I'm making a copy of this and keeping it for when I can give it to him myself! And Jared, if you do get this, wherever and whenever, know that I love you.

But not knowing whether they are holding up my letters or whether you are hurt, what's going on in your mind, or if you're still crazy mad at me, I'm sorry if that is so. I tried to be as honest as I could during our visit, and my letters have been full of love. It's true, they are me, Jared. Me trying to love you as I do love you!!! Will always love you. And because I love you I am writing this. Please, please open that big dumb head of yours, and that wonderful heart! They haven't killed that heart? Jared, Jared, Jared, what is happening?

Let me make this clear—I am keeping the baby. Better, not "the baby" but our child, our son or daughter. I bet it is a daughter! I want you to know why. Let me say it as it really is. I'm having this child, our child, because I love you and am also committed to the Sisters. It's both. I'm not doing this just for you, or just for me, or just for the child, or just for the Sisters. Not true. I am doing it for all of us. Can you understand that?

I'm having this child because I can. This is my act of solidarity with all my Sisters who must abort because they can't have a child. I am blessed with a community that supports me, and I can, with my job, support myself. What I want you to understand and what I have told the Sisters is that I am becoming a mother because I support my Sisters' right to abortion. We women must be able to choose—not be commanded. So I want you to understand this criticism in the right light, and from our Catholic perspective your commanding me is a sin! Yes, that stupid, ugly word "sin." Here, it actually applies!!!

Do you see that? Have you been able to get rid of all that Catholic crap? Think like me for a moment. Think like a woman. Feel like a woman. For God-dess sake do that, please. Just become me, pregnant for a minute and think it through. Feel the oppression. Then maybe then you'll understand all I've been going through.

Let me say that there's been and there is a male conspiracy to destroy motherhood. Right, "conspiracy" is the right word. Males do gather together in rooms. Those Cardinals do it in Rome, Rabbis in their temples, the Communist males do it in their Party, guys get together in beer halls and corporate boardrooms, and they do plan it out. You know this better than me. In fact you told me this, yourself!

Do you remember when you told me you used to believe in the "ontological inferiority" of women, and that only that argument with Jill Farry made you doubt yourself? Tell me, how did you learn that? In a classroom, right! What is the university but a conspiracy for male dominance? Whose history do they tell us? Who do they cite as the great writers, and what do they write about? And theology! You know that, Aquinas and all those other "guys"!!! What else can anyone call it but a conspiracy? It's so blatant. So out in the open. So terrible!!!

And what is it all about, this conspiracy, but control over birthing, baby-making, motherhood? The males tear the baby from the mother's womb, name it after themselves, and dedicate it to their male god! Can it be any more blatant!!!

I WON'T, I CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN!

If we women are to turn things around we have to, like Cleaver used to yell at the Panthers, "Seize the Day!" Right, we must. And so, this child, our child is ours in a larger meaning of that word. She or he is to be born by a conscious act of mothering, one not made in fear of the male. Not afraid of being disowned because illegitimate. Ugh, what an ugly word! Don't you agree?!!!

And my not being afraid of being a single parent (translate, "without a man") is because I am not single. I have you. I do, don't I?!!

Can we ever not be parents, together, the two of us, no matter what?!!!

And we have the Sisters. But you will come to know what that means.

I must tell you, the Sisters have shown me the holy side of mothering. Despite what the press says, no and I mean NO woman wants an abortion. Not want it, maybe needs it, but not want. You know I mean healthy women, not drug addicts and all that. Listen, we have developed a ritual for aborting. I know this might be hard for you to handle given your past, actually our past. But mothering means bringing life out from death and bringing life to death. We're not afraid of Death. That's one of the most important things. Think of it like yourself. You went into that draft board because of Life, and you knew it meant dealing with Death, possibly even being killed. Having a child is the same. So, with the ritual, the Sisters and I talk with the child, touch the child, love the child, send her deep feelings of erotic bonding, right, of strong lover's energy!!! Oh, it's simply wonderful!!!

I know your need for ritual. What happens here is we talk about the father. You know why I am not naming you, please, please do understand! But we bring your heart and your energy to the child. See, you are fathering, will always be fathering this child, because fathering, just like mothering, is personal and collective, better to say communal. Oh, I do so want you to father this child!!! DO, DO DO!!!!

Each day more and more people know me as a lesbian. I know that word is difficult for you. I know how much you struggle over supporting your gay brothers. Maybe it is different for you. I just don't know. Gay men ARE males. Sometimes that's more than I want to accept, myself. But for me, I cannot be the Char you love UNLESS I step forward and affirm being a lesbian. I know you, and you will try to intellectualize this, talk about historical moments, and—you know I say this with love—be a bit bombastic about it all, but LISTEN! I want you to take this into your heart, take it through your mouth, whirl it around with your tongue, savor it and let it slide down into your heart . . . LISTEN TO ME!!!!

What's important is the now, my being a lesbian in EVERYTHING I do. How I think and talk and walk. My politics, my religion, my music, my food, the papers I read. Dig it? How I walk. Walk proud!!! I am a full person ONLY when I say "I am a lesbian." Can you understand? Can you feel what I'm saying?

While you can walk beside me, you cannot walk in my footsteps. That's just how it is. Cruel as it might sound. Know that I do want you beside me. But I and my Sisters must walk our own path, in our own footsteps, making our tracks.

Maybe you'll burn this or tear it up or even throw it down the toilet—DON'T!!! If you do, you will lose me. Know, I don't want you to lose me. I want you to love me. But only as I am, not as we were told to be.

Jared, listen to my heart, I do not understand all this, but with the Sisters I find the strength to share this with you. I believe that YOU can only find yourself, become who you truly are, IF I do what I am doing!!

Now, you may say "That's paternalistic" or I guess maternalistic, but don't do that. Listen, this is the mother of your child speaking—WE want to become "we," but it means all of us must change, be born with this child. She or he is calling us to be together in a truly revolutionary way. I hope—so, so hope that you can hear this and be with us.

Maybe this is its own end. I don't know. If you do get this and don't write back, I guess it IS the end. But until I see you and hear it from your lips, until then you are part of this new conspiracy. You and I and the Sisters—and the child—parts of the Lesbian Conspiracy.

NOW, THAT KILLS YOU, MR. CENSOR, DOESN'T IT!!!

I love you. I am your Sister.

Char

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"Jesus, her handwriting's hard to read! What should I do with this?"

"Stamp it to hell. Bury that puke where it belongs!"

"Fucking queers, ain't they!"

{Censor Stamp}

(note from Uncle Sam -- on Stationary)

Samuel Jennings

TETELESTAI

(scribbled signature)

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"Here's another one."

"They come regularly."

"Does he think we're idiots? Just one word, and we're not supposed to suspect something?"

"Just deal with it as usual."

{Censor's Stamp}

## 25 - WAKE-UP: THE ESCAPE

Everyone's surprised when Jared is back in circulation within three days. The Blacks judge this a provocative act. They're convinced that the Warden wants to use Jared to start a race riot. His return says, "Look stupid niggers, *this* is your target!" Could anything be more obvious?

What they can't figure out is why Jared is cooperating—or is he? A few still believe that Fred Hampton's trust had been for real and solidly based, that Jared isn't a snitch. Others counter that nothing about his Millston acts fit their past experiences with COs. "From Jump Street, he's been bad blood. Whether he's in on it or just a dupe, it don't make no difference!"

Jared returns to "Malcolm X" and is treated as if he never left. It's decided: Ignore him. Make him invisible.

Jared's quick release is a bewildering disappointment to him. He's been gearing up for a week or two of rest and reading—having some space! Getting into his exercise regimen. Once back in the dorm he's just roadkill. He doesn't know what the Black Muslims are planning. He has no reason to trust anyone, white or black. Plus he's anxious and wound up tight about not having moved an inch towards escape. He's got to do something soon or *they* are going to fuck with him until they're satisfied.

*Matt's voice, What happens to us is less important than what we do with what happens to us. Get it?*

At day's end, before the Lock-up and Count siren blares, Jared meets with Davitt.

"Okay."

This is said simply, in monotone, flat voiced.

Davitt's face creases only slightly, not betraying the eruption of pleasure soothing his whole being. He feels Jared crumble through his fingers. *Just dirt, like the rest of them.*

Later, in preparation, Jared secures the *hibakusha* in his toiletry box's false bottom. Leaves a note: "Keep what's in here but mail this box. Get it to my brother, Larry." After jotting down Larry's address, he rolls it up in two tens—depleting his cash position as Larry would say by one-third. Who's to receive this? Who else but Supply Line?

Right after Lights Out, Davitt's man pops into "X." Davitt's omnipotence is evidenced by the lack of attention given to this guy. He's more than just a white boy. He's alabaster with Celtic freckles fallen on milky skin, a shock of red hair with green-glinting eyes, and he just strolls—no, *swaggers*—into "X's" heart of darkness. This guy's not just visiting—*no way!*—he represents the landlord. So it's no surprise that he motions to Jared and utters a command like the Corridor Captain, "Come on!"

Jared's out in a shot.

With the tools Supply Line sold him bundled by two towels, Jared trails Davitt's guy who seems to intimately know each Yard shadow. He guides Jared to a storage room in the Library area. Fingering the appropriate key from a hack's round, he slips inside and as Jared follows he flicks on a light, pivots and leaves, quietly shutting the door. Jared is alone.

*Set up?* bolts from among the repressed memories of the raid, but the question doesn't have time to settle as the doorknob turns and framed by back shadows is his blind date, Sally.

Sally is really someone baptized with his father's name, Junior, but he looks every inch the woman. Jared can't remember seeing this guy. *Davitt has a harem?*

Sally is slight of build, a Scandinavian blonde, almost hairless, fairly tall, and *soft*. She exudes softness. She enters, takes two swift steps towards Jared, pauses.

Her voice floats like champagne fizz—"Yes?" The room crackles with tense anticipation and the magnetism of fear, of crime and sin, the trespassing of new boundaries. She poses, readies herself—steadyng herself—for she fully expects Jared to make the first move. She's accustomed to being lunged at and manhandled with an ardor only *rape* can describe.

Jared's hesitancy, once she's fully aware of it, loosens a tittering that she swiftly arrests with the back of her hand, sensitive to Jared's embarrassment. It's been a very, very long time since she's been with a virgin.

Clearing his throat, Jared's whispers, "Well . . . errr, let's get it over with!"

Normally—*how pleasant the reversal!*—this is Sally's unspoken line.

Jared squirms with the question he has to ask, "Pitch or catch?"

Sally flutters her eyes coyly and exhales like smoke, "Both."

*Oh my God! Holy Mother of God! Mary, Font of Wisdom! St. Jude, intercede for me!* It's a litany that doesn't stop. He utters it as he is cast—casts himself—into the pit of darkness.

*"Today, Friars, we shall discuss 'non-orthogenital sexual acts,' or in the layman's lingua franca—perversions!"*

Jared doesn't think about her. Will not, cannot tolerate a moment of personal recognition. She will have to be but a vivid dream of masturbation, a nightmare of waywardness, corruption, depravity.

Fortunately, Sally is more than expert at her craft. Davitt paid a handsome amount to get her. She has Jared's cock cranking off shots before he knows that his pants are down. Although he's aware of the sensation, it arrives like the distant realization that the fire is warming your frostbitten hands. It's a pleasure from beyond the blockade.

How Jared ever got himself into the catcher's position, (*shucks, just like kneeling at the altar!*) he will never remember, never discuss; only relive in the most repressed of dreams. "*Let's play Catch the Catamite!*"

What strengthens him during these moments is his invocation of Matt's courage. *If Matt could survive it, so can I!* This is repeated round and round like fingering the decades of the Rosary. *If Matt could survive it, so can I!*

*It.* The act of submission is an it.

Jared is on another planet.

Mercifully, it's over almost before it begins. Jared becomes haltingly aware that Sally is adjusting her dress and wiggling into her high heels. He's also aware that his pants are carousing at his ankles and, embarrassed, he mechanically bends down and pulls them up—BVDs, trousers, then buckle. By habit, he reaches down and straightens out his socks. He hasn't taken off his shoes or unbuttoned his shirt. Almost reflexively, he wants to say, "All done?" But he says nothing. She says nothing.

Sally leaves; evaporates.

*Now what?* Jared lies against the wall. He's alone again. "*It is not good that the man should be alone.*" But he's also self-abandoning—*Sally never existed!*

As if on cue, Davitt's man comes back. He's expressionless. "Let's go," he directs matter-of-factly. As before, he pilots Jared through the Yard, using his secret map of shadows, this time to the darkest recess of the fence. He leans against a dumpster and watches while Jared cuts a section and then ropes it up like a doggie door. Jared wonders why the guy is staying with him. *Is he going with me?* Actually, he's staying to make sure that Jared cuts the fence correctly—just a bit of professional courtesy! Jared will never fully appreciate the service Davitt provides.

As Jared turns to say, "See ya!" the guy taps something against his forehead and says, "Thanks for the going-away present."

Jared is at a loss.

"You did great. The Boss is gonna love you on film."

Jared is on the other side of the fence when the full import of what the guy just said hits him like a spray of buckshot up close.

"Son of a bitch!" he snorts while thrusting a white-knuckled fist at the guy. "Son of a bitch, I'll kill you and fucking Davitt if that's true!"

The mix of macho posturing with the feebleness of the threat amuses the guy. He laughs and fuck-fingers Jared off. "Go on, you fucking hippie, you enjoyed it!"

The Mick doesn't move. He's enjoying the spectacle. He laughs and laughs the angrier Jared gets, then fades away as Jared starts duck-walking towards the tree line that serves as a windbreak for the farmer's planting field that adjoins the prison.

Jared was told to make his way toward the farmer's barn, about a quarter-mile diagonally across the field. It's just mid-May and the farmer should have been in the field but Jared sees no tractor tracks. He passes it off as a result of the past month's quite peculiar weather, oscillating very hot or very cold. *Fuck it!* The field's booby-trapped with muddy potholes. In a quick reverse, Jared judges this a blessing because if it was a month later Minnesota's state bird, the "Paul Bunyan mosquito," might be needling him to death. *I'm truly blessed!*

Then what happens is a story that he'll retell often, however never expecting anyone to find it less perplexing or amusing, even 'unbelievable!' as he does.

"I break out from the tree line and waddle as fast as I can. Falling on my butt once and crawling now all caked with mud and hands beginning to thicken from the dampness seeping through. Finally, I get to the middle of the field. The moon's fading in and out, being swiped by a rush of rain-darkening clouds, so Millston looks like an old movie strip where the frame goes by too slowly and the light bounces out at you. Everything's slow-motion flickering and I just plop myself down. Then something really weird happens, man. I felt plopped like some Big Hand came down and said, 'Sit down here and think about it!'

"Squatting in the mud, I asked myself, *How does it feel to be free?* And the gallows humor of it all hit me. *Free?* The word cuts me this way and that. I realized I was certainly free of Millston as a place but was I dragging an umbilical cord with me? Even if I went to Canada, wouldn't I always be connected to Millston? I had to face the possibility that if I did and then came back to the States they could reverse the process—cage me back up a second time. Thinking about it, I thought, *Would it be worse the second time?"*

Jared often stops at this point, ever caught up again in the dilemma he faced.

"What would I be going back to? I realized, *Nothing*. Nothing because I had *not* really escaped. Fucking-A! I was taking Millston with me like a turtle does. I mean, man, I was grafting Millston prison onto my flesh like a turtle's shell. Me—Convict Turtle—no matter where I'd be, prison would be my shell."

It forces him to be philosophical: "I guess it must've been like the other side of being born." Jared struggles to find a way to explain, "like what the infant might feel if he looks back. Questions come up: *Should I have left? Can I get back in?* But the babe has no choice. His mother will never consider reversing the procedure! . . . *But I did.*

"That's it! While squatting in the field, what comes to me is that if I don't return then I'll become—not might or could but inevitably *will*—become just like them. My own Warden, my own hack, my own executioner. I'll never be able to be

free. If I don't return I'll never be able to stand up and cast off my chains.  
"Fucking-A, man, I'll always be *doing time!*"

Jared pauses, knows that it is something possibly only an ex-con could really understand. "Out in the field I look one way towards the barn and then the other way towards Millston. Thinking, *If I go to Canada, I become a turtle. If I go back, what?* Questions and thoughts rain like hail. I can't move. *What have they made me into? What does it mean to be a prisoner, an inmate, a convict?"*

He knows that his hearers want a simple answer—*shit!* he wants a simple answer! None comes. "This was—is—the question, What happens to a man when he accepts being a prisoner? An answer came to me, one that I didn't really like. One that you may not like. I just started hearing that black preacher guy back in the Afro meeting. 'Cons are prisoners of the State, legally, slaves of the State.' He made a connection between slavery and prison, but what is it? Well, I ask you, get stoned on this, man. What is the effect of slavery?"

It's to break the male spirit. Crack the masculine energy and twist out its power to use it in a perverted way. Perversion. It's the right word, trust me. Prisoner perverts men, few ever become the same again."

He stands tall when he says this, uses his full athletic masculinity to hammer home the point: "The reason, man, most cons can't make it on the Outside, is they're broken while Inside. Dig this! Think on it. They're zapped and sapped of their masculinity like the slaves, but worse we're turned into women. Yeah," he thumps his chest, "they made me their *bitch!* No denying that." He pauses, it always shocks them, always hurts him to confess it openly. "After you've lived as an *expendable, disposable, No Deposit-No Return* piece of social trash, you begin to become that. Man, it's weird but you become your own lifelong prisoner, you never stop doing time." They want to know, he wants to know, someone always asks, "Are you still doing time?"

Jared is halfway back towards the fence before all of these thoughts reach full bloom. Once under and through the fence, back on the Inside, he glances over his left shoulder. It's become clear to him, more clearly than at his departure from the seminary, more clearly than when raiding draft offices, more clearly than when watching Char sleep, more clearly than when he had been first born, "I belong here!"

In the morning, several angry black bloods gather at the foot of his bunk. Jared's been deeply, deeply asleep and he's snoring like Yahweh thundering revelations through his snout. Unseen, the hibakusha is buried in the press of his hands. Man, the bloods are really pissed and they kick-shake his bed! Lift it up and let it drop, bang and clang on the floor. No matter, Jared keeps on sleeping; undisturbed. They figure that he's out on "horse" or some other dope.

Later, it takes two hacks about ten minutes to drag him out of bed, into the shower, and slap him awake.

"Hey, Jennings, whatsa matter? Been sniffing something?"

They rough him up a bit. Nothing too hard, not a beating—just trying to get their job done.

"Wake-up, asshole!" one keeps shouting, louder and louder, as if Jared is hard of hearing. The Blacks can't figure this odd turn of events. They knew Jared was in flight. Supply Line gives out more than just supplies. One guy points out that Jared's shoes are caked with mud. Anger and confusion mix. He was out, but now he's back. Why?

What Jared never finds out, what only Davitt and the Warden know, is that his decision to return was more than metaphysically correct. He was damn lucky! Davitt's waiting driver was an FBI agent. A passel of federal agents were also in hiding. They knew his route. They were poised to snatch him and set him onto one of life's other "roads less travelled." Unexpectedly and unhappily at the moment,

they are the jilted lovers left waiting at the altar. Yet, not being guys easily deterred, that same day they hurriedly convene a meeting with the Warden and set in motion an alternate elopement strategy.

## PART III: THE RIDE

### 26 - "EXIT, STAGE RIGHT"

The Warden wants to make this a quick and clean transaction. He's impatient to get the FBI out. They never fail to give him the jitters, even in the best of times. "Hoover's Maids," he calls them out of earshot, thinly smiles, imagining them in aprons using Hoover vacuums. He's thoroughly irked and feels jerked around because he didn't know about the escape beforehand. More so now that he knows that Davitt did and that he's somehow linked with the FBI.

"No COs means no more Feds!" Jared has got to go.

The Feds, on the other hand, were ready for a long morning. They were eager to grill Jared and fry his ass. Although he couldn't have known they were waiting, they're royally peeved that he spoiled their fun. Most have sat tedious hours in ambush, frustrated by raiders who failed to show for their appointed crime. "Bunglers! Weed heads! As stupid as gooks!" With Jared's escapade, many were anticipating a career highlight. Last night was a potential *coup de grace*, a dramatic and chilling expose of how hapless the Resistance movement is. Cameras and a fist of reliable reporters were in tow. "Believe it! Burston, too." This Jared heard only much later.

As Jared is led in—*walk* being an inaccurate term, for he clops along like a camel in tow, still being a shade below awake—he fails to recognize Agent Brennan, the emcee of his arrest night. He's deeply spaced out. He can't decide whether last night was real or just a long, ever too long, bad dream. *Sally?*

The Warden wastes no time in taking charge. "Gentlemen," he nods to the Feds, "this is *my* House and"—he wants to say "and I'll vacuum it myself" but skips the sarcasm—"and *I'll* put things in order."

From the first, the Warden has seen Jared as a paper tiger—just another punk who's come in with a big street rep, only to spend his time hiding under his bunk blankets all day.

“Mr. Jennings, you’re being transferred to another penitentiary.”

Anticipating his question, which Jared isn’t awake enough to ask, he gives the answer, “I’m not at liberty to say where. Just that these gentlemen are here to escort you.”

A full twenty seconds of group silence elapses before Jared realizes that this is all the Warden is going to say.

“Okay,” Jared half-mutters as if his affirmation meant something, his compliance was necessary.

One hack taps Jared’s right shoulder and when he’s slow to move two of them each grabs a forearm and an armpit and jerk him back and away. The Feds follow. As is their way, two agents move with haste to make him theirs. They spin Jared around like square-dance partners dosey-doeing and quickly yank him outside the office into the corridor and hustle him down the hallway. Control has all the gates open, so they quickly hand him off to a third agent who’s ready to wrap and bind this Special Delivery bundle. He decorates Jared in leg, waist and hand chains; twines his hands with steel handcuffs—in front, not around his back. Smirk, “Comfy?”

Done, much like a priestly blessing, they palm his head, push it down, bending him in half so that he isn’t bruised as they not so gently but not too roughly insert him in the idling unmarked car. *Zoom!* Burning rubber, not stopping for a last genuflection before the Tower, not measurably slowing to check other traffic wending towards Millston— *zoom!*—they are on a burn, juiced and happy like the Merry Pranksters on the hippie’s mythic bus, “Furthur.”

Jared’s awareness of what’s actually happening sharpens when the face of Agent Brennan comes into focus, brightens—small mouth, thin teeth—a ferret’s grin. *Or is it a leer?*

Agent Brennan’s in the front seat again. *Far out! Hey, wake up, man!* It’s a TV special rerun of “The Capture of The Four”—*oops, Three!* The weirdness of last

night and now this morning's flip-flop of "Take him away, he's all yours!" twists and turns Jared's stomach. He leans forward, turns his face towards a side window and starts to dry heave.

Embarrassed, Jared struggles for some self-control, tries to ignore his stomach's rebellion. With a great effort, he attempts to throw out a falsely friendly, sarcastic "Hi!" but can't. *Fucking-A*. He's so soundly bushwhacked that all he can do is fall back into the seat, droop and let things just happen. *Karma, man, karma*.

It's Brennan who takes up the conversation.

"Nice to see you again, Mr. Jennings," spoken coolly, not revealing his true feelings or intentions. "I thought I should brief you on where you're going."

Jared is too blitzed to really care.

"You're going on the *Ride*. Do you know what that means?"

Jared's silence is received as a no.

"Listen closely. You'll be given an opportunity to obtain firsthand information on the best and the worst of our federal system." Brennan's words drip with self-amused sarcasm.

"Someone in Washington must like you. Not every con gets this special treatment."

*What are they saying? What do they mean?*

The *Ride*. It's a phrase similar to *Circuit Rider*, which was used during Colonial America to describe the preachers who rode by horse to reach the scattered communities of frontier parishioners. They had no fixed parsonage. They were on "God's Circuit." Jared is about to experience the secular version of that divine mission.

The *Ride*. Jared will be spending the next phase of Doing Time—for him to try and remember it as days or months or what part of 1971, well, it just won't work that way—in county jails, state and federal pens, sometimes in a Big House, at others on a Farm—those minimum security barracks that fringe such places as Leavenworth. He'll visit most of them on *stop and go's*, one-night stands, all the while speeding through a multitude of states, constantly on the move, nowhere for more than ten days at a given lockup.

The Ride will make it impossible for his family or friends to reach him, visit him, or directly send him mail. By the time a prison official receives a request from family, friends, even his lawyers, he's already en route to somewhere else. Routinely they respond, "All we know, ma'am, is where he's been."

Only a clandestine visit with his mother, arranged by Agent Brennan, begins to calm the rumors that he's been murdered. She meets with him in some county jail visiting room in a town he doesn't know and one that she's sworn not to reveal. It's all cloaked heavily in Cold War "Loose lips sink ships!" dramatics, with hushed mentions of "Mr. Hoover" and praise about her deceased patriotic husband—"Lieutenant Jennings was a Republican, wasn't he, ma'am?" His mother is profoundly grateful and can hardly stop thanking Agent Brennan for "your act of kindness." Brennan, pleased with his own cleverness, outflanks the Irish wiles in her. "From Galway, you don't say. Blessed be, Mr. Brennan, that's where the Jennings are from!"

As calculated, this contrivance ensures her silent collaboration. She's shrewdly recruited as a rumor-calming agent. In her heart she truly believes that agent Brennan is her ally. Gleefully, the agent knows that this visit secures the theft of her son.

*"Karma."*

## 27 - THE COMPANION

Once out of Millston Jared expects to spend the night in Hennepin County jail, again. But—as harbinger of what the Ride is all about— he does not spend the night in County. In fact, they pull into the jail’s parking lot only long enough to change drivers.

The new agent gets in but doesn’t say a word. Doesn’t greet him in anyway, not even a nod. In somewhat comic contrast Agent Brown actually waves goodbye—just a flicked hand signal but nonetheless it’s all more than a bit silly, given the reality of Jared’s not really leaving to go anywhere. But Jared doesn’t care, he just lets himself fall deeper and deeper into a fanciful reverie—*I’m free!*

An hour later: “Witson,” that’s how he finally introduces himself, reaching into the back seat, an actual handshake, even friendly. “I’m Witson.”

Jared slips him a limp hand.

Witson’s a bit too friendly, it raises suspicions.

“Where are we going?” Jared decides to be direct.

Witson smiles, “Oh, here and there.”

“Look, fuck-face, you can keep me in chains all day if you want but don’t fuck with me. Either deal straight or go to hell!” rises in anger and intensity.

“My, my,” Witson mocks, “you *are* a mean and righteous brother with a heavy-duty attitude.” Jared spits silence at him.

By the time the freeway signs are heralding the last outposts of civilization in Minnesota —Winona, Rochester, Albert Lee—and they enter the far country called Iowa, Jared’s mood shifts abruptly, shatters like fine crystal.

“Getting there?” Jared reinitiates communication.

“Not too long.” Witson squirms to a position of both comfort and conversation. “I was *there*, you know,” he says with an impish glint.

Jared takes the bait. “Where’s *there*?”

“The raid.”

“The raid?” Jared pushes back the question, turning slightly towards Witson. “Where were you? I didn’t see you.”

“With your buddy—Matt, right?”

Jared shakes his head; hesitates, but then plunges right in. “Where’s Matt now? And Sean? And where are you taking me?”

“Last time I answered that question you got righteous on me.”

“Yeah, shit,” Jared waves it away as if the remark was a swarm of annoying flies, “but let’s get a little more specific than *here and there*.”

Witson wants the conversation to pick up, so he feeds it some easy fodder. “Matt and Sean and the rest of your buddies are being dispersed. You know, you take the sticks of dynamite from the pile one at a time and soon . . . not much damage can be done.”

“You mean the protest did that?”

“I mean the riot did that.”

Jared doesn’t want to tussle over words. “Fuck, yeah, *riot*—whatever. Hmm.” It did make sense from their perspective. Before he can enliven the dialogue with a verbal run on the power of nonviolence, Witson swoops in and unloads.

“You know, you guys act like a bunch of wimps. I really can’t understand that, especially you, Mr. Jockstrap. Hell, if I was your size and had my martial arts skills, hell, I’d be an ass-kicker, not a boot-licker.”

Jared almost swallows the bait. He smothers a “Fuck you, asshole!” and a “You’re the fucking wimps. You need guns. Got a small dick problem or something?” He swallows hard, once, twice then takes a deep breath, restraining himself. He knows he’s a prisoner in a car with a Fed. *The little fucker’s just baiting me.*

“Sure, I can see your point,” Jared replies, smoothly. With a teacher’s instinct he’s moving the issue back in a positive way. “When I went before my draft board, they sort of had the same feeling, so I told them, ‘Hey, put me in ‘Nam, give me a machine gun and a rack of grenades, hell, I’ll be a great killer!’” He checks the agent’s eyes. Witson’s listening, closely.

Jared continues, “I really believe that. No money’s lost on that bet.” Then he grapples Witson at eye-level. “I’m probably one of the most, if not *the* most, violent people you’ll ever meet.” He doesn’t hype it, no “most A-motherfucking violent” or “fag-bashing violent.” No need for flowery machismo. Jared knows what he’s saying is simply true, and saying it this way brings Witson straight up.

“Sounds convincing.”

“I’m not trying to convince you. Just explain it, that’s all.”

*Do you know my dreams, Mister Fed?*

They hit another stop, this time for gas, a piss and some grub. Although Witson, at the start, took off his chains and handcuffs—much to Jared’s surprise but comfort—now he cuffs him. Strangely, he keeps them loose. For all practical purposes it’s just a matter of form over substance.

Despite Witson’s gesture, Jared, unawares, plays the scene in prison mode. He waits for Witson to open the door, then walks a quarter-step behind him. Surprisingly, Jared feels no rush to bolt. Truer to his intellectual temperament, he’s rather eager to get back to rapping. Nonetheless, the visual humor of it all does strike him. He wonders what they look like to others. Him, the hulk athlete, and Witson the puny shit, bound by the steely cords of the gods of violence. When they return, Witson pulls another maneuver. “Want to sit up front?” Jared’s caught off

guard, but just momentarily. Thoughts of reclining the passenger seat and stretching out his long legs makes his answer a no-brainer. "Fuck. Why not?"

"I see, you don't like me calling you guys wimps?" Witson wants to pump up the exchange, get it rushing downstream towards his goal.

"*Wimps*. Fuck, who cares? I mean, *sticks and stones*. It's you guys who are into words. I know your rap—*Commies! Commies!* Just say the word and you guys froth at the mouth!" Jared sniggles.

Witson's on the charge. "Granted. I accept that. But you guys see an *Imperialist Pig* behind every decent citizen in this country." And cutting Jared off, he races on, puffing with his own righteousness. "I know your words. *Lackey running dogs. Capitalist warmongers. White Devil.*"

"Whoa!" slapping the passenger side dashboard, "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!"

Witson bites his tongue, takes a very obvious deep breath, keeps staring down the road, lets a space develop for Jared to speak.

"Whoa, FBI boy, you're talking Weatherman trash, not my lingo. I think you've been reading the wrong books!"

"Books! Crap fella, I've been there. I know those people," and he fails to soften the sound of his teeth as he gnashes the words out, "*Those,*" he stresses the word, "are your leaders. *The Vanguard.*"

Jared throws back, "Vanguard! Jesus fucking Christ, Witson, you've bought more of their shit than I have—or ever will."

Vehemence strikes the air, "*I was there! I know them!*"

"*Fucking-A, man, bully for you! A fucking-A Weatherman groupie!*"

About five minutes later, "You don't believe me, I can tell, you just don't believe me." Witson is hot, simmering, about to boil over.

"Fucking-A, man, I don't believe you."

Witson knows that he needs to step back—to create some mental and emotional distance. A taut silence holds each man at bay. Jared shifts and settles back as best he can into a spot of comfort. Witson exits the state highway and maneuvers over to a county road. As will be his way, he begins to wend through off-the-path streets and byways of small towns, villages and four-way stop sign rural intersections. He's taking his time, enjoying the act of driving.

Jared has an itch he needs to scratch before they arrive at wherever they're going.

"You were *there*?"

"I told you that."

"Yeah, yeah . . . what's this shit about the Weathermen?"

It was time to explain; to set forth the initial range of imagery. "You know I'm a Fed, so you shouldn't be surprised. Before I got this junket with you draft raider types, I spent two years with the Weather Bureau."

Jared believes him; it fits his own assumptions.

"I ran with JJ and Billy . . . Terry and Bernadine . . . the whole gang." Jared has questions but holds back. "I was there almost at the beginning. Let me tell you," and he purses his lips, lightly rubs his chin, squinches his eyes, making those manneristic adjustments he does when about to tell a story he relishes, "they are one crazy bunch. But don't get me wrong, they're dangerous as hell. More dangerous to themselves than anyone else is what I finally came to believe. Let me just tell you—but I'm sure you must know all this—they're dangerous because they have no beliefs."

Jared remains a receptive listener, tossing him the nonverbal nods and shrugs that are received as “Go ahead,” and “Keep talking, I’m listening” affirmations.

“It was their lack of beliefs—it *is* their lack of beliefs that will be their undoing. Their minds are like silly putty. All someone has to do is come in and yell out some incomprehensible Marxist or Maoist chatter and they’ll suck it up. Silly motherfuckers,” he ends with an angry sigh.

Jared laughs, “Man, you mean you didn’t take the Class Option!”

Witson doesn’t laugh, starts again. “They’re idiots. I really could never come to admire them. With all their education and degrees, all the privileges of their rich-kid backgrounds, believe me, they *are* really a bunch of stupid jerks!” Then he abruptly stops, falls into an absorbing moment of remembrance as reverie. Jared’s amused, waits, then snaps his fingers, “Witson! Witson! J. Edgar Hoover to Agent Witson!”

Witson grins. They drive a mile or so before re-engaging.

“So, man, why’d ya leave?”

“Do you think I wanted to stay?”

“No, I mean, hell, were you found out?”

“No, no, nothing like that.” Curiously, Witson starts jiggling his right leg, his driving leg, as if ants were marching up towards his crotch. The car accelerates with a combo of jerks. He’s whacking his leg and wrestling the driving wheel as he says, “No, see, I bailed out. Just couldn’t take it anymore.”

“Too dangerous?”

Witson cracks up as that question registers. *He’s quick! I’ll give him that.* He laughs at himself as he realizes that Jared can’t figure why he’s wrestling with the steering wheel. Both break out laughing. The agent hits the steering wheel with his

left palm, "Too dangerous! Oh my!" And he laughs some more. As he comes down he says, "Look, they were dangerous to themselves. You know about the townhouse explosion, right?"

Jared nods, calling up a bit of recent history that had not concerned him too much when it happened back in March 1970. Several of the Weathermen blew themselves to smithereens while making a bomb in New York. It had devastated the group which to that time had not really felt on their own bodies the violence they so vociferously trumpeted.

"After they did that, I had my excuse to vanish. So I did."

"Man, are you righteous on this? You guys had their number?"

Witson doesn't want to respond to that, it would take him off topic. He's not as interested in telling his story as in riling Jared. He wants to get him agitated, hopefully enraged. To start spewing out his hatred. Reveal his violence. Witson thought that Jared's knowing that he went undercover and screwed the Weathermen would bring out a *Hey, man, you fucked my heroes! Your dirty bastard!* But Jared's simply listening, as if he's sincerely interested in the storyline.

"You really weren't into their thing?" Witson genuinely asks.

"Man, fucking-A no, I never bought into their rantings. Not an inch. Not a penny. Never. They were my greatest fear of who'd I become."

"But Aaren."

"*Aaren?*" The name came out drawn and quartered at every letter, slammed down and glued as one sound. "Aaren? What about Aaren?"

Witson knows he's found the master key!

"*Wargasm.* Doesn't that word mean anything to you?"

"No."

"You really don't know these people, do you?" comes to Jared as, "It was right under your nose and you couldn't smell it!"

"What. . ." Jared's voice drifts away. With that, Steve Witson, FBI agent extraordinaire, picks up his main theme.

"Wargasm was the final word. It came to signify everything, the combining of war and sex. It was inevitable, I guess. The words they threw out didn't stick on the outside world so they threw them at themselves . . . and they stuck inside. They finally indicted themselves as the most imperialist of Imperialist Pigs. Honestly, it's funny. Oddly, it was almost logical. When it came, I wasn't surprised." As if to himself he mutters, "Sickies, just sickies." Back again, "So Wargasm. Yessir, they said it was all sexual. The talk became of cunts and pricks. It all came down to wiping away everything about one's self that was personal or individual or special. They wanted to become 'no man.' No—no, I've corrected my sexist ways: 'no *person*.' Yessir, you just became a cunt or a prick."

These words weigh heavily on Jared's heart and soul.

Witson, unawares, has slowed down in both speech and speed. Someone honks a long, jeering *ho-o-onk!* because the Ride has rolled below the speed limit as if leading a funeral cordon.

As impatient as ever, Jared wants him to get to the point. Witson senses that once Jared bites, he's an easy fish to reel in.

"Wargasm? What the hell do you mean?" The unspoken question is, "Aaren—what the hell do you know about her?"

Witson quickly moves the story to its conclusion. "I did what I had to. I fought their war. It was a war of cunts and pricks. I fucked my brains out. *They* fucked my brains out!"

*Aaren? Aaren?* scorches Jared's brain.

"Group sex, orgy, whatever you want to call it. It was all as cold and impersonal as killing gooks. Just as simple. '*Bang! Bang!* You're dead.' And then you simply move on. So I left them, a field of naked bodies, like a field of dead babies, all stillborn." Witson caps the tale with an unthinking, "Shit!"

Jared has to know: "What about Aaren?"

Her name, a name he himself has spoken in lust, alerts him to Jared's unrevealed obsession. Expertly trained, Witson responds by resuming his professional stance. "I thought you and she were tight?"

"You think?"

"I did. I thought you knew all of this Weathermen stuff."

"Nope."

"Tell me, is she special to you?"

"Who knows?"

"Gee," almost a conveyance of concern, "I don't want this to mess you up too much." *Yessir! I do! I do!*

"What?"

"She *is* Wargasm."

Witson doesn't have to elaborate but Jared *must* ask. He has nothing to lose. He's back in full prison mode. In this frame of mind he stabs through the bars at the hack. "You?"

"Sure—me, and an army of the night."

Jared is sucked back to that fierce point of anger that was his as the Ride began.

Agent Witson checks his watch. It's already six p.m. He's pretty sure this county's jail is just up the road. He's in no hurry. Considers, *Why not make it a short night? Catch a movie, if this corn-fed burg has a theater!*

Once there, Jared is taken directly to the Hole.

## 28 - DAYS ON THE RIDE

Jared's been laying there, maybe half-an-hour, trying to not fully awake into another prison day when he hears what sounds like metallic insect chatter. It's a key poking the lock. Then with a small explosion the cell door opens.

"*Peacenik!* Time to roust and get about!" Witson announces cheerily. Jared throws a shitload of darkness at him but Witson shines through. He can wait for Jared to get it together. He's in no big hurry.

Jared rises slowly, robotically dresses.

Witson leads Jared to the departure area. "Where's the area hack?" Jared asks. No one's at booking and neither Jared nor Witson is signing out. *Odd. What can this mean?* Witson doesn't go directly to the outside gate; instead he leads Jared through several sectors of the prison. Up some stairs, across a cell block, back down a flight. Witson's being waved through by each gatekeeper until they enter a room with a single shower. It's not another Segregation unit. In fact it looks like a private room. *Odd.*

Witson pulls back the shower curtain as if raising a drape for a theatrical act. He says, "Shower and dress." Odd as all this is, Jared doesn't hesitate. It's been two days.

*A private shower!*

Jared lathers up, taking his time, feeling like he never wants to leave the stall. Privacy, so precious. After dragging it out as long as he can, he towels off and begins to dress. But looking around he can't find his khakis.

He spins and jerkily turns when out of nowhere comes, "Christmas!" He's half-naked and facing a smiling Witson who's holding out a hanger with civilian garb. A pair of brand-new dark cotton pants with a dangling, brightly flowered tie-dyed T-shirt. *Is this why he's smiling?*

Jared hesitates. He hasn't forgotten that Witson is The Man. *A trap?*

Witson just continues to smile and stand there, high on a salesman's anticipation. But it quickly becomes clear that Jared isn't rushing to buy, not today.

"We've got a long drive ahead and I'm sure you don't want every rube along the way to gawk at you?"

Jared still doesn't move.

"Look, Jared"—FBI Manual: *Use his first name, always his first name.*—"take advantage of this. We'll be driving for at least two more days before I have time to shop. It'll be easier on you."

"Don't fuck with me, man! It's too fucking early...."

"Tsk, tsk! Yessir, you got to drop that attitude. I'm not fucking with you. The clothes are for practical purposes. "

"Fuck the clothes, man! They don't stop the jangle of the chains."

"Yessir," with award-winning innocence, "did I forget to mention that? No chains. Just you and me humping the road. Just a-truckin' down the line!"

"What?... Okay. Shit." What else can he say? Witson's in control. *Man, they fuck with you here, they fuck with you there! Just go with it!*

Jared dresses. Together, looking like buddies Witson and Jared leave the unnamed County lockup.

At curbside Jared hears the earth giggle and senses another turn of the cosmic screw. Things are getting imperceptibly but progressively out of whack. Their transport is now a van, one of those VW types so loved by the Counterculture. Jared half-expects Witson to whip out a brush and paint "Flower Children!" "Free Love!" "Peace Not War!" on it, turning it into a hippie bus!

In its rear it holds camping equipment. On the middle seat there's a stash of soda pop, magazines and paperbacks. The whole shebang is wrapped up in a surround of music. As he settles in, Jared hears a song from a tape that Matt played as they drove up to raid Sauk Centre. *What the fuck?* Comically appropriate, Jared says, "Crazy, man. Like Agent Witson, man, you're one groovy cat!"

*Witson's not unlike Matt or at least he's making like Matt*, Jared notes. He's also quiet and into his sound. He's queued up Iron Butterfly, Jefferson Airplane, Janis and Big Brother, even The Dead, and as Jared strains to read those near the bottom, even some Leo Kottke, a local Minnesota guitar god!

"Not bad for our mad tear!" Witson whoops.

*Man, this is loony tunes!* But Jared's up for it.

As Witson punches up Iron Butterfly, Jared pops a can and starts to catch up on the world's trivia through a host of magazines and newspapers. Surprisingly, Witson has brought an ample selection of both straight and underground stuff, clumping the *Wall Street Journal* with *Rolling Stone* and both with some street rags and the latest *Hundred Flowers*.

Witson volunteers, "*Playboy's* under the seat."

". . . like I'm supposed to know what she meant by *Why?*"

They've been chasing down their thoughts about women for the past hour. Jared followed up on Witson's bitch about "liberated women" with a racy rendition of his early years with Char. "But she proved to be a real bitching broad!" This is sheer crap and he knows it. But he's snagged, at once riding with Witson's vibes and littering the roadside with bullshit.

"More of a hippie chick than she let on?" Witson's genuinely curious.

“Believe it, man, fuck, she was some hot juice when ragged out. I mean, man, weed just boiled her pot. At times I’d think she’d just about suck my leg through my dick she’d get so grooved on sucking and sucking!” *Lies! Just fucking-A lies, man!*

Jared is incapable of talking straight with Witson. All his thoughts about women come out twisted by Witson’s prior revelation and recounting of Wargasm. At the same time, he’s equally incapable of drawing him out on the subject of Aaren.

Witson waits for Jared to cue him but only Judy Collins’ sound—almost as if scored for this specific conversation—a refrain from “La Colombe” drifts through the van.

The dove has torn her wings  
so no more songs of love  
We are not here to sing  
we’re here to kill the dove.

“What’s your game?” Jared asks in a controlled monotone. “Why are we together? Where are we going?” With a humorous twist that he relishes—and anticipated—Witson pushes in a tape of Kate Smith belting out “God Bless America.” It’ll be followed by a medley of patriotic ballads that are sure to curtail their conversation. Witson’s coup will be a big resounding climax—booming an instrumental version of “The Ballad of the Green Berets.”

“My game is your game. Answer number one.” He doesn’t pause for Jared’s comments. “We’re together because I was assigned to this task. Answer number two. We’re going to Milan, Michigan. Answer number three.” Jared, half-embarrassed, catches himself listening and humming some bars from the just-ended Barry Sadler’s tribute. All of a sudden the silliness of it all draws him over the edge into laughter. He falls into a self-absorbed well of giddiness, after which

he clears off the middle seat, balances and pivots his seat prone backwards until he is, without sound, dropping down, going under, into a swarm of sleepy images.

## 29 - THE SCAR

During the first couple of days at Milan, Jared doesn't rise from his bed unless and until absolutely necessary. He isn't into daydreaming and if he could have observed his nights he wasn't even into dreaming. It's as if his brainwaves have been altered and he's restrained at the border of alpha and beta waves. But he's not mellow; it's more like he's in suspension, hovering.

Today is Thursday, his *fourth fucking-A day here*, and he's just downright irritable. They haven't moved him out of A&O and he wants to find a permanent spot. Somewhere he can be without the remotest anticipation of being moved. He craves the feeling of being settled in. He believes he's here at Milan for the long haul, to run out the rest of his time. *Lock the motherfucking cage and let me be!*

After the late afternoon Count, Jared questions the hack. "When am I getting out of here?"

He gets a negative shrug. For the past several days, new guys have come in and others have been released into the population, but he remains. No one talks with him. That's okay. Jared doesn't seek conversation. No mail comes. No visits. He just wanders to chow, over to the stupid Education Department for some dumb movie: "Opportunities in the Waste Disposal Industry." Another time, to an automotive repair class. It's all just babysitting. *But just wait*, life's never dull in the Joint, if one is patient—"has the time."

It isn't Jared's first night disturbed by a fight. Hagglng over prices, leading to slaps and raucous cursing, is common when guys are pimped in from the gay wing. Tonight, however, it's a killing call.

"You fucking touch my fucking face and I'll fucking cut your goddam motherfucking face off!" is his wake-up. He blinks rapidly and clears the dimming fog of night. Then he sees two guys bunched together on a bed at the end of the dorm. The other dozen or so residents are also awake and listening, like good neighbors.

"C'mon, Sweet Pea, I'm not gonna hurt you. You need a man like me—don't fight it."

What is ominous is the sudden silence. Continual lover's chatter, escalating in intensity, obscenity and length not only ensures a nonviolent resolution but bestows that touch of humor that makes such outbreaks bearable, but none comes. Then, "You fucking shithead, you cut me!"

The two outlines separate, one backing up against the wall, the other dropping to the side of the bed, as if kneeling for night prayers.

"The queer motherfucker's cut me!"

No one moves. Jared's impulse is to reach up and change the channel.

"God, I'm bleeding," is so simply and childishly said that all know there's real trouble. The praying outline caves over and a telltale *crack!*—as an uncushioned skull hits the floor—detonates bedlam. Guys jump up, bang and push their beds, throw pillows and mattresses. For some it's the perfect excuse to bust a few faces. "Motherfucking fags! Kill them all!" Several gays bolt and run. Others just hang around gawking and not moving. But it's all macho posturing. Nothing happens. No fights, just standard Inside bullshit. In fact, no one approaches the fallen con until Jared jumps into the fray. He ministerially reacts to the presence of hurt as he hears the fallen con yell once, twice, three times in ever-lessening voice, "Call the guards! I'm bleeding to death!" No one responds but him.

He hurries over and kneels next to the injured guy. He starts shouting commands and his words have effect. "*Get the fucking hack, asshole! Jump!*"

Everything whirls electric. *Hacks!* Just about everyone moves, most scuttering like mice on the lam from a hungry cat. A few stay but move back a safe distance. All the screaming and yelling, the rush of guys emptying out into the TV room, all this more-than-usual commotion from the Meat Market finally draws the attention of the night hacks.

What isn't noticed is the other outline. It's been frozen, totally freaked out in that motionlessness that is absolute fear, existential dread and shock. It sees Jared as just another outline. It makes no distinctions and so it slices again with the razor's edge, enticing a draw of blood so effortlessly that it spurts forward like a chorus line, all at once along its length, in cadence, in one motion.

More than the cut, Jared feels the gush of air from the guy's strike. He cries out and recoils but not quickly enough. Red beads sprout from mid-forehead down his temple and drop to the jawbone below his left ear.

Jared tastes blood but doesn't know it's his own. He's flashing on Dikbar. He doesn't erupt into the mindless rage evoked by Bruiser. He's amazingly steady. Onlookers can't figure out why he's not screaming in pain or striking out against someone. Then Quinn surfaces once again, threatening. Striking back, Jared grabs the guy's arm, spins him around, cranks the arm upward towards the back of his head, almost not stopping at the *pop! crack!* as he busts it, almost yanks it off.

Jared doesn't see the disbelief in the eyes of the other cons, hollow-eyed witnesses to the banality of cruelty. Horror and terror mingle but they're also curiously entertained and satisfied. "Man! You really fucked him, man!"

Jared isn't listening, not hearing anyone or anything. He's struck a vein of blood lust and is ravenously sucking like a vampire. He scoops up the attacker's razor and raises the guy's right arm. As if angels sent by a merciful God, two hacks rush in just then and jump on him, sparing the guy's life and Jared's untimely visit to Death Row. His slash would have savaged the con's face for he was about to deliver a righteous blow of majestic power, one energized by a source within Jared that no longer worries about the forms of force nor their masks of violence or nonviolence. It's the presence of that Jared who long ago, deep within a mythic dream, testified that he too is a child of Cain. Who rose up and slew Quinn. It is Jared, devotee and high priest of the gods of cruelty.

The two guards restrain Jared with a choke hold and a tackle. In wrestling him to the ground they aggravate the cut on his face so that the blood loss appears greater than it is and the cut more savage. Cuffed and restrained, they haul him and the other wounded inmates off to the infirmary.

Rumors fly that night about the new guy whose face got sliced and peeled. Since neither Sean or Matt is there, and since the few resident draft resisters don't know Jared, wild rumors speedily fly about the big guy who's on hold in the infirmary. Word's out that he's the brains behind a dope ring. Then, that he's a deep-cover snitch, in here under Protective Custody. But none of the dopers or Mafioso types can place him.

Lacking the slightest anchor in fact, the rumors multiply and intensify. They range from the fantastic to the slightly mythic. It's told that the big guy threw off the two hacks, hoisted a bed above his head, and barely missed crushing a hack's skull, and that he saved the wounded lover using his torn tee-shirt as a tourniquet. Such is the juicy stuff of jailhouse confabulations. Actually, these stories work to shield him. No one wants to mess with him. But for how long?

For the time being, Jared will be in the infirmary. Others already have him tagged for the morgue. These tell that Jared was the intended target, and that the story about the two fags is just a lie to cover up his role as an FBI snitch.

Jared never hears any of this.

The con who wishes that he himself was dead is the cutter. The guy he first sliced lost so much blood that he went into shock and soon after into a coma. The slicer never learns about Jared because he has no memory of attacking him. Jared had been just like the guys he's cut in too many dreams. These, the representations of fears and abuses stemming from the cradle. It took awhile for him to even feel his shattered arm, a deformity he'll carry till his final self-execution. Until then he's fated to spend his days in Springfield, the Federal Loony Bin lockup. There his soulful whimpers will be muted by a gaggle of experimental

drugs. The fact of his murdering—of the seducer’s coma death—soon becomes a forgotten part of his memory.

“Jackshit, you’re lucky Ace Fegan is on your case, my man, best mother-humping medic in all of Ve-et-Nam!”

Such self-advertising and ceaseless chatter envelop him as this tattooed vanilla flash is fast to the task on his face.

“Look at those stitches, fella—Mother of Pearl!” He laughs and laughs. Jared flinches and squeals and slaps the steel gurney.

“Yessir, ain’t no one gonna look at you but says, *Ain’t he a man!*”

The formerly hidden pains surface; the protective shield raised by shock is weakening.

“Goddamn, man, got any painkillers, my fucking face feels like matches are being lit all over it!”

Ace Fegan, still in his green-issue nighties and personal slippers—“real rabbit fur, feel it”—shuffles over to the drug cabinet. He slips in the key attached to a gold chain around his neck and *clink!* he’s rustling several bottles.

“Red ones, whites and blues . . . Big Man, youse be feeling no pain tonight!”

Everything Ace says ends with an exclamation mark. He’s high on life without a pill, snort or a skin pop, though he is Milan’s main supplier of feel-good. He’s always having a good time groovin’ wherever he is. If fate had dealt him a different geography of birth and presence of parents, he would have made a fortune in the motivational business.

The drugs hit. Jared staggers back to his cell, he’s out like a light before he flops onto the mattress.

"Awake!"

Jared doesn't awake with a start or a thump to his heart from fright or startle in reaction to his new surroundings. Somewhere in his mind he has reprogrammed himself to expect waking to the unfamiliar. Slowly, cautiously he opens his eyes, lets them focus, ready to accept the strange.

The pain doesn't coordinate with the eyeballs, so it isn't until he starts to get up to crap that the dizziness is crowned with stabs and stings. He reaches up to his forehead, traces his stitches and the identity of his new self, "Scarface."

Mercifully, thanks to Ace Fegan, Jared's is the slinkiest of scars, a gossamer stripe that elicits more memory than immediate conversation. Only those who inspect him while asleep are confronted with the weird effect it projects. When at rest, as his facial muscles relax, the stripe thickens and forms a ditch from which a fleshy worm of whiteness emerges. It's as if his face is buckling and about to erupt, tearing away his humanoid mien and revealing the face of an alien creature.

Jared eyes his traveling box. His ark of the *hibakusha*. It's been delivered along with him, which means that he'll be in this Seg for a stretch. Actually, it feels good, this privacy. No FBI stoolies around. Time to read, catch up. Be left alone. He really needs some time alone. *Funny*, he thinks, *all I have is time*. This is a recurrent Inside amusement, and Jared plumbs its depth: *All the time you want is no time you have*.

Jared knows it isn't time that he needs. It's more like space or air—as if his soul is crying, "Give me some air!" Although he's physically sound he's slowly choking on the psychic and spiritual levels. A progressive and unstoppable vomit is rising up his throat, not just through his esophagus and associated apparatus, but through his soul, his spirit. He just isn't sure whether he's going to spew out a sickly soup and then feel good or eject innards essential to his being.

Before all this turns him to gut-clutching, the service panel on the door slides to a metallic thunk and the words “You got a visitor” spray in at him. Aw shit! Fucking-A, what now?” *You’ve got a visitor.*

*Visitor? What’s Witson up to, man?* Questions that guide him through the several guard posts, don’t pester him too much as he notices no one’s asking him to strip and bend over, but which are questions whose answer totally stuns him—*Aaren?!*

### 30 - AAREN'S VISIT - MILAN, FCI

Witson wants to fuck Jared. Not his body—no, he'd never seek that passage of pleasure. He doesn't even want to fuck with Jared's soul. Rather, he wants to mess with his mind, just the logical synapses. How else but his Wargasm buddy?  
*Ha.*

Aaren blames Jared for "All the shit that's come down! That asshole motherfucking pacifist wimp cock-sucking altar boy . . ." Nasty words without end.  
*Amen.*

To Aaren, Jared's always been a "revolutionary barrier" and—because of his commitment to nonviolence—an "anti-revolutionary obstructionist." She joined the draft raiders to topple him from within. She rejoiced when it appeared that events were going her way. But once Jared was arrested and off the streets, "the People" failed her or "failed themselves!" as she saw it.

Jared, who was a leader for so many in the Resistance, vanished from their sight as jail, the trial and then prison swept him away. After the trial, the streets of protest became increasingly empty. She watched other activists and burgeoning leaders retreat and recede in proportion to their praise of the imprisoned Three.

Aaren herself found Jared guilty on counts the government could never have trumped up. She was furious as she watched him—almost mystically from his jail cell!—weaken the Sisters. He weakened them by being the male they respected. And by respecting him, they lost the violent male warrior that Aaren has found within herself and which she knows her Sisters have to find to become true revolutionaries. Aaren seeks to transform every Sister into a violent female warrior, a Goddess of Iron and Strike. She despises the counterculture Earth Mothers who daintily hand-hoe their herbal gardens—although, deftly, she doesn't alienate these Sisters since each is a potential convert.

As fervently as a nun at prayers, she proclaims every day, "God, I hate him!"—*him* being Jared. God the Father is a distant second.

Aaren's hatred of Jared is fiercer than any love and extends beyond the throes of death. She wants him obliterated, squashed, delivered in bottles of blood and ashtrays of bones. From within her, at every waking moment and truly in every dream, rages a firestorm with which she wishes to incinerate him. She *is* napalm hungering for fetal flesh.

So after hanging up on Witson, she laughs. It's a brief chuckle that doesn't convey the depth it caps. Just a short burst of air, quickly stopped, kept mostly inside, swallowed back like a cork settling atop a magnum of champagne that's released only a slight hint of its effervescence. Her fearsome rage she presses inward, directing it towards a plan of revenge.

"How can you work with Witson?" is a question Aaren ignores. Even her most terroristic comrades are taken by the question. They who bombed the Federal courthouse, they who burned down a black church and a synagogue, they who leaked the raid information they knew would drift towards the FBI and snare Jared.

"Have you forgotten? Do you cower, now?" Aaren castigates. "I act to heighten the contradictions!"

For sanction, she quotes from memory from their bible, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, that ever-at-hand Little Red Book of the truly disciplined.

Contradiction and struggle are universal and absolute, but the methods of resolving contradictions, that is, the forms of struggle, differ according to the differences in the nature of the contradictions. Some contradictions are characterized by open antagonism, others are not. In accordance with the concrete development of things, some contradictions which were originally non-antagonistic develop into antagonistic ones, while others which were originally antagonistic develop into non-antagonistic ones.

These revolutionary dwellers inside the barrel of the gun, these Maoist aspirants, they could now understand her discipline, her sacrifice of working with the snitch, the turncoat. "Witson's part of our plan now," she says ever confident in the *correctness* of her own *self-criticism*. "He's screwed on so wrong that now he's opened a door for us!"

Witson sets the meeting at the Black Forest, a south Minneapolis drinking hole where he's met with her before when in deep Weathermen undercover. He knows she'll feel safe there, although the place is bug heaven. He does it because *he* feels safe there.

"The Forest," as it is coded, has been wired since the beginning of the local Honeywell Project, formed in 1968. The Project confronts the major anti-personnel bomb manufacturer, Honeywell Corporation. "*Marv Davidov. Check him. Russian Jew. Redlined long johns. Walrus moustache. Smokes like the fiend he is!*" The Forest was wrapped even tighter with video eyes right after the break-in at the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania. *March 8, 1971. For Hoover, J. Edgar—a day of infamy!*

Witson is pleased that the Forest electronically hums. Especially since, over the last several weeks, the Feds moved to place an ear against, cast an eyeball upon, and goose, juice, drill, dope or tap any source however remotely related to the Pentagon Papers.

Aaren appears in the way Witson always likes to remember her: black on black, severe, all in all looking like a starved witch. He's always been fascinated by that hollowness of eyes which others try on only as cosmetic, but which, for him, defines her special allure. Aaren strides over, moving towards him on muscles about to explode. He senses, *She's primed!*

A few beers, a lot of bullshit bravado, awkward remembrances, and then, "What do you want? Drugs, get him to escape . . . rape me, what?"

Witson grins like a kid, amused because she's just as they first described her: *How much the trained canary.*

"Hardly. Nothing like that."

Aaren's eyes are vaguely visible, cloaked by the smoke of her desire to kill. Witson's seen such eyes among the Phoenix Program teams, assassins who sport gentle killing eyes. "No. Listen. I want you to seduce him!"

"Fucking *what?*"

"Right. Good. Yessir, seduce him . . . with your Innocence." He says it with a capital I. Then he pauses, slowly fills a glass with a high head and blows at the foam. "Right. Good. Seduce him." Two breaths' pause. "But not with sex. With love . . . adoration . . . saintly desire."

"Don't fuck with me, shithead!" Aaren slaps him. She reaches across the table and rocks him with an open-palm *whack!* on his right cheek. He spills half of his beer. Only the darkness and smoke keeps them from becoming a scene. Witson is startled and a bit unsettled but his lightning-quick memory immediately compares forecasted alternative scenarios and thus he assesses this as victory. In response—a response that puts her in check—he leans closer to her but with no comment about her violence. "Right. Good. Yessir. Just like that. I want you to slap him silly with love." Witson flops back into his chair, satisfied, observing. Aaren doesn't respond.

Later he'll report, "Like a beaten dog, she was waiting for me to be her master!" exuding an air of success. But right now, "I want you to fuck his mind, blow his every cortical connection, and suck his soul dry! Get me? Right. Good. Yessir. I think you're just getting me now, aren't you. I want you to be Eve. Become the substance of his Innocence. Have him desire you beyond his lust for God. *Slay him!* Slay him with his own heart!"

It sinks in slowly. Understanding seeps out slow and long, almost a whistle, "Jesus . . ." again, "Jesus!"

Witson is patient.

"Jesus, you're fucking good, do you know that, Witson? You're fucking good. Too bad you're such a running dog. You'd've made a great Revolutionary. You really know how to work the contradictions."

Finishing on her own terms, Aaren gets up and quickly exits the Forest. There's nothing more to say. She's to become the shiv of ultraviolence that she's always wanted to be. Hers, to enact the primal mythic revenge. Now that this role is granted her, she doesn't care to consider its source.

Early next morning Aaren draws up her plans of preparation. She's charged up with commando ferocity. She works out with every armament available to her soul. She pages through her family's photo album, her high school yearbook, gleans every feminine charm and wile from *Ladies Home Journal* and other sputum of The Man's Woman. Cleverly, she closely observes her Sister, Char.

Although they've been living in the Bread and Roses commune, Aaren has kept her distance from the clique of Earth Mothers who spend their time talking about gardens and herbs, giving one another massages and—*fools!*—exploring erotic rituals for nonviolent sexuality. So during the next month Char doesn't know what to make of Aaren's sitting in the outer row of the weekly Sisters Weave meeting. Especially her joining in the singing, "Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free . . ."! She's been coming faithfully. It's strikingly clear to everyone that Aaren is—*all of a sudden!*—listening to the Sisters. She's even taken to dining with them at their monthly "Bread of Life" meal—a potluck reeking with leeks, garlic, aromas of curried Indian delights, and littered with homemade breads, flat, round, and multigrain. To all accounts, this is a new Aaren. Not she of the bombast

denunciation, the snicker and black humor. The new Aaren is a quiet, absorbed, attentive Sister.

A rumor of hope sallies forth among those who want to believe that Sisterly love is converting and healing this slave of the Weathercock. When they dine with her—these once derisively called Earth Mothers—they pour her healing herbal teas. Touch her affectionately. Tenderly embrace her as “Sister Aaren.”

Aaren loves it. *What a gas!* Like Judith infiltrating the Assyrian camp of King Holofernes she plots using their own arms to breach their security. Within, she continues to hate them as much as him. “Sissies,” she spits the words, reporting to her Revolutionary cell, “just dumbass broads who fuck nonviolently!” She spits again, for she wants only Sisters who are true “Sexual Revolutionaries!” Not just lesbian or gay or bisexual. She wants to destroy all those labels, those categories. And sexual violence is the way to shock, break down and break through the “false consciousness” that separates male from female. Shame, humiliation, ecstasy, pain, even gentleness—whatever is necessary to achieve orgiastic ecstasy, these are each and all the Sexual Revolutionary’s weapons. Aaren wants Sisters who embrace each other atop the bodies of slain cocks and cunts. Warrior Sisters who dream in blood.

Aaren doesn’t tell Char about her upcoming visit with Jared. She doesn’t reveal anything to anyone outside her Maoist cadre about her plans. Even among these comrades she doesn’t reveal her full intent. This is a task that calls for a special Revolutionary discipline. It’s a mission that she believes only she herself, alone, can properly execute. For she knows Jared’s erotic desire, has received and repulsed it with ridicule and revile. Out loud to the Sky Goddess she swears, “I’ll suck his cock . . . with my ass! And chew him up with my foul mouth till he’s sucked into my bowels. And I’ll crap him out on Lake Street like a mound of dog shit! Steaming, like a cold-teat Sunday morning in January!” During this

preparation Aaren majestically becomes the incarnation of Jared's poetic tag, *Liquid Fire*.

As Aaren watches Jared enter the visiting room she doesn't notice the scar. She's too self-conscious of her own looks. It's been years since she's worn a dress. She's uncomfortable, blushes—an affect that she could not have commanded but which serves her well now. To the Watcher, Aaren appears embarrassed by the tryst, but in fact she's momentarily overcome by a flush of inadequacy. Then, as Jared sits down, the slash appears. She gasps and reaches towards him. "Oh, dear, you're hurt!"

*"All kneel at the Sixth Station of the Cross: Veronica wipes the bloody face of Jesus. Veronica steps forth to ease his pain with the coolness of her veil."*

Jared reflexively recoils from Aaren's advance. Not from an aversion to her, rather from her unintentional imitation of the cutter's slash. He flinches and lurches sideways, almost toppling over and just misses plunging into another seat. Avoiding that, he does manage to grab the top of another chair and stand but only to trip over another chair leg, catapult backwards, ass dropping all two-hundred-forty-odd pounds of himself onto yet a third chair and, with the impact of a small boulder, it cracks. Painfully, but humorously to the Watcher, Jared crashes to the floor.

Before he can recover his composure, the Watcher is on top of him. But realizing that they're alone, and since this visit has a peculiar authorization, he uncharacteristically bends down and helps Jared up. Without words between them, the Watcher abruptly leaves.

Jared motions Aaren towards a pair of seats by the back wall. He's rubbing his bum. "Sorry, fuck, I'm a little jumpy. Sorry 'bout that. Shit." No handshake, no embrace, no touching: these all lost their appointed places. Now they're simply here, visiting, he and she.

In the queer way that prisoners get over time—a queerness marked by a nervous directness, imbued with the undercurrent, “Are you going to kill me *now?*”—Jared asks, “Why are *you* here?”

It’s accusatory and to him appropriate. It carries with it a subset of vigorous questions: *How did you know I was here? When did you know? What do you know? Who do you know?* But Jared frees only one and waits. He’s too stunned, happily paralyzed to even remotely consider that Witson has a hand in this.

Jared is a prisoner. He yearns for redemption, forgiveness, absolution. So when she comes at him like a log floating towards a drowning man, he’s euphoric. *She loves me!* It conjures a fantasy image: *She’s battered down the walls to rescue me!* In a reversal of roles, she’s the brave Princess, atop a snorting steed, come to free the Prince from the Tower.

Both are drawn into the play. Each is the other’s audience. Both suspend reality for the sake of the daydream. Together, they are willing playthings of the gods.

Jared senses Aaren’s desire to touch him, to be touched by him. She struggling to find a way to convey, “I’ve changed”—but as a tactic, a ploy.

He doesn’t know what to make of her apparent change. More, he’s frightened to know her here in this place. Warily, he shrinks from her touch, and all they embrace is the void between them.

Jared squirms. It’s obvious that he’s tremendously uncomfortable. His anxiety makes him rub the scar.

“Jared”—the way Aaren says his name almost sedates him—“Jared, I love you.” She says this with such genuineness, conveying such acceptance and invitation, that it doesn’t spook him as under past circumstances it would have.

Jared looks at her with eyes distant, a bit entranced. She repeats, "I love you. And I bring you Char's love. So much has happened since you were locked up. So much that I'm not sure I even want to try and explain it all. But know this," he's enrapt, "there are many, many people who are concerned about you. Who are attempting to keep track of you and who yearn for your release."

It's a sweet sermonette, almost a bouquet. She's showering him with the fragrant delights of a hundred rose petals. But Jared is still Lazarus in his wraps.

"Who are you?" slingshots them back to their last meeting.

Unexpectedly, Aaren bursts into loud laughter. Tears come to her eyes, not of sorrow but of comic release. Prepared as she is for this question, she prolongs her laughter as she stands up and moves one seat closer to him. "I am you, aren't I?"

It's just too much, too quickly. All his dreams, all his wild imaginings, and *here right now in this place!* she's rushing with bridal innocence into his arms. *Sweetheart Aaren* is smiling. Jared is the drowning sailor, paralyzed in his decision-making by the suddenness of the capsizing.

"That's true, metaphysically speaking, we are," Jared responds. Instantly, the oddity of his reply causes him to laugh at himself, bellow, sniggle, and through bombast of shared laughter they relax into the moment. "Metaphysically!" Jared repeats to himself, shaking his head, wondering what she's thinking. He jokes, "Jesus, I'm a fucking professor even at the moment of my execution! *Metaphysically*, man! Fuck." He watches her, grins. "You freaking crazy Weathermen are all metaphysical."

As if cued, Aaron moves quickly, states, "I'm *not* a Weatherman anymore. That's over. You can ask Char."

Although her name was already spoken, this is the first time it snags Jared. "Char? Why would you think I'd talk with her? In fact," and here he starts to

unravel again, agitated, “if you’ve spoken with her, you know how we last left each other.”

Aaren is pleased. *My plan . . . Perfect!*

Aaren reaches over and touches Jared’s hand. “I know. I spoke with Char right before I came here. The biggest news I have is that she and I are Sisters. It’s the most wonderful, incredible, totally far-out thing that’s ever happened to me . . . I am truly *loved*—by her, our other Sisters, and the Goddess.”

Jared is deeply moved by her tone and the passion in her words. He’s aware of her touch, the smallness of her hand, her warmth penetrates him.

“You are *changed!*” he says. It’s almost a benediction.

Not missing a beat, Aaren responds to this next cue. “It’s true, Sweetheart, I am . . . and so, so many people are being changed. It’s almost like a new world being born.”

*New world.* That’s what he heard from Carmody—another former seminarian— just about a year ago when five of the guys came to the Men’s Consciousness Raising Group all decked out in light purple silks. All they could talk about was, “It’s a new world out there. A gay world!” Then later that same night, the rugged, fearless, *fuck the government!* Dave said, “If you couldn’t sleep, you should’ve woken me. I’d’ve beaten you off.”

Just during that single night, there were so many flip-flops. Not just from the dopers in the group who always seemed lost in time tunnels but from the in-the-street Resistance activists. It was like one day this, the next, that. Flip-flops from being a Baptist Jesus freak to a Maharishi devotee. From being a laid-back hippie to an evangelical small businessman: “Organic farming—this is *pure!*” It seemed from that night forward, flops were flipping from straight to gay, or actually for most to bisexual. *Whatever!*

Yet Jared knows that stage center in the revue of the *Best Flip-Flops* is "Jared's Great Escape." And right now he doesn't want to go there. So he shifts the topic.

"Hey, the war's still going on! Right."

"Oh, yes, right, I see, true. The war . . ." she says, almost blissfully. Aaren's tone baffles him.

"Hey, Maoist Momma, man! *The* war. Remember? Fuck. Like why I'm in here. There's a war going on, or *shit!* did I miss something in the paper today?"

His irritation conveys his need for a connection. *Of course he needs the war*, she figures. *It's how he's still linked to us*. This opens a new avenue of attack.

Aaren shifts to a topic she's confident concerns Jared greatly. "The Pentagon Papers have been having a dramatic impact on things. I really believe they'll hurry the end of the war. Have you been able to keep up with them?"

"Papers, schmay-pers. Who cares that now 'We know that they know that we know that they knew all along that they're lying'?"

The symbolism of this radical action, like the one against the FBI in Media, Pennsylvania, is simply stacked in Jared's shelf of bygone moral acts. "I mean, man, I admire this guy Ellsberg. Shit, he'll probably get buried in here for life. Or worse, get shot. He hasn't been assassinated, has he? Fucking-A. Great, cool, but like us—and I mean this, unfortunately it's true—he's just another great sacrifice to the God of War. We're all too fucking late, too many body bags too late. *Shit*. He's just another fuckhead for the grinder," and as he pops this image, Jared rotates his arm, grinding an endless line of faceless convicts into prison mush.

"*Tsk!* My, my Jared," it was a touch of sarcasm edging a feigned shock, "I certainly never thought I'd hear *you* be so cynical. Are we changing roles? Like you're becoming a heavy-duty disciple of the *inevitable class struggle* and I'm preaching a spiritual optimism? Isn't that rich!"

She's set him up, positioning for a strike. Aaren's aware that she has limited time on this visit, that she has to move quickly, dramatically. She readies to move in for the kill. She draws closer to Jared. She grasps his right hand and places it upon her belly. "This is not a murderer's womb!"

Jared is totally blown away by this tactic. He's instantly angered, shocked, dumbfounded. Aaren has stabbed him in the heart and dredged up the worst of his fears.

He rips his hand off her body. He wants to but can't ask, "She's aborted?"

She deftly draws his hand back, this time to her heart, and speaks with concern and compassion. "This heart brims with love *for* the Sister, not *of* the Sisters."

Jared's eyes tear up, for he hears the message within her message, tastes the forbidden kisses of his dead son. *That bitch Char killed my son!*

Aaren senses his thoughts and moods with the instincts of a twin sibling. She half-rises and nestles Jared's head upon her breasts. She pats his head as if her child and whispers, "I love you. I love you with all that I am and will ever be!"

Aaren silently releases him, kisses his forehead. She smiles a wispy, sweet smile, then stands, crosses the room to pour two coffees. She's a chocoholic and pours four bags of sugar into her hot brew. This interval releases Jared from their shared romantic reverie. Like being slapped awake, in a click, it's brutally apparent that he's once again in prison. Not wanting the visit to end, he looks around the room, checks the time, only to discover that he has a hard-on. It came deceptively, rose quickly without the fanfare of small pleasures and conscious mental images. It's bound so tight and stiff that it pains him. He has to spread his legs to adjust his pants. Aware of the Watcher's eyes, he stands, turns his back to snatch a bit of privacy and jostles his trousers. In vain—he can't hide it. It jerks on its own. The erotic pressure from inside is intense, the arousal on the outside frenzied.

Jared turns to look at Aaren. Her dress works its transforming magic. On legs that once only wore black denim, that gloried in appearing rough, mannish, even military, now her full-length, paisley cotton Earth Mother dress clings and reveals her soft sensuality, even exposes the gentle fullness of her ass. Paisley flowers waterfall gracefully down and around, cascading down her thighs, ending with a kiss of a jade bracelet-laced ankle. By every little thing is Jared being drawn to her, seduced. The glint from silvery earrings. The faint, sweet smell of lavender. Aaren is a dazzle of scents and whispers of succulent surrender.

*Jared springs upon her, slamming her to the ground. Her head bounces on the floor. He tears at her dress, no bra to deter him. He licks her teats, roughly strokes her belly, side, reaches down to open her pussy. Pain screeches to her head but flees into an alley of numbness. His cock is gouged in small rips as he wrenches his zipper but feels no pain.*

*The frenzy revs and revs. Unrelenting, he drills her, pokes her, prods her, poles her, clanks, sinks, yanks.*

*All done!*

*Like the whipped remains from the high-speed churn of a kitchen blender, he licks her from his fingertips and says, "More!"*

"Hot stuff!" Aaren warns as she sets Jared's cup on the table next to his chair. She looks up and is momentarily confused. But then not! Jared's stare evokes that shock, that reflex response of women sighted as prey in *The Chase*. She captures in that fleeting exchange all the communication, all the messages, all the power she sought during her Weatherman years. It's what she thought Wargasm would bring—men who are raw! She had desired to sip their raw juices, dribble them onto her belly and smear them all over her aching nakedness. But not now, *not Jared!* Not at this time. Not here. Distraught, she can't escape—she's *trapped!*

Aaren freezes, wordless. Jared's straining to restrain himself, exuding an energy field of tortured lust and unrequited passion. Through this field's fierce

erotic-ohmic resistance she extends her arms and grips Jared's shoulders, grips strongly, firmly. He is as close as a glove. Aaren the short and Jared the tall merge—she stretches on ballerina tiptoes, teeters, almost topples into his arms, but her own fierce resolve holds her steady.

Together, for this moment, they are a palpable mythos— a Real Presence. He and She. Male and Female. God and Goddess.

She steadies herself and says, as if making her wedding vows, "I . . . love . . . you!"

This echoes within him and he happily whispers back, "I . . . love . . . you."

The Watcher observes these events but judges them unrecordable. This day is, all in all, quite peculiar. When first briefed, he was advised to expect a blow-up. To anticipate the strike and anger of physical contact. If such happens, he was told to turn away. Against the basic rules, the Captain took pains to state that, "If sexual things happen—you know what I mean," he was to look away. More unusual was the directive to *not stop* copulation in any of its degrees. Despite all this, it's turned out to be a ho-hum visit. He's eager for them to call it a day.

"I . . . I . . . I can't deal with this!" Jared sits down, sips his coffee, sets his cup back down. Aaren sits, pivots towards him. Her knees are touching his, her right hand rests on his left knee.

"I understand. Really, I do. Sweetheart, I sometimes think I know what you're going through, then I realize how stupid it all is. Like we thought we knew what it meant to be oppressed. We were just full of shit, like we weren't dealing with who we really are."

Aaren releases a short laugh, "Words are funny, aren't they?"

Jared turns, releasing himself from her, stands up and begins to pace. "I . . . I guess I can accept this. Fuck. No, well—maybe—man, *should* would be a better word. I always hoped you'd change. Shit. I don't mean that to sound as stupid as it

does but I always thought there was something you and I were sharing. Damn. But now, well, sure, maybe there is, maybe there isn't."

Jared wants to go; realizes how much he craves to be back isolated in Seg. But how crazy it would be to turn to her and say, "Would you please go now, I want to be alone!"

As if on cue, his wish is fulfilled. Aaren checks her watch. "Oh, dear, Sweetheart, they said I have to be out of here by four." She gets up, gathers her things, gives him a peck-kiss on the cheek, and leaves as if this was a staid, timeworn, daily routine. The casualness of her exit confuses and baffles him. It throws everything that's just happened into a jumble. Cleverly—*wickedly*?—as intended, she's leaving him feeling more alone, more solitary than he's ever felt.

Her objective is fulfilled: "Rush to the edge of the cliff . . . then pull back!"

Midway on her walk towards her car, she starts to skip. It's a childish romp. She's more than quite pleased with herself. She's triumphant, "He's mine!" That's all she reports to Witson, then hangs up.

Every day, month after month, Aaren writes: loving letters, adoring letters, letters of promise. "We will begin anew! We'll go to Oregon. Raise children. Lead a normal life. You deserve that. You deserve the best!" Words, phrases, adjectives, subjunctives: all lies!

Aaren's letters have the censors laughing. Not a word do they strike nor a thought suppress. The Warden's Directive #437 is clear: Aaren's mail goes through unopened, but in the same bureaucratic memo they are charged to reject Char's letters, few that they are. To stamp hers, "Subversive and Incendiary." They are not to be returned, simply retained in Jared's file—the one forwarded to Witson at month's end. Witson arranges for Aaren to visit twice a month, no matter where Jared is on the Ride.

### 31 - GODS OF CRUELTY - MARION, FCI

Waking up, Jared's forgotten where he is, still thinks he's in Milan. *What does it matter?*

Jared is greeting his scar, stroking and rubbing it, picking at specks of scab and dead skin. He's learning how to be someone with an attractive face, not in the sense of beauty but of horror. From now on people will inevitably ask, "What happened?" His face will have no anonymity.

With the tattoo of the slash, he needs a story to tell, different versions for different people. But what's the main rap? That he was heroic and tried to save someone, who then struck him? That he was an idiot who walked into a rabid dog fight saying, "Here, puppy!"? That he's done time? Been a "prisoner of war"? What's the theme and its variations?

For Jared, the scar's not such a big thing. He's rarely even given much thought to his face. He's the type of guy who paid more attention to it when it was a scraggly face eager for a full bushy beard. Since he's been bearded and de-bearded, *who cares?* He's never been into tonsorial style, rarely even looks at himself. In fact, philosophically, he gets a kick out of the fact that humans go through life with other people's faces. That they spend most of their time seeing themselves through the facial grimaces, smiles, and gymnastics of others.

"The mirror," he often commented when speaking about images of maleness, "gave us *personal* terror. Humbly, the burden of seeing our own ugliness. Before the mirror, 'I' takes many faces. A group face; something of a mosaic. And if I don't like the deformed or the ugly face I'm looking at, I can rush over and contemplate someone beautiful. But, 'modern man,' we're stuck with ourselves! Singularity. Individuality. The curse of too much knowledge. The curse of knowing ourselves!"

He laughs, remembering how much resistance he always gets from the kids whenever he asked them to live just two days without looking into a mirror.

As Jared finishes musing on his scar, he sighs deeply and slips into a moment of blissful rest. He leans his head against the wall. Half drags his legs to his chest. A

flutter of sunrays brush across his face. He's warm, slightly blinded warm. Eyes closed, he floats off into a deep red, blood warmth. His teeth unclench and in a blink he droops, sags back under a wave of sleep, a baby's slumber. Deep into muscular relaxation, leaden in stillness.

"Jennings!" It's a friendly holler, like a "My good buddy, Jennings!" hoot.

"Jennings, get off your duff! It's rock and roll time!"

Jared wakes but refuses to rise to face the man he dreads seeing because this fucker sacks his dream world and profanes it. He's less than you want him to be but more terrifying than you could ever fantasize because he is power in the here and now—he ends things.

Yet to an outside observer, the Ride is having its effect. A bit like the Stockholm Syndrome where captives begin to befriend their captors, in such a small way Jared has begun to call Witson, "Steve."

Steve smashes his face through the cell bars, grinning. Jared doesn't utter a word, hopes that by not responding the face might evaporate, dissipate, blip out like a TV screen. But the words have a life of their own. They demand, because they are commands, not addresses. He hears the key scratch and the lock's metallic *thunk!* The gate opens . . . it's no longer Segregation, it's Integration.

Steve's pumped up, juiced as if arriving on the scene to announce, "Freedom—the war's over! You home! Go on, get out of here!"

He steps in and over to Jared's bunk, knee-bends, lowering his smallness to poke the con nose-to-nose as if not needing a handshake now that they are good buddies.

"Glad to see ya!" Steve smiles, pushing out his teeth in mime.

Two, three seconds and Steve's back up, swivels and heads towards the corridor, throwing over his shoulders, "Rock 'n' roll! Rock 'n' roll!"

Jared moans, "Fucking no! Fucking shit! Goddamn motherfucking...!"

But he's resigned; has no choice but to be. He dresses and shuffles towards the door, the institutional mouth ready to spit him out. Honestly, this morning, Jared doesn't want out, he'd just gotten in.

He stops. Turns around. Walks back to his bunk. Stoops and grabs his toiletry box, his ark of the *hibakusha*, stows it under his arm and proceeds measurably, toe by toe, footprint by footprint, pace by pace into the sea.

The cruel sea hums a morning lullaby to him, "and you want to travel with her / and you want to travel blind / and you think you'll maybe trust her / 'cause she's touched your perfect body with her mind . . ." He walks into the sea a drowning man ". . . He said all men shall be sailors then / until the sea shall free them . . ." *Buried at sea*. ". . . amid the garbage and the flowers / there are heroes in the seaweed . . ."

It's the same routine of exiting. No chains, don civvies, hop in the van—as if Lewisburg was just a pit stop. "Have a breakfast brewskie!" shouts Steve as he pops and guzzles one, hits the accelerator and they're *on the fucking-A road, again!*

Curiously, once the van hits the asphalt Jared's bemused, also a bit perplexed as he realizes that he feels "at home" here in the van with Steve. That he's happy in this spot, this seat now ass-molded to his fit. He's really glad not to be in Seg or among denizens of the iron bars. *Fucking-A, Kerouac! I'm on the road, digging the Ride! Whooooeeeee!*

It's a turning point, like the time he sat on the steps outside the College of Saint Clement's campus church. *It's 1966*. He's sitting under the church's massive banner of concrete, a trapezoidal affair that rises from arches that span a hundred

feet wide and forty feet high. It looms on a horizon seen for tens of miles. As if sacred earrings, it is bejeweled by a set of carillons. He sits and sits, waiting for the death of the last clangorous peal, ending the seductive melody set forth by God as a snare to catch the ear of all wayward worshippers. Jared just sits there, waiting for God's belled voice to mute, and then does *not* go in for Mass.

It's the first Sunday in his life that he's ever missed Mass intentionally. For some it would have been a small act, one excusable, forgivable. Without doubt, a grievous sin but one not mortal. Yet for him it is *the* primal act—chosen, conscious, with bitter intent. It heralds to all, "I am not going in, for my God is *not* in there!"

*Is God here, on the Ride?*

Steve throws the first cast of the day, snags and reels Jared in.

"They told me you had a visitor?"

"Yeah, fucking yeah, man."

"Who was it?"

Jared is touched by the role he now knows Steve is playing. He's actually grown fond of him, in a zoo animal's way of appreciating the zookeeper. But no bones about it, Jared's still convinced that Steve is the ultimate hack.

"C'mon, good buddy, you know it was *youse guys*. Hey, shit, maybe even you, man. Was it you who called Aaren?"

"Cross my heart," and lies, "I was as surprised as you must've been." *Aaren wasn't surprised*. Steve pauses and seeks to redirect the conversation. "Say, I truly didn't expect to see you again so soon. Thought I might have maybe a couple of weeks off. What did you do *this* time?"

"Do? Fuck your '*this* time'!"

"You can be straight with me. When I left, I was headed for a bit of R & R in Hawaii. Imagine how pissed I was when they told me I'd have to escort you to Marion."

"Marion?"

Marion, Illinois: a maximum security federal penitentiary. One blood-soaked step up from the medium security FCIs that have been serving as Jared's main lodging.

"You must'a been a ba-a-a-ad boy!" Steve needles.

At one time, the sound of *Marion* would have chilled Jared the way Steve hopes it is doing right now. But Jared's more curious than afraid. He's just short of "Eager to see a real slammer, man!" Marion has the reputation Hollywood loves. *The Pen*, a veritable *Big House*. He already sees James Cagney walking by his cell. Hears him scream at the hacks who have cornered him as he tries to escape, "C'mon 'n' get me, you dirty coppers!"

Feigning a heart attack at hearing "Marion," Jared blurts, mockingly, "Okay, okay, shit, you got me, I'm ready to talk. Squeal. Rat out my brothers and sisters! Just don't take me *there!*"

Both half-laugh. Steve hits the accelerator as they speed up and onto the freeway, head west on 80. Jared looks over his shoulder and scans the middle seat. Sure enough, Steve has refreshed the supplies. He reaches for a Coke and a bag of chips and while popping both he falls back into their lying to one another mode: *Believe me, it's true!*

Casting his own line: "Aaren's changed. She's not a Weatherman anymore."

Steve grabs his throat and gags, "Right. Okay. Yessir. Sure and I'm a virgin!"

"Hey, fucking-A no surprise, maybe you are. I never said I ever believed *anything* you told me. Like this Hawaii thing—c'mon, 'Agent Steve,' level with me.

You knew Milan was a stopover. Lewisburg, too, I bet. Tell me, is Marion the end or are you also working for Greyhound?"

"Nice scar," Steve answers as a distraction. "Want to tell me about it?"

Reflexively—and it's a reflex he will not consciously control for some time—he touches it as if reminding himself that it's truly there. "Just a lousy shaver, you know, that's why I always wore a beard. Just cut myself, man."

Both realize that neither wants to be the mouse today. Steve knows what he's got to do, so this chatter isn't that important. He pushes in a Rolling Stones tape.

"Jesus, I hate those motherfuckers!" Jared bitches, but Steve leaves it on. He can't resist the barb, "What's the matter? Can't deal with Altamont?"

Jared reclines his seat. He isn't going to listen to Steve or tune in on the Stones. After Altamont—"Fuckheads!" is all Jared ever says about them, "Great music but real fuckheads!" From his perspective, the Rolling Stones gave back to the Establishment—America with the two k's, "Amerikka!"—what Woodstock had set free.

At Altamont, four months after the first *kosmic!* rock gathering of the Age of Aquarius in upstate New York at Woodstock, the Stones let the Hells Angels run security. Whether they sought them or they just came, Jared didn't care. They delivered the ultra-violence and black death that "Everyone knows is the dark heart of rock 'n roll." *Four people dead.*

*Steve knows his game, Jared is convinced. He has it all choreographed. But what is the final dance? And who's calling the tune?*

Jared is highly confident that Marion is not going to be the end of the line. He knows that he's on the Ride and *it* is the end of the line. He knows this with an

acceptance of Matt's summation, *karma*. Pissed, Jared disconnects from Steve and rolls back into himself.

Whether it was the steadiness of the road—a steadiness accompanied by several routine *stop-piss-coffee* events, at times a few stretching calisthenics—or the line crossed when he was slashed, whichever, Jared can now enter and exit daydreaming like clicking on the TV. At one moment he's jousting with Steve and the next he's actually living a scene from the past or the anticipated future.

"Okay, Pretty Boy, we're almost there, yessir, so listen to me." The allusion to *pretty* is in line with the new moniker Jared acquires. In prison vernacular he's now both Big and Pretty. But the latter carries the perversity that prison is, meaning that he's ugly in body and soul. To his benefit, to be Big and Pretty is to make the first impression of being "one badass motherfucker!" Or a "Down on ya dude!" Steve uses it to let Jared know that he has his number.

*Aaren's changed. She's not a Weatherman anymore, hasn't left Witson's mind since Jared spoke it. It can't be true! He must be lying.*

He can't accept that in one of these visits Jared and Aaren have not violently attacked or harmed the other. He's genuinely baffled. He cleared the way from the Boss down through the Wardens and Watchers, setting it up so that it would be inevitable. *How could he not fuck her? Why isn't she blowing him to Wargasm and back?* Steve expected reports of wild, brutal sexual violence but none came.

Their visits are filmed and he's spent nights watching each several times. It boggles his mind that Aaren acts the way she does. He's convinced that she's acting. "That bitch! She's a better actress than a cocksucker!" he swears after he ends his monthly report.

*Am I in control?*

Aaren's failure spawns a wild plan. Witson smiles at himself as he silently shouts, "That's it! The only way to really fuck him up is to turn him into a guard." In his mind's eye a file is stamped, "Genius!"

An hour outside of Marion, Steve's flying down the road, fearful that Jared might suffer a reverse mood swing. He's still somewhat unbelieving as they finally drive through the gate, park, and Jared jumps out, *ready to go!*

Within fifteen minutes, Steve has set the stage, dragged Jared through "Costume and Make-up"—has him put on a hack's uniform! (*What the motherfucker now?*)—and signaled Control to roll back the gate to Cell Block D on B Wing. Without a mirror, Jared can't gauge how the audience sees him. He still feels like the hobbling convict, chained and linked from hands to feet, a transfer shuffling behind his keeper. Yet something inside—*Quinn?*—shouts, *Do it!* ... and so he does.

What Jared doesn't see is himself as hack—as that image of ambulatory authority, instant executioner, existential judge and jury. More astounding, he's an icon. The uniform draws out the savagery of his Celtic and Teutonic genes. It's a cloth of transformation. Steve notes, *Great! He looks . . .* a nip of jealousy, envy, a touch of a lack of self-worth cut the sentence short.

Jared: Tall, broad-shoulder muscular, with a face that bears a battle scar. Armed to the teeth: pistol, cuffs, blackjack and "the bat," that cross between a baton and whip, the bastard son of modern chemistry, a plastic composition which, in creative hands, can bludgeon or whip— "plastic steel."

What follows is Marion as a Disney attraction, "Prisonland." Steve tows Jared and barks like a tour guide. Jared is amused, disconnected in a way, sort of observing himself from above, floating, not really in his body. Through the Inside magic of the moment Jared is securely tethered. Steve's the slave master bringing his Northern abolitionist cousin onto the plantation. It's all attraction/repulsion,

approach/avoidance but, at the bottom, a pure validation of the cruelty. Jared doesn't revolt. He is now a god of cruelty.

"Hey, nigger boy, Old Tom there, quit playing with yourself and get over here," Steve commands a barely awake elderly black convict. He's rattling, clanging the bars with his bat. The old man walks over, not cursing, not hurling obscenities, just quietly; he places his hands on the bars.

"Yasser."

"How long you been in here, Tom?"

"Twenty-five, sir."

"Have you learned anything, Tom?"

"Yasser."

"Tell me, old nigger."

"I'se learned not to mess with The Man."

This the old con says with steady fire, with a peculiar dignity. It's as if the sentence sums up his caginess, all his street smarts. Conveys why he's alive and still pulling time. But more, it's a statement of his history, his grounding in his own story, a connection to his people, time and—although it escapes Jared at this moment—his God.

Steve stretches his hands through the bars and pats the old man on the head. Not with the vigor that one tousles a boy's hair but with the same intent.

"Good, Tom, you can go back."

"Yasser."

Without comment or question, the two move along. Steve picks up the pace, quickening, as if sensing his quarry.

"Are you two fag breaths licking each other's assholes again?" Steve fearlessly presses his face between the bars as he raucously laughs at two overly-tattooed guys. Jared notes they're adorned with Hell's Angels and White Power symbols and slogans. The two inmates bound over to him, a kiss away from his face. "Ya la'tel shitface, puke ass cocksucka, ya ain't man 'nuf tu open the cage en fight me lake a man!"

It's clear that they've met before. "Your schlong must be ten feet tall by now, cranking it like you do. Here," and Steve makes as if pulling something from his shirt pocket, "here's some pussy perfume. Go bang the toilet, fag breath."

Why the inmate doesn't rip Steve's eyes out is beyond Jared. *Who is Steve? What's his real story?* Unspoken, these are not questions to break the spell. Performance over, Steve is now several steps ahead of Jared. Behind him, all Jared hears is laughter. He doesn't look. He's jogging to catch up. If Jared had looked, he'd see a con, arm hanging out the cell, pumping a finger of *fuck you!* as the scene closer.

Steve and Jared quickly pass through several cell block gates and arrive at what is obviously Segregation. Here there are true torture holes. No pastel blues, no simple isolation. Nothing solitary about it at all. It's dark, and many uncountable creatures are present. The smell of the site—*phew!*—weakens Jared. His knees quaver imperceptibly, like when he walked into the cemetery to bury his dad.

"This one's yours," Steve says as if they've been keeping score and Jared's been complaining about not enough times at the plate.

"What?"

Instead of answering, Steve firmly shoves him inside a cell. Jared's facing a wall of darkness. For a suspended moment he just stands there—"hung out" as the lingo goes. *Vulnerable.*

Suddenly Jared is vigorously and harshly shoved backwards, body-slamming Steve who's behind him against the doorframe as a dark voice growls, "Ya muthafuckers stay outta my face!" It's a voice that could kill—it has a metallic edge. Again, Steve shoves Jared forward and this time, somewhat adjusted to the dank darkness, he staggers to a standstill in front of a large black youth. The guy's not as tall as him but wider, sculpted like a Nubian Adonis. His body glistens as if he'd just been doing push-ups. *A keg of rage!*

The con swings at Jared, batting down his raised left arm. The force of the blow pitches Jared off-balance. He awkwardly hops and half-jumps a step backwards. He fires a bewildered glance at Steve who's leaning against the cell grate, at rest in an observer's pose, arms folded, almost like a professor—lacking a smoking pipe!

"Hey, man, cool it, shit, I'm friendly . . ." But the guy knows all types of cop talk and takes this bullshit jive as a trap. He jumps on Jared, moves expertly with street smart battle skills, locks his neck, a death choke. Stunned, not prepared in the least for this—not thinking that this is what Steve meant by "being a hack for a day, take a trip to my side!"

Before Jared even taps into his fear he feels his throat being crushed, can't draw in any air, claws at the guy's hands, wrists, desperately trying to loosen the grip as everything quickly turns dark and fuzzy . . . He's wrestling with Quinn! Overpowered, freaked, fearing death...blacks out.

"Aw, shit . . ." Jared doesn't hear as Steve comes to the rescue. He flies from the guy's blind side and with a few quick and expertly placed karate chops lays him out. The guy's sprawled out, ass up on the floor, partly on top of Jared.

In a vale of semi-consciousness, Jared starts writhing, gasping for air. He's smothered by a weight of blackness, deafened by screaming shooting stars of silver pain and red-hot blood comets and drowning in black sweat. Steve hefts and heaves the inmate with his right foot, rolls him off Jared. Then, without even asking if Jared's okay he glowers and chastises, "Are you *totally* insane?" Sternly, before the question's fully heard, Steve answers himself, "Good God, you're a fool!"

For several minutes, the scene is a diorama. No one moves. Then, as if the final bell has rung—*it's over!*—Jared catapults up, heaved by some alien force. He's standing tall and pumping his chest with rage. Without intent, Jared stands menacingly over *Steve, the Short*.

"You're the fool! You walked me into this blind. What the motherfuck did you think I was going to do? Shit. Walk in here and beat the crap out of him?"

"He's black."

"What the fuck?"

"Can't figure it out?" Steve abruptly turns and starts to whack the back of the unconscious youth with his bat.

*Dikbar!* Jared forcefully grabs Steve's baton, lifts and heaves him away from the body.

Steve taunts, "*Do it!* Show me you have some balls!"

Stunned, Jared flicks an intentionally symbolic bat swing at Steve. It catches Steve's nose and, to Jared's astonishment, blood flies, a soft *crush!* whimpers and Agent Witson crumples into unconsciousness.

Steve's slumped body—a heap of powerlessness.

"*Quinn at the ready, sir! A fiery match? A kick to the head? Perhaps a blow to the groin?*"

Jared's deeply, deeply encaged chthonian fury for revenge is aroused.

"What did you do to get him so angry?"

What did I do? Dad . . . . What did I do?

*Revenge: His scrawny body he's worked so hard to build up—willed it to grow tall and taller! A hundred push-ups, a hundred pull-ups, a hundred sit-ups, a five-mile run every day, every week, every year—his own boot camp regimen. Quinn joins the para-troopers—Jared enters the novitiate. Dragging himself, kneecaps scraping every inch around the perimeter of the chapel: thirteen Stations of the Cross. Scourging. Tears of blood. Hammer and nails torturing out the weakness.*

Jared hears the mythic invitation. Every male seed hears it: *Revenge is redemption! Be a man, son. Don't cry!* Yes! Jared feels in his clenched biceps the urging of all who have done it. "In His Name!" "God wills it!" All who have sought validation through this one redemptive act, hidden in the abode of the powerless, here, within a recess of a penitentiary.

*Who'll know?* It's not an FBI trap. No one's filming this escapade. He notes, he's obscured by the hole's intestinal darkness. *Who would be the wiser? Who would come forth to testify?*

From out of the hole—truly the sphincter of life—Jared excretes the black youth, not in body but in soul. Hack talk: *You're just a piece of shit!* He whacks him again and again. *Strike, blow, lash, wop, smite . . . !* There's a pleasure registered on a scale measuring historical pain. Jared—*Quinn!*—becomes giddy at the *thud! thump! crack!* jolt of the body. *Rise up, my son, for today you are a man!* Profound moral and physical release and relief spurts from him as he watches the whites of his victim's black eyes roll around, deliriously. *Quinn is dead! Long live King Jared!*

The gods of cruelty are well pleased.

Gasping awake, Steve is half up, still on the ground, grasping his knee; blood crawls from his nose. Jared picks him up, literally hoists him with both of his hands, clawing his chest, and brings him lip to lip. "You're just a piece of shit," he says quietly as if intoning the Mass's dismissal: *Ite missa est.*

Jared places Steve, carefully and gently, just outside the door of the hole, sets him there as calmly as if taking out Thursday's trash. As he shuts the cell door, he pauses a second. *Why did Steve beat that guy senseless?* It's the mythic trick—*flash!*—Jared instantly flips and his role is forgotten.

Tears flood his eyes, tears boiling with rage and fury at Steve's brutal beating of this helpless black guy. Jared raises his hand in blessing, strokes the air with a sign of the Cross, whispers a kind, loving, priestly, "God help you, my son!"

Steve's a flop of semi-consciousness but he can hear himself being praised; lauded for evoking from within Jared that simple urge to kill, to defend. Even if he, Agent Steve Witson, is the designated enemy! Not that Steve expected Jared's attack. Hardly, he had long doubted that he would—no, *could*—do it.

Jared, beyond weary, chooses a spot across the hallway from Steve. Back against the wall, he slowly slimes to the floor. Then he closes his eyes and labors unsuccessfully to bring to rest all the conflicting emotions. He's totally battle-fatigued, plunging into utter exhaustion of mind, body and soul.

How long did each guy snooze? *Whatever*, it's Steve who blasts back into Jared's consciousness as if what just went down juiced him.

"C'mon, Pretty Boy, the show's not over yet!"

*Steve's back!* He's upright, bandaged, smirking; waking Jared by play-kicking his humongous feet. Not pausing, Steve exits the scene, struts down the hallway, assured that he's the shepherd and his lamb is following. Jared the Obedient, Jared the Amazed—truly amazed at Steve's resiliency—ambles behind him.

Steve, without turning around to observe the impact shouts, "I'm glad they shot Harley by mistake!" He doesn't wait for Jared or say anything more about what's just gone down or about Harley. His banter and romping gait indicate he's in

a better mood than ever. It's as if they've bonded through this escapade. Jared hurries to keep up with him, striding in silence.

As everywhere else, so here inside Marion, they simply stroll past a couple of Control units and through a handful of sliding gates as if walking through a mall. In several minutes they come to an area with single cells like Seg. But it certainly isn't Seg. Several of the cell doors are wide open. Streams of bright light stream out and bathe the corridor. Jared has a fleeting image of hothouse flowers growing inside these cells.

At the last door on the block, Steve stops and raps with his baton as if tapping a gong. He stands back, poised, clearly anticipating a response. The door is just a quarter open when "Stevie!" is half-shouted, carried by a voice filled with age, as if overjoyed and surprised to see a relative. "Steve! Stevie, my boy! Come on in."

Just a step behind him, Jared is inside before his mind acknowledges what he sees. He's inside a scene clipped from *Architectural Digest*.

The room—for inside it's certainly not like any cell he's seen—is fully decorated. It's slightly more than a studio apartment but appears huge and lavish in respect to its neighborhood. Almost all the wood and furnishings are pure mahogany. The knobs and faucets are shiny brass. A ceiling fan, containing a crystal glass light fixture, spins dreamily overhead. A full range of kitchen essentials fill a nook—tightly compacted but with all the necessities—which is separated from the rest of the room by an artful divider that exposes cherished items which reflect both a cultivated personal taste and substantial wealth. Jared's eye is caught by what he knows to be a reliquary: baroque, small but fabulously crafted. He recognizes it as a depository for a martyr's bones.

"St. Francis of Assisi," clarifies his unasked question, "and the craftsman is Borghilini. It's the only one extant after the Frisco quake."

The voice belongs to a slightly stooped, half-bald old guy whose once proud Roman posture and bearing have been relatively uncrushed by age and physical deterioration. His voice glides through the air with a confidence that it will be welcomed by whomever hears. The old man looks towards Jared with eyes that dance and express a merriment that betrays the environment.

Steve handles the formalities. "Mr. Fraticelli, this is Jared Jennings." He doesn't pause or lose inflection, "A rookie with the team."

Fraticelli has a firm grip, a smile that draws folks closer, and the steely eyes of a leader. Steve and Jared both sit as he points to the chairs he wants them to occupy.

Without comment, Fraticelli tinkles a bell and in line with all that is transpiring another convict appears at the doorway. "Bring some coffee for *mio figli*." Then he walks over and slides open a cabinet panel, exposing a golden thermos and several liquor bottles. "If I remember correctly, my dear Stefano, you like a bit of the snake about this time of day."

"Ah, Papa, you have an exquisite memory!"

The old man laughs as old men do when flatteries are offered which affirm that they are losing their faculties. "I am not dead yet, *carissimo*, but even if I live forever, I will never remember a scintilla of what *you* have forgotten."

The substance of this exchange eludes Jared but the warmth, mutual knowledge and genuine affection do not. He has fully forgotten where they are.

As the trio drink, refill, and smoke the largest but most sensually gratifying cigars Jared has ever had—*hand rolled, private stock, Cubanos*—Papa and Steve gambol back and forth across names, events and memories that underscore the character of their relationship. It isn't that they ignore Jared, rather, that they permit him to be an observer of their intimacy is compliment enough.

The old man accepts Jared's unexplained presence. He knows more than anyone about Steve's role in the Agency—anyone except the Boss.

When the sandglass falls to empty, they rise and take their leave with the same gestures of politeness that marked their entrance. Papa places a hand on Steve's shoulder and gently shakes him, the affection of a man saying a small goodbye, in case they aren't together for the big one.

When asked, "Now?" Steve responds, "To the airport." As he drives, Jared jostles out of his hack costume and slips and jerks back into his traveling clothes.

"I guess you want to know about old man Fraticelli?" Steve wants Jared to know.

"Yeah, sure, man, shit . . . him and the rest. What was *that* all about?"

"I'm trying to unmake a fool! *Fool*, you tell me what *that* was about!"

Jared snaps at the bait. He's genuinely pissed about being jerked around. "I'm no one's fool but my own! I'm a fucking fool for putting up with this." He yanks at the door handle, not that he's going to jump out, just that he wants to dramatize a point—but it doesn't open!

"*Fool!*" Steve gloats.

"You even control the power locks! What a fucking hack!" Jared ramps up his attack. "You're the fool, Steve—or should I say, *Stefano*? You think that what went down back there means something?"

Steve snickers at Jared's bravado.

"Good God, kid," he condescends, "you *are* really a jerk. You're making a believer out of me. I'm almost believing all the innocence you've projected."

Jared shifts his body sideways, ass to Steve. With no apparent gain at hand, Steve stops sparring. Both simply distract themselves through enjoying the beauty of the sunset that singularly blesses the Heartland.

“Mr. Fraticelli,” Steve commences the lesson out of nowhere. “Mr. Benedicto Fraticelli has been living in Protective Custody for twenty years. Did you figure it out? That it was PC?” He states all this with a tone that betrays his astonishment and amusement that genius Jared has probably not figured it out.

“He’s an underworld legend. There’s more power concentrated in that room than in all of your Fortune 500 board rooms. He has a staff there, guys who are fully versed in all this latest stuff on computers and satellite communication. Guys even take falls just to serve on his staff. Incredible, right, isn’t that what you’re thinking?”

“Well, fucking-A man, I saw it. It wasn’t just Hollywood.”

“Bet your booties it wasn’t. Dig this, *hippie Resister*, the thing about power is, it plays both sides of the street. Papa—that’s what he likes to be called—got the Agency off the ground by being its biggest nemesis!” Steve laughs at his own cleverness. “He was ferrying dagos and other aliens in here and causing all types of troubles, till he and the Boss met. Then things changed. Papa’s our first *relocated witness*.”

Jared wants to say something but doesn’t.

“He was sent up on a bogus murder-one rap, but some say he really wanted in. That he chose Marion and personally designed his whole operation from A to Z.”

Jared can’t resist trying to untie the knot. “Where do you fit in?”

“Right. Fair. Yessir. That’s—that’s—okay, that’s too long a story, and there’s nothing you need to know about it. Just trust me. Just accept that I’ve been very

useful to him, and he's been very useful to me." All of this makes Jared half-expect to look at Steve and see Humphrey Bogart or H.G. Robinson behind the wheel.

*Dikbar!* appears, jolts Jared's memory. "But the others, especially the black kid in the hole?"

Steve heaves a heavy sigh, like a man throwing off an immense weight. Annoyed, instead of speaking with relief, he expresses the desperation of a teacher who has repeated the same lesson a hundred times over only to see the student repeat his initial mistake. "Power. P-O-W-E-R. *Power!* What *is* wrong with you? Do you come from a different planet? Do I have to tell you how to think, tell you how to feel?"

The hum of the road becomes slightly audible. Jared blurts, "That's not power, that's abuse of power. You can't have power over someone who's powerless. That's just murder."

Steve: "Power's only defined by its abuse. Who would know the power of the State if prison was *not* degradation, humiliation and murder?" He pauses, waits for the correct answer, hoping he can give his favorite student an "A."

"You felt that power?" Steve asks, expecting the worm to turn.

"You mean the black kid? Shit, he only took me by surprise."

"But you—"

"But I what, motherfucker? *You* kicked him when he was down. You think that's power? It's shit. Only nonviolence is power. Only it can change things. I pulled you off of him."

Righteousness is Jared's hammer. "I protected that kid from you, asshole, even in the fucking-A hole in fucking-A Marion. *That's* power!"

*Amazing! Denial. Delusion. Self-deception.* Steve can't believe it. Jared flipped out like he planned but not into acceptance of his violence—into further

denial! *Should I have expected a conversion?* But then he gets it. He remembers 'Nam. So many guys after doing shit after shit, senseless rapes and murders, would say, "What?" if asked how they felt. "About what?" from some nineteen-year-old who would be on Death Row back in the States if he'd done it here. *Jennings is shell-shocked, in night-terror denial. Damn.*

Steve snorts and sneers, rolls down the window and spits. With dramatized moves he takes out and finger-rolls a Fraticelli cigar, bites the end, licks it gratifyingly, and with a Zippo flames it. All this is but a delaying action. He waits until he exhales several fluffy clouds of smoke before responding.

"If we gave power to that black jackrabbit, he'd just kill you. *Fool*, he almost did. You'd be talking with God right now if I hadn't been there. *If* we gave power to that white queer trash, they'd just fuck your asshole and jack off in your mouth until you died. Then they'd crush you. Fraticelli, he has power, and he lives at its source. It's the source that the ole nigger testified to. Papa is the power. That what his 'Yasser' was all about."

Jared feels compelled to testify, knows that he believes, wants to believe: "You think the old black dude is under your power? Jesus, Steve, you're the naïf. He was the only truly free person in that whole fucking joint, including you and me and Fraticelli. Man, fuck, you've got it all ass upwards and backwards. You wouldn't know power, shit, if it was bottled and you got a magnum for Christmas."

These words close down the day's chatter. Truth be told, Steve and Jared are seriously wearing on each other in a way they haven't before. *Stoned on the Ride and coming down!*

Steve's relieved in a way Jared is not because he knows that the Ride is soon to end. *Just one more act to go!* After tonight's plane ride and the next stop, Jared will either be ready to meet the Boss—for what reason Agent Witson has no idea—or . . . Steve's not sure what comes after "or." Just knows that Jared Jennings, 8867-147 will be out of his hands. *Finally!*

### 32 - CHAR'S RIDE VISIT

Jared writes a lot about prison life and the extra quirkiness of the Ride. Most of these letters are fated to remain in Witson's file. It really doesn't matter to him, for he only cares about Aaren's letters and the occasional one from his mom that finds its way to him via the mysteries of Steve's connections, wherever he is on the Ride. He never gets any from Char, definitely hasn't been expecting any, not after his parting words to her—*I will hunt you down ...!*

*Quirkiness.* Jared knows that if it could be explained, the Ride would merit the adjective *quirky*. It's the main reason he writes every day. It's a matter of maintaining some level of sanity. He can't trust himself to remember accurately what doing time, being Inside, flitting about on the Ride really is like. So he writes, gives the letters to Steve. Mails them to his future self. *Let it be, let it be, whisper words of wisdom let it be! . . . There will be an answer, let it be!*

*Space travel: time travel.* In prison, the dream is real and reality is a dream. It's a fluid situation, one best described as "in flux." The distinction between what's real and what's a dream ceases to exist, or at least to be meaningful. Jared fluctuates throughout the day, being "there" and then "there"—sitting right over there in clock time while actually living, breathing being somewhere else in dream time. This is what *doing time* is about—an experience that shifts between "normal" reality and being out-of-body, traveling through dimensions to other realities and dreams. Amazingly when in the joint, he always returns just in time for "Lock-up and Count!" It's all as bizarre as it is cruel and amusing. *They don't call the joint "Stir" for nothin', ya know! We'se all stir-crazy sons of bitches!*

How to explain to those who have never time traveled or slipped through dimensional space that he meets Char while walking in a penitentiary Yard? He touches her, feels her, asks her for the time of day. Then at night, he's outside the perimeter fence, walking the streets of Minneapolis? At other times, in other dimensions, back in conversation with the Novice Master? When he so desires, Jared's deep in a theological conversation with his dad, or playing ball with his brother, Joey—both of whom others judge as dead.

Char's also living on strange landscapes. Friends have been blown up in Vietnam and Weatherman factories. Too frequently she hears that a dear friend or Sister cashed themselves out using drugs. Others, like herself, have broken through to more mystical experiences. Most exciting, now she's a mother.

Not a single mom because all the Sisters help out. It was strange delivering without Jared there but she is glad that he didn't know and still doesn't. Off a bit in her original calculations, she delivered early at just past eight months. "Good Lord! Just imagine how worried he would have been knowing that!" In her heart of hearts, she'd like to report to him, "Mom and child are healthy and happy."

Given that their last visit at Millston was such a disaster, Char didn't worry when Jared initially stopped writing. She wanted some time away from him, also. Although she didn't voice the fact, she knew that he wasn't going anywhere, anytime soon. She couldn't risk visiting while showing, so she blocked out any negative thoughts until the child was born. "It's a boy!" she heard—"Unbelievable! On Jared's birthday!" August 6, 1971. Now the child is two weeks old and she—*At least I don't look pregnant.*

Forebodingly, something inside Char tells her that something drastic is about to happen. So when Agent Witson unexpectedly arrives at her commune, spins his story about the Ride, and says that he can arrange a visit, she's not surprised, though somewhat wary. *Him?* She knew he was coming—she'd already welcomed him here today in her dream last night. *It was him!* To her relief, *forebodingly bad* is immediately checked off: "He's okay, Miss Clark. Not to worry." She's happy that her foreboding seems to have been about something good. When Witson leaves—he had not asked about the child but knew everything from Aaren—she goes upstairs, picks up their son and coos, "I'm going to see your daddy!"

However, everything comes at a price. "It's agreed? You won't tell anyone else about this?"

"Okay."

"None of your Sisters or the Collective?"

"Sure." She hesitates. Witson anticipates, "Just make something up. Say I came to ask about how his mother's doing. That I was thinking about getting her to visit, again. Something. You're a clever girl." Then he starts to leave, stops, speaks as if forgetting the most important point, "And not him. Especially him. You won't tell him we met?"

*Agreed—agreed, agreed, anything agreed!* Unhappily, Char nods yes to Agent Witson. But inside, happily, *I'm going to see your daddy!*

*Denial.* At the moment the child was born, Char went into deep denial. During her pregnancy she suppressed the memory of that horrible, murderous nightmare visit with Jared. *Abort the child! You're unfit to have him! I do not want you to touch my child! Hear me clearly, Char, you cannot, I mean it—I command it!—you cannot have this child. If you do, now listen to me, if you do, I will hunt you down!* Now, even deeper denial. A curious mother's shield of protection—she does not want to think bad thoughts about "Your daddy!"—she whispers as she kisses him, lifts a breast to feed him. "Your daddy loves you so. He's here," as she touches her breast, "this is his body and your body," she sighs with pleasure as her milk flows once again, "*our* body!"

*Foreboding.* What Char doesn't know is that Aaren pressed Witson to arrange the visit. Until his superiors told him otherwise, Witson repeatedly rejected her request. He had just moved Jared out of Marion and didn't want him to get the idea that he was going to arrange for visits along the way. Like Jared, *Thy will be done!* is Steve's attitude when given orders.

For Aaren, Char is one of her most effective and cruelest weapons. The baby's here now and she's confident that when they meet Char's broadsiding him with both her not telling him that she didn't abort and then making him feel the

loss, even the guilt, of not being at the birth, will rekindle the rage that ended their last visit. Actually, she's hoping it will be more than rage—a double dose of fury at her for fucking with him over the abortion mixed with the poison of his being so powerless before. Aaren has gained an in-depth grasp on Jared's psyche during her Ride visits. He's babbled and babbled, slipped her out with him during escape dreams, taken him to meet people—his dad, brother Joey, Dikbar, even Bruiser—that he forgets but she doesn't when the visit is over. It is her meeting with Quinn—unintended even in dreamland—that made it clear how to break Jared: *Make him feel as powerless as he was with Quinn.*

Char's Ride visit is over. "They said I had to leave at three, and here it is." She stands up, straightens out. "I know this might have been more painful . . . that it's probably more confusing to you than even to me, but when he told me, I knew I had to come." Steve drove Char to a small town county jail somewhere in Ohio. He asked her to wear a blindfold for the last half hour, so she did. *Weird.*

For the first time Jared touches her. He didn't embrace or kiss her when they first met. Now he sculpts a space for her within his soul. He draws her close and hugs her, very, very gently. *What more can I say?*

As she leaves the visiting room: *Why even now couldn't I tell him? Why did I come?*

As he goes back to his cell: *Why even now couldn't I tell her? About Aaren's visits?*

This night Jared is on his knees, naked, baring all of himself, inviting the touch of creation to remold him, reincarnate him on the spot, position him for the rest of the Ride. Out loud he asks, "Has Char really been here—today?" And if she has been, did his dream become reality? He's been so confused. He wakes from dreams feeling exhausted, at times ritually wiping invisible blood from his hands.

Questions have come to him whose answers he is not ready to hear. *Did I bludgeon her as Witson—me?— did that black kid? Did I beat the bitch like I did Bruiser? Did I watch the surgeons scrape her belly clean, pull out all her insides, force her to eat my son, my sacrifice? Did I hunt her down as Quinn did me? Beat her, break her bones, set her on fire?* He had dreamed all these violences before, often. He had actually feared that upon seeing her he would kill her. But after Marion, he's waken too many nights drenched in sweat, panting, fearful that he is a killer—become a devotee of the gods of cruelty. He dreams himself as Quinn's disciple, one of his henchmen, as one with Quinn himself pleasuring in sexual violence, ultra-violence.

*Has Char really been here today?*

Jared prays and prays every prayer that ever meant anything to him. Desperately—because he no longer believes in the power of prayer—he implores saints of every ilk and blessing from St. Jude, the Patron of Hopeless Causes, to St. Anthony, Finder of Lost Objects, to St. Anne, Mother of Mary, Grandmother of God. He prays with sound and feeling, whimpers and groans. He petitions through pain and fatigue, loneliness and desperation. He yearns, he beseeches, he grovels.

*Jared finds her in the lake—naked, swimming. Moving with a suppleness unfamiliar to him. "Hi!" she waves her arm, beckoning. "Come on in, Jared. It's terribly warm . . . and delightful."*

*Jared wavers at the lake's edge. His hands want to shed his shirt and pants but the paralysis creeps closer and tighter. The water's kiss of foam beckons to his feet but fear pushes him back.*

*"Come on in, Jared! Come! Come!" Char's swimming with delight. Pleasure glistens her body. Her long hair floats in undulating waves around her; it caps her*

*head with reflections of sunbeams like a liquid crown. Floating delta of female birthing. Gliding on the Earth's moist valley. Quietly, patiently, beautifully it moves, thrilling Jared's eyes with a hunger deep-shot to his toes, alluring, drying his mouth; unspeakable words.*

*"Come, come on in," Char calls, again and again, floating, bobbing, gliding. "Jared, it's so wonderful, so wonderful!"*

*Backing away, throat dry, hands oozing fear, Jared plunges away from the shore, repulsed by the foam. Running, running, the words catch him, imploring, whispering on the wind: Come come on in come Jared it's wonderful!*

It's always Char's eyes—her look! Right through me to my soul!—that lure him into the deepest of dreams and startle him as he wakes, finding her looking at him. Jared laments, *She's out there. Inside here. And all that I've been is nowhere, stuck in-between.*

He remembers her sweet words, "Jared, before I leave I want you to understand one thing. I ache to be with you. Understand that, please. Being with you is always a joy—a mystery, but a joy for me. I store no dislike or displeasure in my heart. I do love you. I wish that love were enough."

*Jared finds himself amid the wreckage. All others have died. He alone has survived.*

*"Is this survival?" he asks himself. The pain in his left leg throbs.*

*"Is this me?" The plane is slashed and gnarled, its beauty destroyed, its strength mocked in its death among rocks. To himself Jared laughs. He knows that he will die here. Die slowly—cursed, to survive just to die. The other bodies are secure in their places. Placed there by a destiny defying all. They lie mashed beyond recognition. All once strong, healthy bodies, now seeking the release of*

*decay. So much pleasure and pain, Jared giggles into the pain of his leg, so much now dropped from the sky and but a smear, but a droplet upon the Earth.*

*It seems to be too much, too much the snickering laughter of the eternal gods. Now men lie as feces on the stones. These strong-hearted males strewn like piss drops in a vengeful desert. Jared moves his leg again, raising and propping it on a rock, leaking the blood toward his heart, wishing for relief. He wants no sensation. He wants no awareness. He wants merely to rest here until death comes. All he asks—my final wish—is to hear the footsteps. To be told, "It's a boy." Then he could go, knowing that final vengeance is his.*

Awakened, he says to himself, in an effort to convince himself, "She was here, I know it."

Once home, Char goes straight to Aaren. "He said not to tell anyone I'm *going*, not that I *went!*" So Witson be damned, she's talking to her soul Sister—as she now sees Aaren.

"You didn't tell him?" Aaren questions softly, with a surprised inflection, but it's just a passive-aggressive mask as she fiercely restrains the rage boiling inside herself.

"It's not real *in there.*"

Char picks up her son—sees Jared alive in his eyes.

### 33 - WOMANFIRE

*Char is your target!*

After the West Eleventh Street townhouse explosion in New York City back in early 1970, talk among the Weathermen focused on the image and reality of “underground.” Those who had been spurred on by the *West 11<sup>th</sup> Martyrs* began to practice a discipline of steel. They hammered their bodies into warrior stamina and thrust their minds into kamikaze mold. They armed themselves and festered inwardly.

Their vision was of the inch; life was without memory of the previous moment or planning beyond the next. Now, after her Milan visit with Jared, a bit over three weeks ago, recruiting “the true Vanguard” is the obsession that sets Aaren on to Char. She tells her Vanguard Sisters, “When *she* comes with us, more of the hippie and radical feminists, even many of the war resisters will come.”

Like the faithful renewed by the fire of the Holy Spirit after a Sunday revival, Aaren’s eyes glaze over as she ponders the opportunity Steve’s given her—Steve, who she still thinks of as “a ninny, toad, running dog. Smart, but not as smart as us!”

Within herself Aaren has no doubt that she can and will convert Char. “The correctness of our ideas and the purity of our vision make it inevitable.” She trumpets, “Victory is ours!”

Her zeal for Char’s enlistment borders on incautious. Fortunately, she’s tempered by the advice of several other Sisters. “Don’t let your enthusiasm outstrip your evaluation of the situation. Otherwise you’ll end up like Joplin and Hendrix and that dead Door you once so adored—dead yourself!”

Concerned, those who make the bombs, the technicians of the Revolution—who merely have to not place the *red negative* where the *yellow positive* belongs—these who are disciplined at the flashpoint of blast and oblivion are the ones who pull her back. For she’s gotten too juiced. Back from her recent visit with Jared, she started into her old ways, the habits that those more sober among the Sisters know

are her short route to apocalyptic ranting. "She's already preaching daily sermons from Mao's *Little Red Book*. How many times have we heard, 'Leaders must march ahead of the movement, not lag behind it!'"

When she's not in earshot, they chuckle a bit at her "over the top commitment." "Goddess protect us! It's that *and* Jimmy Hendrix all night long!"

Aaren benefits greatly from her ongoing visits with Jared. For the first time she's actually Inside, not just a jail but a prison, "The Slammer!" She loves the melody of the clashing bars! Hears the message of their simple song, that it will not end as the Apocalypse nor with the *boom!* gone nuclear in the mushroom cloud. No, it's now clearer than ever. Aaren holds that prison validates the truth of Ho Chi Minh's statement, "We will outlive you!"

"This means," she proclaims with all the fervor of discovery, "this is what all revolutionaries must prepare for—to *live!* Not to die." She asks her cadre to consider, "They were suicides, not sacrifices, these much idolized self-immolators of the fall of 1970. Neither anti-Christ's nor new Christ's. Don't revere Hendrix, Joplin, or Morrison! It was simply their Eve of Destruction. Let the damn counterculture die with them!"

For her, the hippie movement is just crap. Lies and crap. "It isn't a peace movement, a culture that values life. No, Sisters, comrades, just the opposite. It's a death movement. That's what the Holy Trinity of Jimi, Janis and Jim are all about—dying. Look at that puke Lennon. He's Revolutionary Enemy Number One!"

She derisively sings a refrain from his song, "Revolution."

If you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao,  
you're not gonna make it with anyone, anyhow.

"Fucking asshole!" Lennon takes center stage on her Wall of Crap.

Aaren can't stop herself once her evangelical fervor resurfaces. So at their weekly Maoist cell meetings, she plays Lennon's song for the cadre because it jacks her up, motivates her. "See, he's linking revolution with sex. If you're a Weatherman, he says, you're not going to *make it* with anyone, anyhow. That's pure bullshit! Just the opposite. When you carry pictures of Chairman Mao, you're gonna make it with everyone, every time!" Often this is her segue to chanting, "Wargasm! Wargasm!" It's a spark to a powder keg. The cadre picks it up, forms a Congo-line and dances into the central living room. They merge: one into the many; all into the one.

"Wargasm! Wargasm!" The chanting brings chilly heat and shivers of lust to her image of Char. *Conquer Char!*

Char turns towards Aaren as she lifts the steaming kettle. Tea is prepared, a soft peppermint sweetness that Char knows is a healing anodyne. She's conscious of the moment, of the sharing of water with her Sister.

"It's wonderful. That we're Sisters," Aaren says, "but aren't we more than Sisters?"

"How do you see that?"

"We are Mothers!"

"Mothers?" Her tone frames the oddity of Char hearing that word from Aaren—this woman, now Sister, whom Char has once indicted before the Collective as wanting to be Father and All Male.

"It's just thrilling! Imagine, Mothers . . . being Mothers is the *only* correct anti-imperialistic stance!"

Char settles back in her chair, opens to being pleasantly surprised by this shift in Weathermen ideology. An ideology that Char always believed could never, would never, bond women.

Aaren: "It's the Fathers who are the imperialists. They who seek to usurp our birthing rite. *Glory be!* Thank the Great Mother! They have become their own undoing."

"More, tell me more."

"In the Bomb they've concatenated their power and simultaneously rendered themselves impotent. For who can wage a nuclear war and live? Their atomic logic has fallen, crushed by its own ferocious powerlessness."

Char is pensive. They sit quietly for several minutes, sipping tea. Aaren's patiently moving Char up one rung of the ladder at a time.

Aaren: "Marx is right on about religion as the opiate of the people, but he failed to see that the Father—himself, that bastard wife thrasher!—made sex their religion."

"I didn't know the Weather's become so spiritual," teases Char.

"Goddess! It's wonderful. Listen, my Sister, do listen. Please, open your mind. Eve's transgression was sexual. The Father's expulsion condemned Eve to a life of total submission to the cock. Woman's sexuality was obliterated. The Male creation story is a sexual genocide, like Vietnam, like our Native American brothers and sisters. We—women, Goddesses, mothers, Sisters—were rendered invisible."

Char: "Not so. It's just the reverse. Men need women for birthing. If anything, Adam was alone . . . and he *had to have* a woman."

"Revisionist Christian crap!" Then a dead silence. Aaren's response has blasted out before her internal censor could artfully guide her tongue. This phrase is one of Aaren's stock condemnations, often hurled in heated discussion when debating with Christian feminists. She instantly regrets losing ground. But just as quickly she reevaluates the timeliness of this tactic. *Sometimes you get more flies with shit than honey!*

"Jesus fucking Christ, sometimes you are a dumb-assed broad," Aaren spits at Char, then stands, goes to Char's chair and swats her teacup to the floor. Char is frightened. Aaren's a storm of violence.

Char wants to say, "Sister, this is also my house. Not a Weathermen's barrack. Get control of yourself," but only her mute fear addresses Aaren's eyes.

After several tense minutes, Aaren turns, closely facing Char. Her tone is conciliatory, sisterly. She employs a tactic of reverse psychology that one Sister taught her. "Turn empathy into antipathy into sympathy," was her instruction.

"Sweet Char, look, I thought they needed us. That we needed them." Aaren kneels down before Char.

"It was my fantasy . . . Jesus I can't believe I really believed this. What an ass, but never mind. Listen . . . I wanted a cock, and I wanted them to have a cunt. I wanted men and women to be equal with a capital E, Equal. For both to bear children, for both to be bisexual—revolutionary hermaphrodites—and all that shit." She waves her hands about as if to dispel thoughts now gone rank. "I always—Jesus, you have to believe how captured by *false consciousness* I was!—I mean, I always made them butt-fuck me. True. Made them promise, *You can have pussy but you got to fuck my ass!* Oh, Jesus fucking Christ, I wanted them to fuck me as if I were a man."

Within, Char is gasping for air. She's never ever desired what she deems not only useless but painful. She's never asked; was never asked.

"Char. I confess this. We did . . . fuck butts . . . jack off on command. Goddess, what a mess! But listen, hell, we don't need them, get it? The Sisters' future society will be cockless because we can harvest sperm and by then raise babies in test tubes."

"Wait, stop. *Stop!*" Char stands, steps back, turns and walks away from her, halfway across the room. "This is all loony tunes. You're sounding like an acidhead

on a bad trip!" She walks about the room, stopping here, touching this and that, trying to ground herself in something solid.

Aaren presses on, "You must understand! You must strip yourself of their every dream. Root out and destroy their myths. You must become Eve revenged!"

"But—" Char turns, spins slowly one way, then another. She's feeling odd, like something magnetic or magical, something truly powerful is reorienting her brain's neural pathways. "But what can that mean but more violence?"

"Eureka, Sister, yes! But Womanly violence, Motherly violence, the violence of Kali. We must become Black Widows. Females who once and for all and forever kill the Male, castrate him, gut him. *Sexual technology can set us free from him!* We must abandon him to his masturbation—that's all he wants anyway!"

"Never, never . . ." Char is resisting.

"No, *ever, ever!* It must be done forever, now and for all time yet to come. Imagine and rejoice! For we can now seed ourselves. The ultimate contradiction of Capitalism is not just political, not just the Stateless State, but the cockless ecstasy. We don't need them. Can't you see how clear this is? You must join us, the Vanguard—*witches!* True revolutionaries! *Women without cock!*"

Char resists, shuts down the evening. "No, this I cannot go with." She touches her belly, then her breasts. They know the male. Too much of Jared is still present to her in the room upstairs. With a tone of finality, Char states, "This is all too much violence."

Clever as she is, Aaren withdraws at Char's request, but she also stays on point. Her words are carefully chosen to imply a shared bond and an expectation of further conversation. "Just think about it, *Sister*, just dwell on it a bit more." Aaren leaves. They don't hug.

In the aftermath, Char realizes clearly that she definitely did *not* enjoy the meeting. As much as she sees the rightness in Aaren's lightning bolts of change,

she's left with cold dreams. Searching for more information, she doesn't seek Aaren out, but does ask around, "What's she doing? Where does she go every day when she leaves the commune?" But no one knows. Some think that she's visiting the Weatherman underground. It's a hot rumor that her Weathermen faction is planning a major event. *Ha!* There are always rumors about Weathermen violence, although little has happened since the explosion at the jail.

Aaren continues visiting Jared every other week. She intentionally doesn't talk about Char. Even when mentioning her name seems logical, she finds a way to sidestep. With her Maoist sisters—her cadre does go underground in a fashion, for only her and another comrade remain working to pay the bills—she focuses on forging deeper erotic ties, practicing true revolutionary sex. They go deeply underground in psychic plunge and shadowy rage. They merge their sisterhood with dark witchcraft, forming a coven that is communal in all ways sexual and violent.

Wargasm sessions are now twice a week. Wargasm works to keep the cadre together. It releases all the pent-up anger, outrage and desire for revenge that rises from their ideological analyses and oppressed lives. All together—with a companion cadre of Weathermen "radical cocks"—they break down their sexual, personal and political inhibitions. The upshot is a wild, orgiastic, crazed, frenzied event at once athletic, erotic, maddening, even fulfilling.

Aaren often takes the lead position. Within a musical ocean they swim and are tossed about by hard rock and acid rock. Often they are thrown up onto the beach by the force of African beats, heart-thumping drumming. As Wargasm's quarterback Aaren calls out the plays. "Hand jobs!" Then, "Pussy lick!" Then, "Stick and suck!" There's also "End run!" and "Up the middle!" Mostly offensive, not defensive calls. All in all, as the sexual war game plays itself out, the group falls into smaller groupings—men with men and women with women, it goes on. More than not, they often end up chanting, sounding at times more like Buddhist monks than they intend. This is a cacophony of unstructured, unfettered, free emotions.

They noisily grunt, howl, shrill, and shriek. Humorously, this dissonance and bedlam does not draw knocks on the door from the police, since the neighborhood is heavily migrant worker, poor and in urban blight.

One day, after an exceptionally intense Wargasm, something happens to Aaren that she can't describe without robbing phrases from psychological therapy and the Catholic Mass. She really doesn't care to label it correctly, whether Primal Scream or Real Presence, but it happened and she wants to tell Char.

When Aaren visits Char, now a full month later, she brings a gift of Celestial Seasonings herbal tea. They parted in tension and she's come to know that drinking tea is a way Char and her closest Sisters bond. This small act of thoughtfulness is received with a smile and a hug, but Char is taken aback at what she sees. *Aaren?*

"The Weather Movement is dead!" doesn't have to be stated because Aaren's mode of dress proclaims the message. The two women move into the living room and Aaren settles into one end of Char's overstuffed couch. For anyone who knows her, Aaren is a startling image of "without." *Without* her boots, *without* her military accessories, *without* the harshness of Marxist cosmetics: no red star patches. She sits looking not hippie, not radical, not Vanguard, just plain and simple. Char takes immediate notice that an aura of inner peace surrounds her.

Char sits down at the other end of the couch. Both sip the hot brew. Slowly, a comforting silence wraps them. Aaren snuggles into Char's tender eyes as she blows away strings of steam; she's amused at Char's befuddlement.

*Char is the target!* This now means something profoundly different. Aaren wants to, needs to, share with Char. She wants her to experience as best her words can convey, her astounding, life-altering transformation. Carefully, as the two women share tea, Aaren slowly unfolds her tale. Her characteristic zest and fiery passion nourish her, but she modulates her pace. She's enjoying the moment.

Although Char knows about Wargasm, she isn't prepared for the daunting sexual athleticism she hears described. Intuitively, she knows that what Aaren has come to share concerns her heart, not the details of sexual play.

As Aaren nears the key scene of transformation, the pace of her speech picks up. The volcanic spew for which she is well known bursts forth. "Jesus fucking Mother of Christ! JJEESUUSS mudda fucking K-ris! It was like I gave my calling card to the Universe. All of a sudden, from where I don't know, I hear my name, *Aaren!*" She sips from her cup.

"Right there, in the middle of Wargasm—just like in the middle of battle, *pow!* It came to me. *Ha.* I came that day—eight, a hundred times, I don't know. I looked around and there were mouths and eyes, moving like fireflies in the late summer sky, flashing, and I came, orgasm and juice flowing, and hard cocks all over me and my sucking this one and that teat, and Jesus, oh, god! Fuck it. I was really fucked! *Glorious!* That's how it happened. I came . . . really came. What can I say? The weather's changed!"

*Breathless.* It's the only word that describes Char's reaction, when she retells the story later. "I was breathless! Imagine. Wargasm leads to love! Who would have ever thought that?"

"But that's not it," said almost regretfully, "I just, I don't know, maybe it's all so new—too new even for me!—but it wasn't the sex, hell, sex is sex, not that, I saw, fuck, I felt, my heart burst into fire, sounds stupid, but true, "It's all wrong," I said to myself, "This is what the fuckers want us to do—just be lost in sex. The real war is the war against war." She pauses, Char waits, it is difficult for Aaren, she's wrestling the words, "It's intimacy." Hard pause. Confessional: "I've never had that, you know." Char's eyes mist. She reaches over and touches Aaren's cheek. "Isn't it wonderful!" Aaren finishes, as if concluding but actually asking for Char's comments, her reactions. Again, "Isn't it wonderful!"

“What?”

“Love.”

“Love?”

“Blissful! Female love, Sister love, true intimacy . . . *WomanFire!*”

Distrustful, suspicious, only too familiar with the devious ploys of the Weathermen, Char waits. The prior meeting left her with a cache of unresolved suspicions about Aaren’s intentions.

Aaren: “Many Sisters have told me about you, especially your nonviolent Sisters. I know about your heart. Your words have come to me upon their kisses and within their embraces.”

“What do you know about my heart?”

“That you believe in love, have preached love . . . know the love of the Sisters.”

“True,” unsure, somewhat tired of anticipating her snare. “That’s true, but it’s love without violence, a love that isn’t terror.”

“Sure, I know, it’s intimacy, right? But see—” Aaren puts down her cup and sits on the floor, places her back against the couch’s frame, “I didn’t know love as intimacy, never did, only thought I did, but all my posturing—and it *was* posturing—was still the Male Trick. Still, even when our Wargasm included women loving, it was still fucking.” Here she halts in the embarrassment that’s also the gateway to the creative. “I was fucking women and they were fucking me, but then after that day, that breakthrough, I met Ellen. She showed me true love.”

“Ellen.”

“I know she’s been your lover.” Fear of rejection; jealousy?

Char without a breath responds, "Please, understand, I *am* her love. But we've moved on or let's say "beyond"—we're more mothers together now. It's a deeper love," but she doesn't want to distract Aaren, "but that's for later."

Char moves to sit on the floor closer to Aaren. This time there's a genuine magnetism of erotic attraction that draws them together.

Aaren: "She loves me. It's crazy to say, but it's the most, the greatest of sex, but not with possession. She gives birth to me, my soul. She's freed me from being a sexual warrior, showed me what she calls my precious self. This is *Womanfire!*"

Char: "Yes, true, this I understand, go on."

"With her—better to say, *within* her, her embrace, I finally—Goddess, how dreadful all those years of self-imprisonment, *oh well*—within her embrace I found my own love. I loved myself."

Char leans forward, hugs and kisses Aaren on the forehead. "Sweetest of Sisters, yes, Goddess be praised, that's it!"

Char is truly amazed. *The Goddess works in mysterious ways!*

"And men?"

Aaren responds instantly, an evidence of her heartfelt sincerity. "Not to be hated, just not necessary or essential . . . not irrelevant, but maybe not of great concern. It's a blessing. Simply, we have another path. Who knows where it will lead?"

Twilight is upon them. They rise, bonded through the ritual of sharing water, of tea and conversation. Two females of the species *homo sapiens* rise and are drawn together by yearnings of Motherly spirits that have lain dormant for many centuries, *oppressed!*

They move to the bathroom, undress each other. Their eyes dance smiles, messages, unformed hopes. They agree to bathe each other, as Ellen has guided each of them. "This water is our water. We are one drop, together." They soap, lather, dust each other with bubbles and so cleanse each other. "May our blemishes humble us and point to the inner beauty we are as Sisters." Then they dry one another. They touch with soft cloth, caress with tenderness, and end within an embrace and a shower of kisses.

This is all and everything that Aaren wanted from Wargasm. It is now delivered by the sparrow and the dove, not by the claw of eagle and hawk. Together they walk into Char's bedroom and draw back the covers, fluff several pillows, then, in duet, lie down in each other's arms.

For time not counted they kiss and drink the restfulness within each other. They talk—dream talk, rambling thoughts, sweetness upon sounds. They rest within the silence of the non-word, of the heart and the will. They embrace closely, entwine. All that is known and felt in this moment is healing.

Aaren and Char—whom Jared calls *Liquid Fire* and *Soothing Water*—are two women who now commune together within a shared intimacy . within an embraced presence. They consciously join together to create a common fire: *Womanfire*.

Within the week Aaren moves into Char's bedroom. Each day they grow more strongly attracted and attached to the other as they share their life stories. Char learns that Aaren is the youngest of four and the only girl. Her upper-class family suffered several major financial setbacks and so her home was fraught with all the anxieties and play-actings of those who must convince themselves that they are superior. Her father's morality twisted Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" into a carnivorous Calvinism. They were raised to accept that others are fated to be shark meat, and that it is their moral obligation to be sharks. "Shark or shark meat," her

father would say, "It's all part of God's mysterious plan!" Competition with one another and everyone else was considered an act of righteous behavior. As a woman, Aaren was charged with finding a mate who would *try* to master her. "Love," so her mother told her, "is a battle between the sexes." Only in personal combat—no matter the arena—would her life find meaning, so did young Aaren learn.

Her parents divorced while in college. She watched her mother swim through booze and pills and become a floozy. She totally disintegrated into silliness and weakness of mind, body and soul. Just before she graduated, Aaren buried both her mother and father. They died six months apart. Worse, her father died near penniless.

Broke but gifted with sharkness, Aaren found and took off down her own path of conquest. She set out to triumph over not just the Market but the Earth, itself. Her new passion was at once global and cosmic. Politically and metaphysically, she put aside her father's vision and knelt in revolutionary adoration of Mao and the revolutionary gods: Marx and Lenin.

Ironically, Char's father also experienced severe economic ups and downs. Once a family farmer, he then became a sharecropper and is now a minion of a vast global combine. But instead of anxiety, her father and mother labored to raise their children as optimists. "God cares for you. He created the whole world just for you to enjoy!" They believed this despite hearing all the scriptural stories during their childhood about original sin and mankind's fallen nature. In their hearts and souls, they were farmers more than church goers, meaning that they were people of the land, of the dirt. More importantly, they practiced what they preached. They nurtured everything and everyone around them.

Char was also the last child, but of five, two of them boys. They were all just two years apart. Hers was a prototypical small town, Midwestern storybook life, complete with riding ponies and eating sweet corn at picnics after dips in the lake. For a brief period, in her early teens, she became both fascinated and terrified by

the emphasis her Sunday school teacher placed on Jesus' sufferings. "Jesus died for you!" did not make her feel loved by God—rather, she felt guilty for being the sinner Jesus had to die for. Eventually her mother changed her whole perspective on Christianity by saying, "Jesus rose from the dead for you. He calls you to live a resurrected life!" With that upbeat, life-affirming message, Char grounded her sense of identity and purpose. She became a nurse, and a leader of social justice causes.

Aaren falls fully under Char's spell. What Char enables Aaren to tap is a wellspring of inner affection. Char's touch, her mere presence, gradually fills Aaren with a sense of security that she's never experienced. They become true friends and Sisters. This is the basis for the flowering of their love. In that deep embrace of entwined hearts, they express to all the joy of making present Womanfire.

Yet something is yet to be transformed. Aaren is beset by a thorn in her flesh. Like the stiletto of days gone by, she keeps her visits with Jared sheathed and hidden. *Why am I not telling Char this?* The thorn is deep within her flesh because it's more than not telling Char about her visits with Jared—she's also not telling Jared about Char. *Why am I not telling them?*

*Am I afraid that they will not forgive me? Trust me?*

What she does have is so good—she has love as she has never known it before—that she chooses to walk the razor's edge. Char now knows her as true Sister and she doesn't want to lose that love. Jared—he doesn't know about Witson's deal—so she can continue as before since he never knew that her "love letters" were acts of subterfuge and deception. What were once sweet words carrying hate now express her earnest affection and desire. As before, Aaren's letters begin, "Oh, Sweetheart," but end alluding to, "Things I must tell you, truly exciting things, on my next visit." But she hasn't yet.

### 34 - REVEREND CRAY - ATTICA STATE PENITENTIARY

When they land in Buffalo, Jared has no clue where they are until he sees the sign: "Greater Buffalo International Airport." He's never been in this part of the country. However, he quickly grasps why upstate New York is an artist's delight—especially during early fall months, such as now, when Nature's beauty is particularly resplendent and profuse. It's September and Jared's deep into the vibrant landscapes as they drive over from the airport. He's entranced as daylight whisks dusky handkerchiefs off hills of treed intrigue and morning majesty. He, like so many before, succumbs to the area's natural magic.

Especially its light. Its luminosity and texture has delighted and enthralled artists of paint and stone—schools of Romanticists, Naturalists and Illuminists. The landscape is a fitting diversion, a benevolent obscuration of the doorway into hell that is about to welcome Jared.

As Steve makes a sharp left, Jared is awestruck as he beholds "The Wall." He gasps audibly.

"Magnificent, isn't it?" Steve comments right in sync with Jared's gasp. "Just magnificent."

Attica's outside wall is thirty feet high, with a thickness measurable only in density of imagination. It's a barricade, and not unkindly regularly compared to a concentration camp. For the first time in his life, Jared is soundly terrified.

It staggers him as it has so many others. Some hail The Wall as more profoundly numinous than Saint Patrick's and more ethereally vibrational than Stonehenge. It is considered the imagistic source for the obelisk that Kubrick floated in front of the acidheads of hippiedom and sci-fi devotees at the conclusion of his magical film, *2001*. To Jared, The Wall is the end of a quest as he is finally at the entrance to a mysterious castle, a fortress of the gods of cruelty.

Once inside Jared is relieved to don prison garb. As Steve escorts him through the corridors, he begins to feel less vulnerable because he's more invisible—just an inmate, 8867-114 again. His world stabilizes. Here he knows the

Institution's rituals and procedures. Here he is ironically but truly protected. *The Man has all the guns!*

The cons' arsenal of home-made weapons is dwarfed by the guards' storehouse of armaments. In this respect, Attica is a functioning dream of nonviolence. Its inmate horde of roaming peasants, outcasts and rejects all huddle within an embrace of nonviolence. Attica, as a culturally sacred image, is one with the Statue of Liberty. For the "huddled masses" have found a home here. Here they are protected from the street's most violent and destructive social and cultural forces—*themselves!* All about, Jared sees inmates, lying down like lambs Inside the Wall.

Steve can't figure what's got into Jared. He's walking, almost sauntering behind him, and muffling bursts of laughter. His chuckles and short snorts indicate that another alternative reality show is being aired within his brain.

"What the hell's so funny about this?" Steve pokes him in the shoulder—asking as they come to a stop in the area called "Times Square." This is the center of the prison complex, the meeting point of the four inner corridors.

Jared is in good form. "It's all so crazy, I mean, man, look, it's so fucking *peaceful.*" He stresses *peaceful* as he sweeps his arm around full circle. "This is exactly what people believe. That if you have enough guns and bombs and instruments of terror, you will have peace. And they got it, and its name is Attica!"

Something about this makes sense to Steve, but he can't get it in focus.

"*Walls!*" Jared's poetic tongue is loosed, mocking and ironic, "Walls of stone, of flesh, of skulls. Walls of thoughts, Great Ideas, the Great Society! Walls of songs, kisses and embraces. Walls—we build them with every conceivable thing. We build them resplendent in visibility and invisibility."

"What?" Steve looks at Jared. *He's going nuts! Loony. Screwball. What's he so worked up about?*

Jared is reading Steve's mind. "Fucking-A, man, it tells you something if you'd just fucking-A listen. See, hear it? What makes one fully human is the act of breaking down walls."

Why he has been taken to Attica, Jared can't figure. Before last month, he hardly knew the place existed. Millston, Lewisburg, Milan, assorted county jails and now here. *For sure Steve's following some grand plan. This has to be some royal mind-fuck experiment!*

Soon after entering Millston, Jared heard about START, the federal program being used at the medical prison in Springfield, Missouri. It's testing the premise that "Personality is a social product, not an individual possession or right." By manual and design, using psychoactive drugs, an inmate's personality is slowly eroded, until very little is left. All his trust relationships —with Mom, Dad, brother, sister, lover—all are shattered. Then, the hack-shrink is supposed to be able to build a personality, one that will be socially and morally useful. At one point, early in the Ride, Jared feared that he was going to START. Now he wonders what type of bogus scientific theory underlies his current reformatory regimen.

Steve and Jared stop outside the Chaplain's office. Jared balks. "Why?" Steve doesn't answer. He nudges and half-pushes Jared inside ahead of himself.

Within is Reverend Cray, a middle-aged, medium-height, gangly figure with a retreating hairline and ill-fitting spectacles that he adjusts constantly. What is most striking are his arms. They are long, much longer than most, way down past his pockets. As the Reverend stands, his arms sway like pendulums, keeping time in a universe other than the one they currently occupy.

As Cray rises, he closes a file which, in light of his greeting and subsequent remarks, Jared knows is his.

“Mr. Jennings, I am pleased to meet you.” This is said with an air of pastoral friendliness that is accompanied by an assumption of familiarity. Cray sits down with Jared as Steve nods and quietly leaves.

A thermos of coffee is unscrewed and two cups of java poured. Cray’s opener stands as a clue to why he was chosen. “I’m a former Dominican, did they tell you that?”

From there, they distract each other with stories and quotes, academic citations and adventures, seminary escapades and happenings, and earnest explorations by eye of each other’s spiritual soul. Ignoring his internal sentry, Jared relaxes into the banter and settles into a comfort zone with Cray. *Not such a bad guy.*

While Cray is now a Methodist, he’s been trained by the Catholics in Rome, Paris, and Cambridge, and by the Protestants at the theological union in Berkeley. His degrees are of substantial academic weight, so an unspoken question on Jared’s mind is why Cray has ended up in Attica.

The Reverend, in his ramblings—covering many topics in a sequence and direction he controls but which appear spontaneous—mentions Uncle Sam, not knowing Jared’s blood relationship. Jared stores that possibly fortuitous coincidence away for the moment. The file he has on Jared is mostly summary, and the details of this key relationship are inadequately stressed. It would have led to greater insight by each about the other since Cray remains a fervent student of Uncle Sam’s. Notwithstanding Cray’s love for his now Trappist mentor, they parted—and did so with all the bitterness and dark love of parent and rebellious child—over the issue of the function, place, presence, and Biblical basis for the Holy Spirit. While this is an issue dead to many in its abstraction and esoteric character, it is for them a fundamental spiritual truth with profound implications for how to live a spiritual life.

“Why am I here?” comes around at the point where Jared wants to test Cray’s mettle.

He's equally direct, "Someone wants to know if you're sincere."

"Sincere?"

"Let me say," Cray gets up and walks to a window with a view on Yard A, "there's a strong interest in you . . . and I'm supposed to determine whether you're a dupe or a dooper—or divinely inspired."

"Divinely inspired!" Jared roars, guffawing so hard that his halo falls down around his neck! His jollity is short-lived, cut down by Cray's vexed gaze.

"Do you think all of this," and Cray points towards the Yard, "is not divinely inspired?"

*He's dead serious! He's freaking dead serious, man!*

Jared starts to get a fix on why Cray left the Catholic Church and religious life. He intuits the pattern—that despite his former Catholic or present Methodist demeanor, he's a charismatic, a Pentecostalist, a mingling of Holy Roller and faith healer. Once grasped, Jared sees it all in Cray's eyes. *Why did I miss that?*

He knows clearly that men like Cray can never survive in the Catholic corridors. There, divine fire is majestically controlled with theologically complex, at times twisted, often tortured language. After centuries of perfecting the magic, the Catholics have the Holy Spirit dancing in tongues of fire but only as a flame atop a devotional votive candle. This spiritually subdued third person of the Holy Trinity, Cray could never worship!

Another of Jared's unasked questions is answered without words. *Cray strayed because he caught the Sacred Fire in his gut. His soul. His every word became an act of "speaking in tongues"! The ironic humor of it all, Jared muses. He's a heretic, a clerical outlaw—just like me. No wonder he's here!*

"Come with me," and they step outside the office and head towards the Yard. Cray turns pastoral, "The men who are here have deep needs. They have the need Cain must have had *the day after* he awoke from slaying Abel. They see that they

are like others, *normal*. That they have eyes and legs, emotions and desires, but that they are not like others. *Abnormal*. They—and I will forestall your appeal to ‘social conditions,’ ‘the effects of poverty’ and any other sociological or anthropological reductionist explanation—these men are agents of Satan. *Demonics. Possessed*. How they became so, whether through conscious decision or a slow infection through bad habits, I do not know, do not care to know, but they’ve joined his fiendish army.”

Cray places his right hand on Jared’s shoulder, stares into his eyes, probing his soul. “Do you believe me?”

It’s a moment of first recognition. Like the address to those being baptized, “Do you renounce Satan?”

Jared responds, “I believe *you* believe yourself.”

Without hesitation, Cray slaps him. Claps him with an open palm so the effect is more sound than pain. It’s so quickly done, from shoulder to cheek, that Jared doesn’t even reflex. In all, it simply evokes a shocked titter.

“Don’t tell me what I believe. What do *you* believe?”

They resume walking, more slowly. Inmates pass by. Hacks pass by. They amble through Yards A to D and then around the inner periphery, always within death-shot of a guard tower. Jared fails to admire the Superintendent’s lawn. Cray has him enrapt. Within this timeless stroll, they begin to round back towards Cray’s office.

In asking Jared numerous and theologically nuanced questions about his beliefs, Cray reveals what he himself deeply believes. For Cray, the Garden of Eden is real. Its facticity he passionately speaks about *after* impressing Jared with his doctoral degree and advanced studies in Biblical archaeology and historical linguistics. “The evidence is crystal clear. There is no more factual repository than Holy Writ. Everything, *just everything* we have created, even our rationalism, all

stem from events in the Bible. The hideousness of it all is we live just outside of Eden, and—damned as we mortals are!—we hold blinders to our eyes.”

Cray suddenly stops speaking. It’s a momentary fracture in which Jared is also quiet since he senses that Cray is simply reloading. Aptly, in less than a minute, Cray bounces off on a new spiel, exploding with a piercing energy. “*Jesus* shows us the way. He sends the *Holy Spirit* to heal us and to bring us *Home*.” This outburst, this declaration, this act of witnessing occurs as they come full circle in the inner periphery, right below a guard tower. Jared pictures them as being protected by an angelic guardian.

“There is *nothing* and I mean *no thing* which is rooted in Scripture that is not a manifestation of God’s Spirit.”

Cray sums up the message he wants to deliver. “In His divine scheme, America is the latest and the newest opportunity, most definitely the second chance for the fallen people to live in the Holy Spirit!”

Back inside his office both sit down facing each other as before. Almost ceremonially, Cray tips the thermos and fills Jared’s cup, not asking, just doing. Jared reaches over and takes his cup, cradles it, blows on it but doesn’t drink. Leaning back in his chair, Cray takes a deep draught, then puts his cup down and in a practiced motion raises his open hands in a posture of pleading, fingers writhing as if afire with pain, and interrogates a second time, “Do you think all of this is not divinely inspired?”

He asks with earnest optimism, as if their little walk should have converted Jared. Failing Jared’s instant response, he presses him. “Can you *not feel* the Presence? Can you not feel the similarity between these walls and monastic walls?”

Cray rises, comes and stands next to the sitting Jared. He lays both arms upon his shoulders and looks, drills himself into Jared’s eyes. “These prison walls are a new manifestation, a new revelation. Do you grasp that?”

Jared is silent, unmoving. Cray presses forward: "Truly, God is benevolent, but the Spirit is terrible. The Holy terrifying Spirit. It is He who works in here."

The Reverend leans his full weight upon Jared. His arms press down so hard that Jared's shoulders almost tear apart and set free his inner holy spirit.

"Have you *not felt* the terror in your soul when in the presence of Dikbar?" The name rocks Jared's ear, causes him to tremble. *How can Cray know this?* All speech and rational sensibility desert Jared. Cray is relentless. Words fly that make Jared's heart thump.

"Have you *not felt* the terror in your soul when your woman chose abortion over your child?"

He almost blacks out, teeters at the edge of Satan's fiery pit.

Cray's eyes demand an answer. *Your child!*

Jared reels, almost slumps off the chair. Cray is relentless.

"Have you *not felt* the terror in your soul when that gay whore spit out your seed and made you the slave of his passion?"

His dead child, Dikbar's beating, Brusier's sexual pleasure—*Only God should know this!* Embarrassed and angered, on the verge of freaking out, the urge rises and so he does push the Reverend's arms away, shoves him backwards as he jumps to his feet. *What to do? Where to run?* In a panic Jared stomps halfway across the room. Pauses. Turns and hurls back his own prophetic fire and brimstone.

"You are using the knowledge of evil people," he's so pent up that he sputters, "you know things that you shouldn't know. You—you *are* the Devil!"

"*Repent!*" The Reverend urges, implores, condemns. Thunders again, "*Repent!*"

Like Jared, when first in Segregation, the Reverend starts to rove around the room, hitting, slapping the wall, furniture. His body is God's Hammer. He bashes and smashes with steely anger, kicks with wild fierceness and slams his body against the wall like a man insane.

Jared cuts him no slack. He denounces him. "You belong to this World of Walls. You and Steve and all the hacks of the world. You believe you can, that you have the right, the god blessed fucking right, man, to invade the intimate spaces—the heart, the soul—of another human being and to fuck with him!"

A heaved pause.

"God, you're so corrupt . . . you, *you* are the most corrupt. Because you've made a religion of violence. It's you—you miserable fucking asshole of a preacher—it's you who's been possessed by Satan."

Jared stops suddenly as if a hand has come down and gently pressed his lips together.

Cray instantly strikes back. He knows a lost soul when he sees one and Jared words are those of the devil. Righteously, he condemns and expels him.

"Damn you, you do not fear God! *To the devil I cast you out!*"

With that done, Cray hits a button on his phone and just above a whisper through clenched teeth issues a surprisingly calm, "The prisoner's ready."

The Reverend stands sentry, waiting for cell block security. His hands hang down by his sides, slowly swinging in small metronomic arcs. He's silently praying. His prayer is a refrain from 2 Timothy 4:3. It's one he has invoked before to help drive out the Devil, as he has done today with this poor lost soul.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

“Be steady! Be steady!” The Reverend utters, very low and steady. Jared knows full well that Cray is praying for the strength of the terrifying Spirit. “Be steady! Be steady!”

Still enrapt in evocation, the Reverend fails to register that Jared’s been taken away.

### 35 - "WE ARE MEN!" - ATTICA STATE PENITENTIARY

An armed guard comes and takes Jared to his cell. They walk through several corridors, footsteps scrape, iron gates creak, Jared enters and settles down on a cell bunk. It's an ancient cell, just a wrinkle in the wall. Not unlike the scar on his face. A thin, narrow space, functional—a slit. Another body sleeps in the upper bunk; it isn't wakened by his entry. Automatically, without self-awareness, Jared touches the *hibakusha* tucked under his T-shirt. He lies down and stretches out. Cray's words like cinders of brimstone still smolder on his cheeks.

"What am I doing in Attica?" he murmurs as he pulls a pillow over his face. He's already tired and as he drifts off the day's scenes all run backwards, images wildly replay themselves.

As Jared sleeps, he doesn't have a clue that Cray is writing about him, stating in his report that Jared has come to Attica "just at the right time," during "the lull before the storm." If told, Jared might have simply laughed. But the truth is that he comes on the heels of an unrestful but unifying summer among the black inmates. The Reverend is referencing the summer's protest launched by the self-proclaimed "Attica Liberation Front." The Liberation Front protested "conditions." They didn't petition the gods for ultimate liberation, not even for liberation from incarceration. Only liberation from indelicacies. They asked not to be locked up sixteen hours a day. Boldly, they requested the opportunity to take more than one shower per week. These conditions, which seemed not unreasonable to reasonable men and women, were denied. *Why?* Steve would have enlightened Jared. "Don't they get it?" They messed with the Administration's techniques for control, for fine-tuning punishment.

Consequently, Jared walks into an Attica where mounting friction thickens the air. It actually invades his dreaming right now and he wakes with a nervous start. He feels like someone's just kicked him in the gut. He's sweating profusely, his T-shirt is soaked. He slaps his face, once, twice. Then he kneels down as if to pray.

"Wazzup? Buddy, don't die on me before breakfast, will ya?"

Arnold rolls off the top bunk. His words startle Jared, tap into an unguarded fear—*Attack Rape?* Jared jerks around, catches the guy in full eyesight, bolts upward to his feet, his mind's racing, processing—*Shit!* Arnolds say to himself, *The guy's flipped out!* If Arnold wasn't the type of guy he is, he would have belted and looped Jared back into dreamtime with a well-muscled left upper-cut. But it is Arnold—a guy in his twentieth year Inside, and he knows how to handle loonies. So with a step quicker than Jared can observe, he's right in his face, places two hands firmly on his shoulders, digs his fingertips in so that there is an awakening pain and shouts, "Hey. Hey!" It works. Long-timer magic! Arnold pushes Jared back, gently, almost brotherly, all the while laughing at this crazy con. "Buddy, take it easy, Jack! Relax."

Jared's been just sitting there, dazed, fifteen minutes go by before Arnold says, "Arnold."

"Jared."

"Why are you here?"

"Errr," and a stream of images from the Ride just about kick-start him into talking about *Adventures with Agent Steve Witson* when an interior voice stops him—*not now!*—and he blurts, cryptically, "I'm just visiting."

Arnold: "Visiting?"

Jared nods, affirming his statement. He's not in the least struck by how odd it must sound to Arnold. Cons do time and speak of "dropping a nickel," say, if they're doing five years. No one says, "I'm just visiting." *Curious*. Somewhat amused, Arnold asks, "How long are you visiting for?"

Jared responds as if this is just average con talk. "Shit, man, fuck, I'm not sure." Then Jared stands and stretches, not impressing Arnold with his height and stature or testament of the scar.

Once again Jared's just about to start in about the Ride but stops. Arnold observes the mental shutdown. Without intent, Jared throws him a wacky curveball. "Shit, I'm not going to be here for long, you can bet on that."

Enough said. Arnold's willing to let Jared wait. Each goes about his day, doing time their own way. Arnold reads and writes. Jared does puzzles, sleeps and stares at the ceiling.

Around three o'clock—the sun still high and keeping their cell bright—the voice of a soulful blues harmonica tracks up and down the block. It stops their conversation. Actually, Jared stops only because Arnold does the instant he hears the first note. The tune's picked up by another con who's drumming on a set of bars. Then it's lifted up and amplified by a whole lot of clapping and shouting. "Play it, man!" "Tell it like it is, leetle brudder!"

The music streams through cell block bars. The beat is contagious. Arnold gets up and starts dancing, a modest high stepping and body wiggling. Jared's amused. The sound is snappy, heart-thumping and damn irresistible! Arnold turns, motions to Jared, "Dance, man! It's the Blues!"

As if in a bar and a bit drunk both men start moving to the beat. They swing around and hunker up and down, sway and act silly, gyrate arm in arm. At the instant the song stops, Arnold shouts, "Raymond, you sweet muddafuckah, blow it out!" This profane endearment is seconded by a chorus of encouragements, some spoken, some clapped, some whistled. Arnold faces Jared and smiles, starts clapping his hands. "Little Raymond's a mute, but he kicks ass with the tongue of his harmonica!"

Arnold is almost in rapture, as if Raymond—an unknown to Jared—is his kid, just capping a high school performance.

"Mute?"

"Believe it! Never says a word. Guess he's mute, or at least he lives mute."

*A mute bluesman. Jared is struck by the image. An appropriate oxymoron for the world Inside*

Just ten minutes later, *it* went down. *It* being the moment of *crack! boom!* at the end of a long, long fuse. Jared soon smells the smoke wafting in from the Yard and up from the bottom tiers. The noise doesn't just become louder, it becomes convict noise, that rowdy, reckless, violence-prone sound that got most of them here in the first place—outlaw noise. Delighted, Arnold knows it's here for sure because Raymond is on his harp belting out a moaning blues.

What drifts about is that most cell blocks are cleared, except theirs. No one knows why they're the only ones still in lockdown. It all began, they hear, when inmates in one cell block busted through an old rusting door, somehow linked to a guard's oversight. Then, one after another, the tiers were freed. Cons are running around everywhere. Word is that there are hostages—some Free World visitors!

"Any women?" An utterance of hope, fear, dread and anticipation; a daisy chain.

"No wimmin."

They hear that a leadership group is forming. It's trying to unify the revolt, get some attention from outside the walls. More news is made up than recorded, and rumors fly that Bobby Seale, and Fi and G.I. from the Young Lords, even movie stars like Raquel Welch are coming.

The wildest rumor—"It's true, it's true, man. Believe me!"—is that Raquel is coming with Jimmy Brown to reenact their love scene from *100 Rifles*! This rumor lives longer than any others. It thrives as it taps into that fuck-the-white-bitch fantasy of every heavy-loaded black stud.

Among the more rational minds, a council of leaders forms to contact senators and congressmen, journalists and publishers, activists and radical lawyers, and leaders from the oppressed communities. To everyone's surprise, the Warden takes their list and agrees to honor their requests.

All throughout the day, flyers arrive, some printed, some scrawled. One phrase appears to unify all messages. Jared reads this and *it* finally becomes clear. Scribbled on some well-worn, oft-handled, skin-greased paper, he reads the con's message: "WE ARE MEN!"

This phrase is like a narcotic. Jared slips back onto his cot, closes his eyes, and remembers. He's back at the family home in Hastings. He's just returned from the seminary for a summer of temptations, August 1963. At this phase of his life, he's an avid reader who eats ideas and thoughts, is fattened by the desire to know. He's been sitting in the living room all day reading Greek Classics and theological works. Near dinner time, he takes a break for the evening news.

He's watching something, half paying attention. Then, as if a message from Above, across the TV screen a criminal message appears. "I AM A MAN!" He turns up the volume. It's a Civil Rights protest march. He has never marched. He is unsure what to think. "I AM A MAN!"

*What can this mean? Who wrote it? Who carried it? Was it an individual, a nation, an alien species?*

Jared struggles with the TV image and message. He grew up in Bayonne, New Jersey, where humans were partitioned not only by geography and gangland stakes but by soul markings. The sacred dog lifted its leg and pissed, set its ownership scent on the *Irish* Roman Catholic Church in this neighborhood. Then scented on the *Italian* Roman Catholic Church just blocks away, and still a third scent on the *Polish* Roman Catholic Church up towards the City line. No one cared much about the Protestants and Jews, for they are the lost, the outcast, the betrayers and the damned. Forget niggers and spicks and the eerie slant-eyes. Jared's world is all and only Catholic. Until this startling TV moment, he never doubted that his kind was better than all the other kinds, even other Catholics. Fatefully, that all changed as the Tube conveyed the prophet's revelation: "I AM A MAN!"

Jared pondered, *Why was this written?*

It took him years to fully hear Martin Luther King's Dream and to grasp the meaning of that simple sentence. Now, he himself is the one who holds up the sign, "I AM A MAN!" For that is how he has summed up his war resistance, his draft raids. Just this short sentence, that means for him: *I am a man. Do not kill me!*

In the morning, a mimeographed newsletter lies in the middle of the cell. Jared picks it up, reads it, then wakes Arnold. "Listen, man. Shit, you gotta hear this. Dated September 9, 1971. Here, just this part of 'The Five Demands. Fuck.'"

WE ARE MEN! We are not beasts and do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. The entire prison populace has set forth to change forever the ruthless brutalization and disregard for the lives of the prisoners here and throughout the United States. What has happened here is but the sound before the fury of those who are oppressed.

We will not compromise on any terms except those that are agreeable to us. We call upon all the conscientious citizens of America to assist us in putting an end to this situation that threatens not only our lives, but each and every citizen as well.

We have set forth demands that will bring closer to reality the demise of these prisons, institutions that serve no useful purpose to the People of America, but to those who would enslave and exploit the People of America.

As if on cue, as Jared finishes reading, three cons walk into the cell. Black, brown and red. They look at Arnold. He raises himself on an elbow, looks down at

them, then flips onto his other side, backside to them, and pulls the covers over his head.

"You're Jennings?" Brown asks in a way that tells Jared he knows they know his name.

Before Jared can answer, the taller of the three—Black—turns as if to leave, head-signaling to Jared, *C'mon. We've no time to waste.* The other two are out of the cell as the third guy—Red—hand-flags Jared with a nonverbal, *Right now, move it!*

In a whiff, Jared's off, but to where? They walk through several tiers and cell blocks. "Bad shit," Brown keeps mumbling as he surveys the damage. Busted up bunks. Trash on the floor. Broken white-lightning bottles. Lots of hootch stink all over the place. In one tier there's more blood pooled and splattered than Jared ever wanted to see. *Bad shit! Bad shit!*

"This the honkey muthafucka?" It's not spoken as an endearment. The speaker is a very large, bordering on humongous, Hell's Angel type white guy with tattoos more visible than pure spaces of flesh on his face and arms. Except he can't be an Angel, he has "Black Power!" slashed across his right upper forearm. The other three enter the cell and sit down. It's like a meeting's been called and Jared's the only one who didn't get the memo.

Sensing that he has to make some statement, Jared states in a firm voice (working hard to sound calm and confident), "I'll help you out however I can. But you should know, I'm just passing through."

White: "I'm just passing through," whined with a faked limp wrist. As Jared hears it turned back, it does sound, shit, a whole lot of things: stupid, whiny, weak, nutty, crazy.

Red: "The passing through is over. Ain't no other place to go."

Brown: "Help. Do you think we need help?" A bit irked, as if responding to a condescending remark.

"Shit. Fucking-A, guys, hey, give me a break, man. What's going on? Who's in charge? You tell me why the fuck I'm here." Sounds better even to himself.

The three start lightly laughing as if sharing a private joke. White seems particularly amused. He says, "If we didn't know Cray went berserk after your visit or that Arnold was supposed to read you like a lab rat, you wouldn't be here." White pauses and eyes the other three, "We don't know the fuck why you're here, honkey. You tell us something we don't already know!" Jared wants to ask, *Why are you calling me honkey?* But lets it slide.

Not knowing what to do, he just starts talking. "Say, man, I read your manifesto. Glad to see you've taken a nonviolent approach." As if hearing a straight man delivering a line, the four crack up—a muffled giggle from Red and a lot of knee slapping from the others, a hoot from White.

White: "Man, are you fucking crazy?" Turns to the others. "Shit, sure can see why he drove Cray over the edge!"

Brown: "Bad news, Arnold didn't say a thing. Nuttin'." And as if this was critical, White shakes his head, "Too bad. Too fucking damn bad. Christ."

As this curious meeting is transpiring, all over the prison other meetings are in session or concluding. Some are ad-hoc judicial proceedings called to avenge ancient wrongs, both individual and gang-tribal. Every now and then shrieks of pain pop and burst in the air. There's a lot of motion and commotion everywhere. While not on the agenda, a small group of cons all of a sudden appear outside White's cell, clearly there to participate. Someone throws in, "It's going down, man. Motherfucker soon—if not already."

Hearing this, White and the others start to leave the cell. Red grabs Jared by the arm and yanks him forward. The whole group moves through the prison like one gigantic being, weaving up and down and in and out, until they come to the main doorway into the Yard. Red pushes Jared to the front of the line where he has a front-row view to what's going down.

"Sweet Jesus!" Jared blurts—a word all at once of discovery, surprise, despair and resignation. On top of every wall is a solid line of rifles. All are aimed towards where Jared is standing, right at the doorway entrance. Helicopters fly overhead. There's a lot of scurrying back and forth behind him, but Jared doesn't have the inclination to look. He's both fascinated and horrified by the scene. His feet are leaden—he can't move. Thoughts come slowly, ooze and seep to the surface. Then, like a school kid standing in the center of the theater's stage as the curtain is pulled, for the first time ever Jared knows, simply knows, that everyone—cons, guards, reporters, the army, every fucking whomever is out there, even *Cray*—is waiting for him to speak his opening lines.

"You ready?" White says, as if this has been rehearsed.

The others wait.

*I'm just visiting. You've got the wrong guy!* An avalanche of words, commands, pleas rush chaotically through his mind; his heart has stopped beating.

The door to his left is opened and it's as if a great wind sucks him out. Jared is walking towards the center of the Yard.

Later accounts of what happened differ; such is the curious way legends are made. Jared walks, calmly—much to Cray's admiration!—to the center of the Yard. He looks around, taking in each person, pivoting slowly but smoothly.

"I am a man!" he booms. Clearly. Distinctly. It is a statement, a proclamation. It is an indictment. It is an act of rebellion. It is a moment of joyous celebration.

Just these words he offers. Once, facing east, then north, then to west and south. It's a primal ritual, basic and fundamental. "I am a man!"

At this point the accounts differ.

"They fired on him. Missed every time. He had protection. God's angel was with him!"

"No, man, shit, he was shot. Once, twice, three times. I sees his head snap back. Sees that in 'Nam, man. I knows what I sees." Stymied, "But how'd he live? Anyone sees who'd drugged his sorrie white-ass away?"

"Sinners! Do you now doubt? The Lord slew His messenger and then raised him from the dead!" So Cray preaches, often. "This is proof that the Spirit is in here Inside with us. He is here for you! Repent! Come to Jesus, Sweet Jjjjjjjjeeeeeessssssussss!"

Arnold never tells anyone what he saw. "He stopped breathing. That's all. He stopped and they stopped. He was willing to die there, but they breathed first."

Nevertheless, reality being what it has to be, Warden Vincent R. Mancusi is proud that he has won the day. He, the ultimate battlefield general. Once he saw that it was Jared, he knew what he had lost. He knew that he couldn't kill him. Not just because he was a white guy but because he was the Boss' guy. Cray's "sacrifice." How White and the other ringleaders cajoled Jared into this act of rank foolishness, he doesn't care to determine. He just prides himself on the fact that he immediately won the day through strategic retreat.

True, Mancusi had to write in his report that "shots were fired." But he never wrote more. He remains confused as to the specifics, like everyone else. But no one—commission, study group, FBI investigators—ever meets to compare notes.

Jared himself isn't aware of how it ends. He simply finds himself awakening back in a cell—all alone.

But in a dream he sees himself leaving the Yard, bullets bouncing all about, walking as if on water, back Inside. The cons part as he walks by. He says nothing, does nothing. Halfway through the crowd he abruptly stops, turns back to Red, Black and Brown and says in a firm, commanding voice, "All is lost. There's just too much love here in Attica." To himself, he hears his own thoughts, "Prison has failed these men. They will not escape. *They do not know how much they've imprisoned themselves!*"

"Are you fucking nuts?" A dismissive question. Spoken. Cursed. Threatened. A lot of heads shake in stupefied disbelief. The unexpected idiocy of it all paralyzes the leaders. They know all is lost. Powerless, they watch the fear escalate, becomes carnivorous. As soon as he is able, Arnold grabs Jared and drags, almost carries him back to their cell. "Man, I've never met anyone as fucked up as you!"

Arnold shuts the cell grate but no guard is on duty to lock it. He slips down under his bunk, takes out and assembles his makeshift weapons: a long bladed knife and seven expertly balanced pencil-like darts. He'll be sentry tonight. He knows Jared is lost somewhere, somewhere deep Inside. *What a nut case!*

"There's just too much love here in Attica."

Should Jared have been surprised? Sweet Steve. Agent Stephen Witson. "At night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said . . ." With the soft light of early morning guiding him in a singsong voice, "Jennings. Jeeenn ... iiiiinnnggs. Je ... eee ... eeee ... iii ... iiiii ... nnnnggggs!"

**36 - CHAR'S LETTERS**

{a page indicating a letter from Char with everything except adjectives, adverbs and prepositions blacked out.)

{official prison stamps of the censor are on the page}

"CENSORED BY \_\_\_\_\_"

"HOLD FOR SECURITY REVIEW"

{stamps from various prisons reflecting Jared's travels}

"MILLSTON, FCI" "FORWARD TO MILAN, FCI"

"MILAN, FCI" "FORWARD TO WARDEN, ATTICA STATE PRISON"

"ATTICA STATE PRISON" "FORWARD TO FBI, WASHINGTON, DC"

"FILE CODE: 237-JJ-001 TOP PRIORITY. SECURITY RISK."

### 37 - CHAR'S LOOK AND AAREN'S FANTASY

*Revolutions.* On the Outside. On the Inside. Political. Spiritual. Reality. Dreams. Although the Ride has ended on the Outside, it has never stopped speeding along on the Inside. Tonight, the smoothest whiskey he's ever drunk is an elixir that revives his dreaming self. His comrades in arms, his lovers, seducers and sexual revolutionaries await. He dreams.

*The look* is how Jared remembers it. How it touches him. How her gaze fills that common blank of air between them with abstractions like *longing* and *eagerness*. Ah! Jared slumbers deeply.

*Char looks at him.* She moves to become rider. He fancies this position—not one of dominance, but of control from another side. He likes to have her slide. Likes to watch her face, which at first he didn't. He was almost paralyzed the first time she gently rolled him over and gloved the stick shift. *Your face!* he almost screamed, *I can see your face!*

*She is the look.*

"Fuck the bitch!" and all the "Roll 'em over and groove the tube!" ringside cheers scramble through his mind just below recognition as she comes on top. He wants to grab her by the throat (maybe her titties) and yank her down. Throw her, throw her hard on her back and slap her. Slap her like every bitch needs slapping when they want to play the Man. Slap her and spit at her, "*Bitch!*" Conveying in that one exhaust of breath the ageless condemnation, the exhalation of Yahweh's expulsion of Eve from the Garden: "*Bitch!*" Oh, the word fits so well, draws the cheeks into gullies of bitterness. It's a word that spit easily accompanies. For what are they but to be spit upon? Beaten and rammed with the rod? "*Spare the rod and spoil the child!*"

Uneasy with this switch in roles, his body expresses the violent thoughts he's suppressing—he squirms, pushes her hips this way and that, but soon it all subsides as she looks at him—Char's eyes! He is snared by her coming at him like bay fog. Floating above him like a mist over an island. Her breasts are soft clouds,

her slender arms like sun rays raining down from heaven, all about her is tender beauty. He's dumbstruck.

As she brushes her hair backward, nothing like the word *bitch* or *whore* or *piece of ass* or *cunt* comes anywhere to life. He's not thinking about himself as *dick*, *cock*, *stud* or *ballbuster*. He's not even feeling himself as *hard* and *pole*. What comes to him in this moment is a full-body shiver. It's as if she is singing his body, as with a throatily sighed "Ohhh!" he is hers, totally possessed. *Char looks at him.*

For some time now, Char and Jared have consciously worked to move away from being a young Catholic couple for whom sex is fairly embarrassing to sex as an adventure, even an abandonment. Tonight, they shared orgasm while she was on top of him. *Amazing.* He laughs a bit, lightly swats her on the butt. He's remembering that when she first stated firmly but not with venom, "I am *not* satisfied," he simply didn't get it.

"What's there to satisfy?" is how he related it to the guys. They all laughed. Each one had *been there.*

"*I came!* is what I said," he recounts as he belly-slaps and thumbs-up his laughing crew. Their laughter shakes the room, beer bottles clank. "And she looks at me and says, *Well, stud . . .* Jesus, I mean, she says that like it has four syllables, S\*T\*U\*D! Man, was my ass fried!

Believe me, she takes my hand, I pull it back, she glowers at me, 'I'm not going to bite it!' and then she puts it on her pussy. Jesus, man, I mean I never played with pussy. I didn't even know it *meowed!*"

As brotherly bond, the others throw things at him, pretzels and other tokens of their own foolishness. He goes on, "Hold on to this! She gives me a short lesson in female biology . . . fuck, I don't have to go into that for you guys, do I?" He smirks.

"Asshole!" is shouted four times around the room.

"Did she give you a map?" This and other mocking teases shower him. Only his stomping machismo and swigging the bottle covers the absolute seriousness of the episode.

Jared is looking for affirmation, confirmation, and clarification from his buddies. He's still not sure that this is what "men should do."

Ever since she *looked* at him, all he knows for sure is that Char has changed his sense of what sex is, should be, can be.

*Crazy!*

*His hand rests upon her lower belly. He feels her breathing coming through like tiny footsteps. As he rests there, his hand being almost the width of her slender self, he is beset by unfamiliar stimuli. Warily, he senses desire and invitation.*

*Her soft emerald greens beckon. "Yes sweetheart, touch me, explore me, feel me."*

*He hears this and without knowing how or when his fingers slip like knots unfastened and find their way down the inside of her left leg. Fingers breathing messages of "Yes" and back upward to her mound where like the potter's throw he gently begins to mold her, knead her, design his heart through his fingertips and kiss her tip of symbolic maleness, that female phallus so tiny, almost infinitesimal, but yet so powerful, here at her entrance.*

*When he first touches her clitoris he fears that he will break it off by rubbing it too hard. Its midget firmness almost draws a "Nawww! Ya don't mean this, babe, do ya?!" But then the jolting response he draws from Char assuages any doubts: "I mean, man, it was like igniting a Roman Candle. Believe me Jesus, she just took off, vabloom!"*

*As she rocks and moans he fears that he might kill her. Not from any violence, but from his desire not to stop. As she moves, shakes, jerks, grabs him,*

*her head bounces up and down, she tries to roll away but he keeps at her, for he is mad with creative ecstasy, she is so totally plastic, "Almost rubbery . . . I mean, I've never seen anything like it. She sounded like death. Fucking-A."*

*He hardly realizes how fatigued his hands are. Aches abound from his wrists to deltoids, but he's in love or madly in pursuit of love, or he isn't just sure. Relentlessly, near savagely, she keeps coming back to look at him, and when she rises from a bout with "Yes! Yes!" and low and high pitched moans and sighs all she has to do is look and he's at her again, to the joust, wearing her favor.*

*He moves his right hand, strong, basketball-disciplined hands, moves into her, two, three fingers, leans over and kisses her, lets her legs fly over him, and he moves . . . and she moves, and it's like landslide and fleeing from landslide. He's coming, ejaculating, getting off with a newfound part of his heart and soul. He licks her, finds himself aware of their heat, of the wondrous shower of their sweat, laughing drops flying onto his chest, and he dips his beard and sops the trickling drops on her forehead and her chin that cling like diamond fragments, and he glistens.*

*He pauses, wipes his hands all over her, soaking up her bodily steam, and then anoints himself from head to foot with their shared wetness. He stands—to her he is Great Pyramid and Eiffel Tower, and to him she is mystic mirage on the desert and the beach at ocean's edge. He drops, kneels, not kneeling as he had in monastic obedience but kneeling in true wonderment, bends, humbles himself before her, confessing with eyes, "Yes, I love you . . . God, you're beautiful," and a thousand postcards and radioed transmissions and himself like a child playing in the sand, happy under a late afternoon sun, he leans forward to rest beside her; embracing.*

For Jared that day, that moment, remains as something only his dreams interpret and unravel. From that day forward, on his soul, he finds the mark of her kiss. She is always present with him, *in* him, although not always seen nor felt.

*"Major Jennings!" His name comes at him like cannon fire. "Major Jennings!" and he snaps to. Before him is Aaren, but not as he remembers her but as she most wants to be, in full North Vietnamese military dress. Stunned and at a loss, his disorientation is heightened by the feel of his military garb. It's the same room. He's lying on the same bed. It's a dream within a dream. Has to be!*

*Aaren strikes him with a drill sergeant's switch. It stings like hell. She's not smiling. All is stated through her bodily manner. Fully dressed and pistol armed, her stance clarifies the situation. Jared's a prisoner of war!*

*"Major Jennings, you have been found guilty on all seven counts of war crimes. If you were a foot soldier or even a noncommissioned officer, we might have considered mitigation. But you are an officer. An educated man. A leader of your people. You are personally responsible for this war. Your men act out the moral mandates of your soul! When they kill and maim, rape and pillage, it is you who are acting. Such heinous crimes, such imperialistic crimes must not, cannot be forgiven. It is just, it is justice, that you die!"*

*Aaren draws a knife and slits his belt, clutches his trousers and starts to carve them away, exposing his nakedness. He is half undressed, totally bewildered. He feels nothing in his legs. Am I paralyzed? Then she comes at him again. She kneels, bedside, and strokes his inner thighs. She begins to massage his penis, rubbing a soothing, spicy-smelling lotion all around his private areas.*

*Unable to control anything, lust burns his flesh. A sudden, then rapidly flushing wave of heat washes all over him. His cock rises. Again he struggles fiercely but cannot move, not a pinkie. His mind shouts and screams words that never yield sounds. With eyes that are unable to shut and must follow her as if commanded, he watches her loosen her blouse and start to sway seductively, enticingly, hands cupping her rosebud breasts which she ever so slowly offers to him, up and down, a flowing, a slight swaying, denying to his mind the repulsiveness of her military garb. He becomes hard, terribly hard, concrete aching hard. She casts aside her warrior tunic and exposes her midriff nakedness. It's all*

*milky cloud and comforting hillocks to rest upon. And he tries to reach, strains to reach up and touch her, but can't.*

*He falls back without falling and watches her eyes. They are tending to him, and in a flash they are Char's tender eyes, but like a wisp of hay lost in fire flare Char is gone and Aaren is there. Her look.*

*The deliciousness of her tongue is palpable and upon him. It touches him, makes him sharply conscious that it is her. It draws forth his deep hungers. Her hair gently brushes across his face and thrills his earlobes, they fill with hot flush and she bites them, blood dropping onto her tongue. He's enflamed. His desire is beyond his heart's boundaries. He's churning under her, rather she's churning him, and he loves it, somewhere a voice counsels "Don't let her!" but he does. And she is upon his breasts, deft movements slice his shirt and she's breathing softly upon his nipples as if blowing out small candles. Then she bites and tears him—excruciating pain as if she has latched his nipples and lifted him on ropes, but he loves it. He wants it. He wants her to chew him. "Punish me! Punish me! I am guilty!" throttles through his mind, but not a word does he say, yet she smiles.*

*He knows, she understands!*

*She moves down his body like a sculptor refining her work. Her fingernails are scarlet with his blood, crimson droplets from tattoos which she has scratched out upon him. Words in Vietnamese, cryptic symbols signifying for her this style of punishment. Marking his body with a record of his evil deeds. Mylai and other unrecorded massacres are noted. The image for napalm burns which the illiterate peasants suffer are incised. A thousand names of a thousand villages, now obliterated, are etched with "Searched and Destroyed." A heap of bones, a headstone for all—every beast of the field and child at suck—who were never buried with dignity are inked. Such does she draw, a microscopic artist with blades of fingers. And the pain for him is as intense as pleasure, such is her intent.*

*He flushes and writhes and groans and finds himself possessed, and as possessed desires that she not stop. "Punish me, more!" She reads it in his eyes, and she is pleased.*

*"Long live the Glorious Defenders of the Fatherland!" and her second assault is launched. She straddles him, rising up and down upon him, working his cock with her disciplined cunt, she is master of her art, expert in her trade. She craftily watches him grasp for pleasure among pain and pain among pleasure. She laughs within herself; stoically she tears him apart, stroke by stroke, slowly shredding him. "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, NLF is Gonna Win!" she chants.*

*As she pulls herself off him, he bounds back to a certain reality as if sucking in his first breath after near drowning. His lungs and whole body ache and he feels all the pains she has inflicted: ears pierced, breast savaged. As she moves back off of him, the sight is more brutal than the resounding numbness between his legs can convey. She holds his severed penis in her hand, dangles it, her war trophy. It jerks spasmodically as if alive. "It is alive!" he yells, a yell which he hears, she hears, everyone hears, and she haltingly laughs, sniggers as he makes to move but collapses sideways, draws fetal like the just-raped, fears to touch himself, begins to sense the blood, his own, flowing down his inner thighs.*

*"Death to the Imperialists! Long live the Viet Cong!" and in a movement which he is not conscious to remember, she runs his anus with her blade, twists right and then left and with a knee to the small of his back pins him and jams his own penis up his ass shouting, "Victory! Victory! Victory!"*

*Her shout, rising to yell, swells to cosmic chant. For her all is orgasmic.*

Jared wakes abruptly. He's oddly calm. His sheets are sweat-soaked but he's calm. He stares, forces himself to stare harder. "Did I dream *that*?" goes unvoiced but heard. He whispers as if in private prayer, "I do not want *that*." Repeats it over and over. Offers it up in propitiation, "Not *that*!"

*Aaren enters the room as midnight sets its mark. Jared and the guys are drunkenly draped around chairs and sofas. Bodies, like unwashed clothes, are strewn here and there. She walks in, a bit hesitant about entering the lair. Jared sees her. "C'mere, Liquid Fire!" he commands, and she comes, obediently. He stands and places heavy hands upon her shoulders, pushes her to her knees. "Here, this is what you want!"*

*Jared's penis is hard and erect. "Go on, go on! This is what you want!" She lightly fingers and unbuckles his belt. With a practiced hand she drapes his trousers around his ankles, then strokes and strokes his penis, licking him, taking him into her moist mouth. He moans, jerks and moans. She greedily sucks him in until he comes. Within his pleasures, Jared laughs loudly, for he knows she is his. She's my bitch!*

*Proud of his possession Jared turns to the others and beckons with inviting hand. "C'mon, she'll take you all!"*

*One by one, Aaren is led around the room. She kneels and happily blows the minds of the besotted crew. Services rendered, Jared lifts her up, comes again in her hair, comes on her face. He snorts, starts ripping her clothes off and at half-naked trips her to the floor and jumps on top of her, dives into her. "This is what you want! You always want this!" Fiercely, savagely, into exhaustion, he fucks her, rolls her over and fucks her from behind, whacks her butt and sticks his cock in her ass— wildness insatiable. Finally spent, he rolls off her and calls again, with a leer and a triumphant chortle, "C'mon, she'll take you all!"*

*For hours, they stream towards her, rising like the flood, sweep over her, run through her like kids at the beach kicking waves, and she moans and screams and is the goddess of all pleasure. Each guy proclaiming, stating, whooping, "You like it, don't you!" Neverending, she shouts, "Yes! Yes!" What fun! Everyone's laughing, having just such a good time, and so he sets her up on her knees and mounts her behind while another stuffs her mouth and another sucks her teats and yet another probes her pussy. With the greatness that is she, athletic goddess, strong and*

*taking more than she gives, she outdoes them all by simultaneously jacking off two others.*

*It's all the acrobatics of total submission. Ah, she is jerk off and beat off and whack off and cock suck and ass ream and quick feel . . . totally his.*

This is what Jared dreams within his dream is Aaren's fantasy. It enables him to sleep soundly, embraced by the protective arms of the gods of cruelty.

At the times when he awakens and this scene lingers, he states out loud to himself, "I do not want *this anymore*." The Ride is making him dream more but also remember more and more clearly. He feels the cruelty of these dreams as he progressively remembers them in fuller detail. It's been coming increasingly clear that these dreams are his cage, not the County jail bars or Millston's razor wired fences or Attica's impregnable walls. It's seeping into his consciousness that he'll never be truly nonviolent until he deals with these fantasies of sexual violence. "I love you," he says to Aaren and Char as they float above his bed. He wants so terribly much to make his love mean something, something different from how they all related in the past.

For the first time in a seemingly long time Inside, Jared feels hopeful, even that he's becoming sane *or maybe just less insane*, he laughs at himself. If he can deal with these dream fantasies, *Maybe, maybe, being in here will mean something. Maybe.*

### 38 - SAFE HOUSE, GEORGETOWN

"Where to now?" It's become an incessantly annoying question—to ask that is.

Jared, slunk in his bucket, feet propped on the dashboard, sullen, morose, inward, quiet, sighing, almost immobile, a robot of shit and fart. Jared, wordless recipient of Witsonian welfare—who can cure him? Raise him from the living dead? *Why didn't I die? I heard the bullet. They talked to me, "The next time!" Fuck.*

Steve is driving down the spine of New York's Hudson Valley, past a Woodstock whose famed festival Jared did not drop in on but which now beams its subliminal revolutionary signal to him. This earth base station of rock 'n' roll vibes—the first *kosmic* music station of the Age of Aquarius—nestled in the right ear of Manhattan, endlessly transmits its countercultural messages in the rhythms of the Moody Blues, mad-driving Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana, and of a thousand stoned plunkers and psychedelic spelunkers.

" . . . some pills make you larger . . . "

" . . . four dead in Ohio."

"War—what is it good for? Absolutely nothing, say it again."

"It's a hard, it's a hard rain . . . "

"This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius . . . "

"All we are saying is . . . "

The meaning of Woodstock is delivered to him. *Did you not know all of creation is music? Did you not know that the famed astronomer Copernicus celebrated the Harmony of the Spheres? Did you not know that he so knew the Earth and its pathetic inhabitants that he held it to be between the celestial notes FA and MI—Famus et Miseria—for famine and misery? You did not know this? Then, you have not been listening!*

*Listening. Listening. Was the Revolution in the music? Was that where he hadn't looked? Should he have been a rock musician instead of a raider?*

*Am I simply off-key? Out of harmony with the world? A speaker of holy, fiery, overturning, revolutionary words who seeks to destroy the established powers-that-be in a time that really needs laid-back, good-feeling, "Be here now!" mellow music to spur the next step of human evolution? One earth, one family.*

Steve ejects the tape. He waits a few minutes, observes Jared. He needs to properly set him up for the next stage of the Ride. "Hey, c'mon guy, lighten up. I pulled you out of that hell hole. I tell you, you won't believe what's going down there. Let me tell you, there's more firepower there than I saw in most actions in 'Nam. Truly, yessir, it's like they've moved all their power upstream and in-country and are finally going to fight goddamn Tet all over again! They'll do to Attica what we didn't have the balls to do to Hanoi!" Steve's more excited than he wants to be. His words and mood don't faze Jared.

"Want to know where you're going?" A tease, it should work. But no life signs blink in his patient. "Suppose I told you this is it. The *end of the road*. Your time's up and you're going to meet the Boss." *How could it not work?* Then with a self-conscious correction, "Meet Mr. Hoover, that is. The Director."

"Go on." Barely a grunt.

"Do you think this has all been without purpose?" Steve can't get rid of what he takes as a great one-liner, something he knows would make his fellow agents roar. "Maybe he's going to ask you to join the Agency!"

Jared doesn't laugh, not give Steve his comic due. He just rolls his two honking feet off the dash and cranks down his window. The rush of air waves across him like a loving flag. "Hell, man, fuck, things couldn't get more weird, could they? Fucking-A."

For Jared this is a conclusion, a resignation and a relegation of "reality" to the powers and authorities who move life's scenery about. He accepts that he's no

longer—*Fuck, never been!*—in control of his own life. When Steve called his name, “Jeennnn ... iiiii ...nnnnnggs!” he had almost fucking-A died. He didn’t want to leave Attica, not go back on the Ride. *Fucked in the ass, again!*

Steve’s been looking forward to this day: “The End.” He sees the two words float in front of the windshield the instant he turns south and knows that D.C. is reserving a bed for him tonight. Yet he notices that he’s shivering although it’s a warm, early-fall D.C. day. Whatever’s messing with him, it subsides as he turns onto 270 at Frederick, Maryland and heads down towards the Capital Beltway. As he drives, he’s comforted by familiar names: Urbana, Germantown, Gaithersburg. These towns outside the Beltway are where he so often flees to be alone, where the flora and fauna do not ask him to amuse them with his gifts.

In a deeply comforting way, he’s safe here in D.C. The bureaucracy will always need him. There will always be a place for him among the computers and Xerox machines. Here he will never be totally rejected, despite an occasional glitch or a short-run failure. He knows that others say “bureaucrats” with a sneer and in disgust, but it is bureaucrats who make him feel most wanted. It’s within their mausoleums of symbols and memory that he feels proudly welcomed and secure.

Steve Witson loves Washington, D.C., adores it. He doesn’t care about what happens to Jared after today. His part is over. All he has to do is locate the safe house in Georgetown, unlock the doors, throw the cuffs and chains in the trunk, and tomorrow all the wonders of Pennsylvania Avenue will be his, once again.

Jared’s off the Ride, *but where? Why?* He read the road signs, knows it’s D.C., but he doesn’t know this town. He was down here for one major Moratorium march, but that wasn’t a tourist trip. *Is Hoover coming? Really? Why? Okay, why not? Maybe I should join the Agency, become a good Catholic boy again, kill somebody and be saved!*

Jared's been at the safe house a week. Steve stayed idling as Jared stepped out of the van and stood, as he now stands, before the mansion. "Remarkable!" he whispers, once again. For it is one of those replicas of the Forgotten South that are so often resurrected by foreign architects as they construct an Embassy which reflects what they feel is American. "*Ah, will Tara ever fade, Miss Charlotte?*"

Often on one of his many walks around the grounds, Jared stands here, half expecting some darkie to greet him and lead him within. Today there is a change, he notices it, senses that something is welling up inside, that something is coming down over him from out the sky—*You lost, they won, you fucked up, where the fuck are you?*...like what happens to a recently paroled con, once back Outside all the negative energy from Inside comes home to roost. Jared doesn't resist, can't, just lets it form his reality. *So weary. So tired. So broken. Fuck!*

No one escapes prison unbroken. No matter the state of their health, the prowess of their lips, the charge of their bravado. *Fucking-A!* Prison works; it crushes.

In truth, parole is just a new imprisonment. Jared muses, *Parole never ends, man. One is always imprisoned by either one's own imagination or one's fears.*

Jared surrenders. Not in word. Not a salute. No Farewell Address to his troops. Nothing so dramatic. Just an unnoticed sigh, released from deep within as he tosses away the chains that bound him to himself.

Within that surrender, he slithers into a puddle, soft and round, only an inch deep, all himself, onto the wondrously manicured lawn. He has come home, to a house he has made a home in his mind. He's come to rest; exhausting on the spot.

Jared's brain begins to deprogram. All the brain's information cells discharge as if shorted out. All that he has sought during the twenty odd years of his intellectual pursuits, these he chucks. A cellular transformation sets in. He is that *tabula rasa* so yearned for by the dreamers of Liberty, those Englishmen of Yore

whose metaphysical fancies became the Frontier Land of our early revolutionists. A land with rollercoaster rides labeled Democracy and thrills barked as "Liberty! Come one, come all!"

Jared is now that "blank pad," "clean slate," unmarred table of yet to be thought Grand Thoughts. *Tabula rasa*: erased wax tablet. Thoughtless. This is where Jared is living. What he has become.

He is deeply placated, suffused, filled. Once inside the mansion, he has no desire for News from any media source, from anywhere or place Outside. He ambles about the several spectacular private libraries of the estate but dusts off nary a book or journal. He does not push himself to test the stone boundary that girdles the estate beyond the trees and bushes. He's content to be in this world.

*If it is a garden, then so be it! If it is an island, so be it!* He honestly does not care. Wherever he is, whatever he's in, it's a special place, a spot that takes him in and nurtures him. As on the first, so every night, he's nestled by and around a late night fire that warms him, deeply and throughout. The darkened air comforts him. And the smoothness of morning light lays him quiet and concept-less.

If he had been in his characteristic analytical mood, if the frenzy of Attica and the Ride were still coursing through his mind's blood, if he were who he has been, then he would have been critical of the empowering empty-headedness of the place. It is what, at another stage, he would have judged an effect of a sacred, holy power, a presence which can absorb one's mind so that it seems not to be one's own anymore. Contented, he does not so think because he is what this place intends him to be; thoughtless.

Almost two months pass by before Jared's idling brain begins to shift into first gear—that of curiosity. He's been in and out of every room but—still doing time— he passed up on the several large libraries that justly amaze the average visitor. Then, out of nowhere, Jared shifts into low. He just gets up from his chair

and starts touring, working his way around the main seating room's vast holdings. He snoops, grabs a book, flips some pages, checks an index, in another the table of contents, and, without intent but certainly welcoming the surprise he locates a booze closet, lifts a bottle or two, selects something he's never drunk: *Woodford Reserve, fine Kentucky bourbon—why not?* He floats back into his bedroom.

Up into second and into a smooth overdrive throughout the evening, Jared sips and reads. The book he grabbed, somewhat mindlessly—*Karma, J?*—is blowing his mind. Its title: *The Viet Cong Front in the United States*. On the back of the title page is the explanation, “. . . originally appeared as *The Second Front of the Vietnam War: Communist Subversion in the Peace Movement*.” It further notes that on April 21, 1971, the Honorable John G. Schmitz in collaboration with the Honorable Fletcher Thompson and the Honorable Roger H. Zion with the assistance of the minority staff of the House Internal Security Committee presented this material for publication in the *Congressional Record*. Jared has never seen this book or any reference to it. This report—*if true!*—puts a fresh face onto everything. *Maybe we were wrong. Maybe I'm wrong?*

### 39 - AAREN'S VISIT (2)

"Who's watching Jennings?" It's a question that gets answered with a sequence of pass along names much like the game of telephone. "Isn't McNamara on him this week?" "Ask Putowski." "Hey, I looked in last week, don't need to be bored to death again. Give it to the new guy, Banner." It went like that because—for some reason that no one knows—Jared's case slipped down the priority list once Witson delivered him to the safe house. As things go in bureaucracies, snafu's are a given, not the exception—even in an agency as quasi-mythological as the FBI whose head, J. Edgar Hoover is called "The Boss."

At some point, someone decides to bring Aaren in again. Or was it really a snafu? Aaren doesn't question the caller. She jots down the address and picks up her pre-paid ticket at Minneapolis' Lindbergh airport.

Aaren's regular visiting stopped once Jared was off the Ride. Whoever is on the case—again, if anyone really is watching—she is instructed, "Take that tape." "Which tape?" There was a pause: time lapsed as she heard shuffling, some whispers, "You know *the* tape!" "I don't know what you mean," she says so earnestly and with a tinge of hurt that the agent fumes and rushes his words as if they would erase his previous instruction, "Okay, Miss, don't worry. (Pause.) There is no tape. My mistake." He hangs up. Aaren shakes her head, *Tape?*

The next morning Jared finds a videotape at his breakfast spot, right in front of the coffee pot. After eating he takes the morning paper, a fresh cup of coffee and the mysterious tape, goes to the TV room, slips it in, settles back and raises the volume on the remote. Within a nanosecond he realizes that it's a tape of a meeting at the Black Forest. His heart turns to ice, cracks and he dies as he listens to Witson and Aaren say, "What do you want? Drugs, get him to escape . . . rape me, what?"

On the plane Aaren knows that she's being used again—assumes that Witson is behind this—but she doesn't care what he's up to anymore. She only wants to be

with Jared to tell him about her heart, what's she found out about herself with Char and the nonviolent Sisters. She's not sure how to approach him. *Should I tell him everything?*

"Mr. Jennings, you have a visitor in the Coolidge room," is the butler's single comment.

As Jared walks in he sees a woman across the room. Her back is to him. Her hair is cut mannishly short. She's wearing a plain brown smock that is loose fitting. He walks towards her, halting two feet away.

"Hey?"

She turns. Aaren's face? *It's Aaren!*

"What the fuck . . . ?" Jared is shocked not only by seeing her but by her being in this strange attire and hair cut. "Aaren?"

She smiles, steps forward and links with him by finger-locking his wrists. She looks at him, admiringly. Then she leads him towards a sofa, all formal white, both of them like two out-of-place decorations in this room of ultra-formal taste and propriety. As they sit, Jared rips his hands away from hers, breaking the thin coma induced by the weirdness of her being *here*.

"What do *you* want?" is delivered with control, intending to short-circuit all the bullshit.

"Did you think you could keep me away?" Ah, sweet innocence! Eyes so sincere that he shivers, sensitive now to the depths of her perversity. Echoing throughout his mind, the tape plays back her conversation with Steve.

"Tell me, honestly, this is the contradictions, eh? This is how you fucking-A work it out?"

Having said that, he intended to rise and leave but he stays seated, stifling his violent lust. Despite everything, he wants to ride this filly.

"I don't understand . . ."

*So sweetly*, he responds within, *what does she really want? Why would they send her here? And now?* Flash! A plan pops into his head. *Play her game. She couldn't know about the tape, could she? Be cagey, hmmm.*

She so wants him to want her, to be open that she falls for his switcheroo. He says, shaking his head, "You took me by surprise. I mean," he points at her garb, "your rags, this place. Christ, sure, fucking-A, I'm glad they let you in. You're still my only contact with the outside—with real people, that is."

"Yes. Yes. I know. Maybe love does conquer all?"

His brain riots, *Love? Jesus, bitch, what type of asshole do you take me for?*

"Possibly. Possibly it does," he says, back into the conversation, keeping a lid on all the weirdness. "Tell me where you've been and what's been going on since our last visit?" It's an award-winning moment, the perfection of visiting room banality.

Aaren sighs, inches, almost glides closer. "Everywhere," comes on a smile, a slight head nod upward and eyes sparkling, indicating a fullness to the word "everywhere." Then she says, "Here" and she touches her heart. A slight pause, then "here" and she touches his heart.

He struggles not to flinch as her movement evokes her slick twist of the stiletto. They are back at the draft raid retreat. She's all eruption and Liquid Fire, but now his flesh is asbestos, his heart, titanium. Mercilessly, she continues to slice him with her bodily motions. She lifts and places his palms on her face, kisses them and then lets him have them back. She sighs, a woeful, almost pathetic, confessional sigh, and words of self-criticism, indictment flow, "What haven't I done?"

It's unbearable. Not the pain he suffers from the emotional iron restraints he's cuffing himself with. Not the stabbing pressure of his unvented anger. No, unbearable is the farce, the scene, the dialogue. *I know! I know! They taped you! And I know!* is what he wants to shout, but he's holds back. In recent weeks, he's been gaining some insight on his own tumultuous twists and turns. *Maybe it's happening to her, too? Maybe everyone's flipping out?*

She places her hands on her lap. Calm, almost monkish in her bearing. Then playfully, "Mr. Jennings . . . may I call you *Mr. Jennings?*"

He looks at her quizzically.

"I have come to claim my soul. I have come to praise you, my soul mate."

This *is* too much. "Aw, shit, don't fuck with my mind! Jesus fucking Christ, what *are* you doing? Have you fried your brain, man? Or," bitterly, "fucked yourself mindless?"

He gets up and paces, walks around the sofa, sees himself seeing himself here surrounded by all the opulent heavy-handed finery and overdone airs of the place, laughs at the scene, stares at the walls as if behind them is an audience. Laughs angrily inside: *Maybe it's a two-way wall! Who would put it beyond them? She and I in a fish bowl ... being dissected—Sweet Jesus!*

He blurts out, breaking the mood she has set, making her jump, "Who'd have thought? You're a fucking snitch, eh? It's come down to this. Don't deny it, you fucking bitch!" Aaren is staggered by the remark—*he knows!*— her body jerks backwards, her eyes slowly twitch and flutter making her look stoned, and he runs on that scent. "Jesus, are you drugged out of your mind or something?"

Justified. Righteous. Vindictive. "Didn't you hear me? Your little game's up. They taped you and Steve. All of it. I've heard the fucking tape." He exaggerates, making it all seem buffoonish. "Heighten the contradictions!" Jumping up and down, kangaroo antics. "Heighten the contradictions!" He mocks, stroking the air with

pontifical sweep, "May the blessings of Chairman Mao be upon you and your descendants!"

What she then does totally confuses him. He's expecting her to break down or, actually, to break out—break out of her disguise, this sham attire and false speech, to snarl back at him with the black tongue he's used to. He wants her curses, her *Fuck you!* and *Eat shit!* Her condemnations: "Dickless pacifist, the smell of my cunt will kill you!"

Atypically she doesn't spew. She is stone silent, immobile. Then, as if fainting, she falls back into a corner of the sofa, falls throwing her left arm across the back and lifting one leg to set restfully on a cushion pad. Simultaneously, she breaks forth into hysterical laughter—no words, just sounds, twitterings, head bobbing back and forth, tears streaming down her cheeks. It's the hysteria of the maniac and the bereaved. A wail of laughter, high pitched, low moaned, then short rasping breaths. She lets herself sink into the couch, embrace her, finding it her sole emotional support. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" softly, five, seven, ten times. Ending, "Oh, Jared."

She calls his eyes to her, bewitching. He's watching her like a boxer ready to repel, then simply as a bystander pitying this bewildered woman. *God damn!* He's once again overcome by a fierce passion—"I desire you! I want you! I need you!" is what he desperately wants to say. He bites his tongue, presses his hands over his eyes, *who's crazier?*

Aaren quiets down, dries her cheeks, looks at the man she loves, says with great sincerity and honest disclosure, "Can you see what they've done?"

Eyes still closed, he mentally tracks her cleverness.

"They are truly masters of the contradictions. Oh, can this web ever be unwoven?"

"At last, you admit it?"

"The tapes?"

"Yes."

Pause. He drops his hands, looks at her.

She starts up, "Yes, but—"

"Ha! Gotcha . . . no *buts*. Were you a plant all along—I mean, is the Weatherman trip for you what it was for Steve?"

It's a novel thought for her. "Me, a Fed?"

"How else could you get here? How else could only *your* letters get to me—uncensored, not a jot or tittle blacked out?" This is the first time he discerns this obvious clue—*Fuck, how did I miss ...?*" In a flash all her visits rerun and—*self-deception, Friar Otto!*—he now clearly sees the show titled "Aaren's Deception."

She gathers herself together and stands, takes a step towards him. He steps back as she comes forward. She interprets the moment. "I understand. We're like body and shadow. I move and you move. Somehow never on the same dimension. Together only at some point, some curious point where you begin and I end, I begin and you end."

"What the fuck's that's supposed to mean?" Jared is hyped up, weary but cautious. *Was, is everything a lie?*

She knows that this is her last stand, she'll just have to risk it all. Madness is her only guide.

"I love you. I love you because I love myself. I have come to understand that we are two parts of the same soul. You and I have walked the same road, only in opposite directions. I've been Mary Magdalene drawing your holy lusts. You've been my Sweet Jesus giving yourself up to be crucified. Don't you see, we have saved each other!"

Sarcastically, "Right on, Sister! Right on!"

She despairs. "Oh, Jared . . . *Jared*. Can't you see? Trust? You've been the visible one and I the invisible one. And then you disappeared. And I appeared. It's true, as you went into prison, into this foul womb, going the opposite way, I was born. Once you were gone, I realized how much I was you and you were me. I even had to love Char to find your love, lingering on her lips."

"*Jesus!* You're mad! One fucking-A insane Weatherman asshole!"

She dismisses this with a "Tsk!" but then affirms, "True, I am mad. As only a sane woman can be, today. I am a madwoman. I dress like this because I am mad. I live alone and have chosen poverty because I am mad. I am chaste because I am mad. I tend a plot of vegetables in the middle of a welfare neighborhood because I am mad. I pray . . . pray for Char and her lesbian Sisters. Pray for those who do not pray. I am most mad because I pray for you . . . pray that you will go mad!"

"Fuck! You're now Sister Monk? Seducing me with holy babble!"

Fearful, caring, "Is it that dark in prison," two fingers knocking on the seatback, "that it's only dark in here?" tapping on her heart. She wants to say, "Sweetheart!"

It's still too much someone else's theater. *It has to be a script!* Jared, barely an arm's length away, starts commanding, almost yells, "Get out of here! Fuck you! Go back, go back to wherever you really came from—hell or the FBI or both. Fucking go tell the Boss that I know your game!"

On a frustrated sigh, "But this isn't a game! Truly. Trust . . ." Before she completes the sentence, she's down on her knees, head bowed. "This isn't a game! I did betray you but I've changed, I've seen through all the false ideology, the nuttiness of it all. Please, Jared, please ...."

He doesn't want this. *Stop it! Bring down the curtain!* Angrily, hatefully, bewildered, he bends and picks her up planning to carry her out the door and dump her on the lawn but she wraps her arms around him and try as he may he can't

dislodge her. Her seeming smallness wedges against him with a weight five times her size. His only weapon is his words.

“You love me, eh! Shit. All those letters. Fuck. All that cock-licking and eagle-spread pussy. Yeah, all that ‘Waiting for you Jared, *Special Delivery*’ crap. I’ll tell you, it’s a lot more of a turn-on than this holy molely bullshit. Fucking-A, how in Mao’s fucked-up name did you ever believe this would work?”

Aaren clings to him silently, forlorn, trying to press trust into him through her body. But he is the exorcist, expurgating with biting sarcasm. “I liked you better when you were only mad about sucking my cock and getting fucked up and in and out and around! If you are what you say you are—Jesus, how Satan rules!—man, holy shit, what are you? Just a burned-out hippie chick who’s afraid of living. Man, I can smell it. It’s the smell of the fucking monastery . . . of holy fear. So now you’re praying! Well, whoopie doo! *Fuck it*, you deceptive bitch. *I don’t need you*, so don’t come knocking on my door anymore!” With vehemence, “Get the fucking shit outta here!”

Jared with fierce effort rips her tired arms off of him, flings her to the floor and strides out of the room, leaving her there like a discarded towel, a clean-up task for the butler.

#### 40 - A BRIGHT CLOUD

Janis Joplin sang, "For tomorrow never comes, man . . ."

*J. Edgar Hoover, R.I.P. May 2, 1972.*

It's a day that passes Jared by, except that he reads about it and hears it reported on the evening news. "American hero." "Defender of all that is good and right in America." "There will never be another J. Edgar Hoover." *Amen to that*, Jared smirks.

Little does Jared grasp that it is the day he also dies, at least officially. Even more devastating than the day he is labeled 8867-147, this is the day he becomes truly invisible.

The Boss's death unleashes bureaucratic chaos. Jared's file and so his identity is "accidentally" lost by a quickly promoted Section Chief within the Agency who has been coordinating the Ride and their own undercover agents inside the federal prison system and who has been personally in charge of taking Jared deeper and deeper down Inside, so far down now that he is next to absolutely non-existent. Now, no longer "next to"—he becomes invisible.

Going Inside has a way of making one somewhat invisible, he's already experienced that—folks accept that you are "gone" but, push comes to shove, they still know where you are. They have the name of a jail or prison. They can find ways to visit, even if under highly controlled maximum security circumstances. To truly disappear requires a magician. Someone who can wave a magic wand, intone "Presto!" and everyone in the audience is awed. Who else is Jared's magician but Steve Witson?

After the Boss's death, Steve calls in a few favors and nestles himself inside the Agency, off in a corner where he himself nearly disappears—becomes, in Agency terms, *low profile* as compared to his previous high-profile Black Ops activities. He is formally relabeled *Database Manager* and given an office in a windowless basement where he happily spends his days with other braniacs, nerds, and assorted off-beat Agents who live and breathe information technology.

He sought this position for personal reasons. One, he just wants out of Black Ops. Two, he fears for Jared. Unexpectedly, the Ride affected Steve as much as, possibly more than, it did Jared. Steve honestly feels that Jared is a good friend, even a “decent guy.” After he dropped him off at the safe house he thought, “That’s it. Done with that!” But it wasn’t so. Every day since then he’s gotten up feeling a tug of longing for companionship, even concern for Jared. Nevertheless, truly one of the faithful, he trusted the Boss and so just waited—confident that in time he’d hear about the final outcome.

When the Boss unexpectedly dies, Steve takes the news badly. He panics. At the very moment he hears “The Boss is dead,” he’s gripped by fear for Jared’s safety. He has no way of knowing who else has a vested interest in him. There are those in the Black Ops world whom he doesn’t trust, *not at all!* Some he feels might actually want Jared dead—one of those prison “accidents” or a racial incident. He knows that the Black Muslims have been fooled into doing this more than once.

With the chance happening that the Section Chief gets promoted, so does Steve find his way amidst all the document packing boxes to filch Jared’s file—“accidentally.” The chaos also enables him to quite easily create the impression that he’s still in charge of Jared and the Ride. Executing flawlessly, he supplies the butler with a few knock-out drops to slip into Jared’s morning OJ, and once he’s out cold, dresses, lugs him and, reviving him just enough to function, props him up—with the requisite Agent’s dark sunglasses—at the Boss’s funeral.

Once Steve safely returns Jared to the mansion, he spends several long nights in his office creating, at times erasing parts of, Jared’s storyline. He maneuvers within several governmental databanks, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and arranges for Jared to be officially listed as transferred to Marion—here Fraticelli makes it all happen smoothly. He reassigns the detail watching the safe house and “officially” informs the butler and other staff members that Jared’s protective custody status is “ongoing, waiting for a new chief to be appointed.” They have no reason to question Steve’s authority, and so Jared’s life at the mansion takes on a very orderly regularity. Steve hasn’t a clue how long he can

manage to keep all this just below the surface, so he's monitors Jared's situation daily.

Managing families and friends is another feat, something that does border on the magical. Here's where bureaucracy truly trumps reality—in its power to shape “reality.” Steve convinces Mrs. Jennings that Jared is safe and on a long-term assignment with the Agency. He tells her this during a “Secret visit. *Top secret.* Understand, Mrs. Jennings, your son was always on *our* side. What he's done is heroic. *But no one* must know, only you. We don't want *you* to suffer. He loves you so much, Mrs. Jennings. Your son is such a patriot!

“*Mr. Hoover* wants you, *yes*, the *President* wants you, *needs you*—to keep him safe by telling everyone that you're in touch with him. That you've seen him. That he doesn't want to see or hear from anyone. Okay?”

What mother wouldn't?

“Great! God bless you, Mrs. Jennings. It's mothers like you who make America great!”

*Oh!* Jared's mother so wants to believe. Prays with her Chester's picture in hand. “Our boy's *back* on God's mission, Dear! Thank you, Jesus!”

Steve ensures that occasional letters are mailed—typed and with an expertly forged signature. He further manages to secure assistance from a former Marine buddy who's involved in developing a highly secret computer-based voice recognition technology and thus has Jared “call” his mom monthly—always with very brief messages, but very convincing.

Aaren was unsure how to proceed after her last visit. So when Steve calls and says, “Leave him alone. I'm taking care of matters,” she has little choice but to wait. She throws herself into a new cause—inner city preschool education. She goes back to graduate school, teaches part-time, and faithfully devotes herself to new practices: yoga, meditation, and focusing on developing personal relationships, but as a celibate. She wants to still tap but harness the wildly erotic energy once

released through *Wargasm* and ply it to transform her heart: *purge, purify, prepare me, O Loving Mother!* Each day one of her meditations centers on envisioning Jared and herself as a happily married couple.

Char's situation is a bit more difficult to handle. Although she's used to getting letters returned and not knowing whether he gets hers at all, she's distraught that she doesn't have any clue about where he might be. She contacts her state senators but gets little response—Steve is a step ahead of her, he's nothing if not a master of managing the most minute details.

She sees the country, even the anti-war movement, going into a phase of denial as everyone keeps accepting Nixon's talk about bringing home troops and ending the war. It's as if they're saying, "Honey, he'll be home soon. Just wait." So she's absolutely relieved when Steve contacts her—just the fact of his making a personal visit provides a bit of comfort.

True to form, Witson lies like a bandit. *He's under my direct control. He's in protective custody. His case is being reviewed. See, with Mr. Hoover's passing, there's a lot of red tape to cut through. He'll be home soon.* These are lies she wishes were true, so they become her truths. As Steve suggests and she agrees, it is best for all if she focuses on her new role as parent. He convinces her that her letters are getting through—"Of course, given the situation, I can't get any back to you. But I'll keep him apprised of your love." Cleverly—and leveraging without any qualms what he has come to know is her greatest fear—he says, "Yessir, certainly, *trust me*, I will not mention the boy." With bureaucratic skillfulness, Steve conjures up a cloud of mystification, and it settles around Jared's family, Aaren and Char, and the whole world Outside.

*What happens when you disappear?* Jared knows that something has happened over which he has no control. Hoover's dead. The mansion is quiet. The sentries are gone. He's not getting any mail, certainly no visits. In a moment when he observes himself observing himself—*pretty trippy, man!*—he watches himself

ease back or back off or do something that just settles him into the place. *What's going on out there? Who cares?* He turns inward.

Invisible. Unaccounted for. Living off the fat of the land inside a Safe House.  
*Karma, man, karma!*

He spends a year inside the safe house, still doing time—one way to describe it. But unknown to all, in reality, Jared's been living inside a Bright Cloud.

*Karma, man, karma!*

*Bright Cloud*—another kind of Inside, a misty veil of mystification settles around Jared. In a curious way, Jared's whole life could be explained by understanding this Bright Cloud.

*What it's like to live inside the clouds?* As a child and as a man, he's often daydreamed with clouds. In San Francisco during his graduate school years, he was near ecstatic the first time the clouds descended and swooped up the city. He'd been leaning out his second-floor apartment, a common flat with bay windows in an uncommon town, and was fascinated by the tumbling fluff coming in off the ocean. Something was happening that he had never heard of nor even knew existed.

*Fascination:* Creamy balls, huge and ghostly, big patches, lagoons of clouds, at times tiny wisps falling steadily like snowfall, at others quicksilver avalanches, all coming onshore. The street was soon immersed inside an embrace of wet, chilly clouds that snuggled him, kissed his cheeks with shivers of coldness—he loved it! He longed to run naked through them, for as the banks of clouds tumbled down the street, covering everything and everyone from the ground up to the sky, the world was rendered invisible—truly, he could not see five feet in front of himself.

Now, as real and tangible as Frisco's clouds were, inside the manse a Bright Cloud engulfs him. It emerges, arises most magically and mystically from the *hibakusha*—which glows! There's a fleeting moment when Jared chooses to enter

the Bright Cloud. It is a fateful choice—Matt would have mused, watching him enter, *Karma, man, karma.*

As Jared steps into the Bright Cloud, he is aware of his karma: born on August 6, 1945—the day Americans dropped the Atomic Bomb. The day a revolutionary new mythic story was written, revealing that humans possessed the powers of the gods—who were made instantly defunct at the moment of atomic *blast!* As Jared often tells people, at that moment of blast, “We humans came to possess the fire of un-creation! We can now claim that we control life, reality, existence at the atomic level—by uncreating it, rolling it back down, a revolution of devolution. We are the un-creators!

With that blast, we freed ourselves from the illusionary entities called gods. We no longer need the language of religion or theology. We alone are the masters of our fate.” *Revolution of devolution!*

He goes on to talk about “the Bright Cloud.” As he sees it, the Bomb threw up a great mushroom cloud. It was dirt filled, bone filled, gorged with all forms of pulverized life and vaporized existence, but from its center shone a brightness pure, unblemished, lily-white—“a virginal fire: the atomic heart and soul of humankind.”

He relates how he first became aware of the Bright Cloud. On his sixteenth birthday while in the minor seminary he read the scripture for the day, which also happened to be the feast day of what the Roman Catholics call the “Transfiguration.” With ardor—always gripped by the awesomeness of the scene—he recites by heart the passage from St. Matthew’s gospel, verses memorized from the Catholic’s Douay-Rheims bible:

And after six days Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as snow. And

behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him. And Peter answering, said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. And as he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.

From that moment on, that *Flash!* of insight, he realized that the Bright Cloud is a tangible presence. Jesus had one. Moses had his Cloud manifest as a pillar of fire. Since that day, Jared has preached and taught that America and all of Western culture, and so all of Christendom, entered the atomic Bright Cloud of uncreation that same day, August 6, 1945.

“On that day the leader of the best and the brightest brains, whose communal identity was that of America and Western culture and whose mythic story was that of the Warrior Hero—this leader initiated a true *revolution!*” He pauses to let it all sink in. Then, “Just as we Catholics believe the communion wafer is transubstantiated into the mystical body of Christ, this leader acted as High Priest and transformed earthly matter into a new mythic body—which he named as *Destroyer*. This leader—Robert Oppenheimer—as he beheld the first successful atomic bomb test, said ‘Now, I am become Death, Destroyer of Worlds.’ He was quoting the Hindu goddess, Kali.”

Many often find Jared’s words to be harsh. “I didn’t make this up! Listen to Oppenheimer. He’s the true revolutionary—not Che or Castro, Mao or Lenin, Samuel Adams or George Washington. Listen! *Blast!* and the atomic bomb changed the identity of Americans into the Atomic People. In a way Hoover didn’t grasp, on that day the *world* became *America*—through the amazing act of uncreation. The “world” was uncreated and from that day forward all the world is America and all

people are Atomic People. *Listen!* There are no longer any gods of cruelty—there’s just us, cruel humans. *We, the People* are now *We, the Destroyers.*”

Few like hearing this. Jared is always amazed at how much Americans are beset by historical amnesia, as if “We didn’t drop the bomb! Not us—we’re the good guys.”

“We did. We did drop the Bomb. Vaporized people. But more, listen to Oppenheimer. What does he mean by *Destroyer*? Simply that the Bomb doesn’t allow for anyone to be singled out as ‘the enemy.’ Atomic war with nuclear bombs dropping all around the Earth means that *everyone dies*—the bomber becomes the bombed. Fallout drifts with the jet stream, killing everyone. The Bomb doesn’t recognize political boundaries, doesn’t stop at national borders. It’s almost laughable: the Warrior Hero creates the ultimate weapon that kills everyone—himself included!”

This is why Jared was so moved, so undone when his Uncle Sam gave him the *hibakusha*. Jared silently spoke to the *hibakusha*: *Out of this bombastic revolution of the mind, heart and soul are you fashioned, your metal melted, fused and beaten.* He didn’t know then whether Uncle Sam had any inkling about what the *hibakusha* meant to him. But Jared immediately valued it as a key for his own revolution—whatever it was to be. He trusted Matt’s meaning for *karma*—accepted and kept the *hibakusha* with him as he went Inside. Now the *hibakusha* guides him inside the Bright Cloud.

At the periphery of the Bright Cloud is the world of time clocks, calendars, meals, exercise, and so on—all physical necessities. In that world Jared moves as if on automatic pilot. To the mansion’s staff he is a compliant and easily cared for guest—he makes few requests and never a demand. Although he appears physically calm, his interior life is anything but. Living inside the Bright Cloud is quite similar to living Inside prison. The boundary between dreaming and reality doesn’t exist.

While he's aware of Outside events, he progressively disconnects from contact through media.

A year will come and go, a year achieving what the monastic year of novitiate was meant to, namely, transformation—deep spiritual revolution. At times he spends hours, even days, in silent meditation. At others he writes like a madman. There are blissful periods, even weeks, when all he does is walk around the grounds, totally fascinated by the simplest of things: a butterfly, a soft breeze, pebbles on the patio. Then dark times, nightmare days and nights, shaking, feverish, in prayer, exhausted. His whole life unfolds, refolds, and folds back in upon him—suffocating at times, snuggling him like a newborn at others.

*Kali:* It is during these bleak horrifying drops into the pit of darkness that he begins to sense a deeper meaning to what Oppenheimer meant by quoting the goddess Kali. At first, Jared thought he quoted Kali because there simply was no goddess in Western mythic thought—in the Garden of Eden there is no Mother Goddess present, only a Father God who creates all. But in these Bright Cloud moments of darkness he senses Her majestic presence yet—and this baffles him—in Cloud-thought he *thinks* She is Kali, but she always appears with Aaren's face!

*Jared is back in Marion. He is beating the hell out of the young black inmate. He turns to the knocked-out Witson but sees Aaren sprawled there, blood dripping from her mouth. He looks back at the black inmate, only now it is Aaren looking up at him. "Beat me, Master! I am yours! Beat me!" She is passionate, erotic, and he finds his cock out in his hands, the baton is his cock, he beats her with it, as she moans, Oooh! and Aaaah! The sounds of orgasm.*

*Then it all flips over. Witson yells, "Aaren, stop that!" Jared drops the baton, bolts over to the mirror above the sink—he is Aaren!*

The dark moments trouble him no end. As back in San Francisco, during these moments he cannot see five feet in front of himself.

More than once, Jared's heard Matt's chiding chuckle echo through a dark moment, "Karma, J—karma, man. What are you going to do?"

Inside the Bright Cloud Jared begins to live as an individual at once acutely aware of his very particular identity as *Jared Jennings*—as a distinctive human being—but simultaneously as acutely aware of his very particular communal identity as part of a greater human presence. No name comes to him: not God or Evolution or any other familiarly capitalized word. Rather, he is a presence within and expressing a fuller presence.

He remembers and senses himself as still part Friar Otto and linked to that communal presence as a monk. He clearly knows himself still as 8867-147 and linked to that communal presence as American prisoner, as American outlaw. In a Bright Cloud moment he muses and *Earthfolk* is a word that whispers and then emerges as his heart begins to beat in rhythm and harmony with all living things: flowers, bugs, animals, the mansion's staff. As Earthfolk he feels eternal, sensing that *the human family never dies*, never will, as the Earth herself never will. There is, was and always will be parent-child-parent passing down from eternity into time. He grasps with a fervent sigh that humans are the *consciousness* of Earth, and that this is a consciousness that can creatively celebrate all other living beings and life forms. It is a consciousness that can play with other living creatures in a special way, that *human consciousness can become imagination!* And when it does, *consciousness then becomes conscience!*

*Amazing! We humans are the conscience of the Earth.* Jared jumps up and down, sprints madly this way and that, feels his heart about to burst through his chest, he touches his face, lips, looks up to the sky, opens his arms to let it flood through him, use him, take him as a painter's brush and imagine. Imagine a world of harmony, peace and justice, of ecstatic, honoring orgasmic love between men

and women . . . He's bursting at the seams, explodes into exhaustion, sleeps restfully on the lawn.

*Imagine!* It becomes quite clear to him that the monastic life is a communal way of imagining. That war is a communal way of imagining a whole series of characters: enemies, heroes, cowards, predators. That peace is the imagining of a different set of characters, resulting in a different ending to the story. "War is simply a choice!" he shouts as he walks around the mansion's periphery. "Simply a choice. Imagine war or imagine peace." *John Lennon, a true revolutionary!*

Yet discovering himself as Earthfolk is not simply a utopian insight or a dip into some Pollyannaish innocence. For the undeniable basic movement of reality—dreams and waking states—is that the Bright and the Dark dance, and he must go from one partner to the other. He's brought squarely into the dark recesses of the human imagination—of his own mind and that of the greater human imagination. He confronts the simple yet disturbing fact that this Bright Cloud is somehow linked to the Atomic Cloud. That to understand Earthfolk he has yet to plumb the depth of his relationship with Kali, the Destroyer. "Fucking-a, Aaren! Goddamn you woman, it is you, you I have to plumb!" He chuckles, worries, wrings his hands, smiles, sighs, "Aaren!"

*Aaren:* He imagines her, meets her, but more than that—when she is about, he is alive with a heartfelt passion. *Amazing!* Inside the Bright Cloud he feels drawn, strongly pulled by a heartfelt desire *for him*. Inside the Bright Cloud he doesn't so much venture forward as respond to this wondrous invitation to...all that his mind registers is what his heart so tenderly feels..."to be loved!" All about him is Aaren, and she lingers and is present with him as he grasps what it means to be loved. Aaren who betrayed him. Aaren who sliced his heart with her stiletto. He now feels through all that and senses the desperate love that drives her towards him, lures him towards her. *Liquid Fire!* Jared knows that love has always filled her heart. *Karma!*

*Love that comes to him from his family.* The presence of his brothers and sisters is heartfelt as he pictures his family, gathering around a fabulous table rich with food and drink. There is laughter. There is frivolous and serious conversation. Then their mother enters, arm in arm with their father Chester and their brother Joseph. Surrounding the table on rising platforms are seated all the thousands of souls who are ancestors to the Jennings. Jared's heart is so full and rich: "It is good to be family!" All of a sudden his eyes are their eyes, he sees down through generations, lives flash before him, time with its storyline of joy and heartbreak, war and peace, sin and redemption, stream before him. He is within this stream. It is a stream that has been and will be and is most joyously alive in this moment of their familial embrace.

*Love that comes to him from Char.* It's a difficult journey they are on, hand in hand. In scene after scene, they find one another, rejoice in the discovery of their love but then are parted. The parting is always around an event of childbearing. She dies in third childbirth and he is left to raise the children. In another version, off to war, a soldier not to return, leaving her pregnant and alone. In yet another scene, they are an old couple, childless, pained that their lives are barren; a sad distance grows between them.

There is so much pain, so much heartbreak with loving Char. For long periods within the Bright Cloud he walks with her, is parted from her. Theirs is a shared bereavement.

"Why?" He is in tears.

"I don't know. I truly don't know."

"I want to give you everything. My body, my soul. I love you. Why do we suffer so?"

It's a scene wherein they are aware of their troubled history, of their story.

“Forlorn lovers? Doomed to never love? Is this it?” she laughs with a hint of desperation, resignation.

*What is it that I’m feeling?* Jared asks himself, but not her. He must find this out on his own. He looks at her in a moment when she isn’t looking at him. *That’s it!* It’s an insight that is weighted with its own dread and fear. “You’ve looked at me and *your look* . . . truly, I knew that you were seeing me, could see inside me, my soul, you know how I feel about that, your look makes me real.” She’s waiting, unsure. He says, “I must look at you—you must accept *my look!*” Pauses. “I want to look inside you, not just be a cock inside you.” She smiles, he melts.

It is then that they relive her abortion. He watches her undress, slip into a hospital gown and lie down on the gurney. In the operating room it’s all done with dispatch. There is blood, there is the sound of a gurgling suction machine, there is flesh squashed and deposited in a pan, which is quickly removed. She’s not looking at him, she doesn’t want his look. He’s looking at her and his heart beats with a savage lust to kill and dismember her. His anger is molten. He pushes the doctor and nurses aside, stands above her, *hunt you down and . . .!*

Now she looks at him—it freezes the scene. He looks at her receiving his look, and he sees through her eyes that it is he who has aborted life. He who has not given birth—to their life. She speaks softly, unafraid, “Jared, it is we who give birth.” *Imagine that!* He chokes, cannot speak, something changes—he sees himself as Char, his body as her body

“Forgive me, my love,” he prays as he kneels before her, places his hand upon her belly. “Forgive me for never having looked at you!”

Char pulls him tenderly into an embrace. It is so profound that it shakes Jared to his mythic roots as a male. It takes them back into Eden where Adam did *not* embrace Eve. Where he lied to her, telling her that she had no mother, no Goddess Mother, that she came from his rib—*that the male body is the birthing body*. Theirs is an embrace of the lie—that men should not look at women, not become mothers.

"When you look at me, truly look at me, see me—see me as Char and as Mother—then we are born as beloveds," she whispers tenderly.

The words open him up, split him, and then heal him. "It is so, I am your beloved."

Jared and Char—coupled as *Beloveds*.

*Love that comes to him from the Master.* Cray hears, "There's just too much love here in Attica?" He goes to Jared's cell, tells Arnold to leave. Arnold's no fool, he knows how crazy Cray can get.

"Do you mean that?" Cray's words threaten.

Jared had just dropped off into a snooze, exhausted. He blinks blearily at his interrogator. The question hangs there.

Cray runs nervous fingers through his hair. "Did you say that to the inmates?" Jared's look tells him all. "Sweet Jesus! You did." Pause, searching his own soul. "Lord Almighty, they didn't kill you?"

Jared grunts, gets up and walks over to the sink, splashes some water on his face. *What's the big deal?* he wonders, but just then he feels the back of his neck explode. "It's not right! It's not right!" Cray yells, screams wildly as he pummels Jared with a hard wooden baton. "Jesus loves *me*, not you!" *Thud. Whack.* Blood all over Jared's shoulders. Unbelievably he's still somewhat conscious. Survival rage rushes through his body, his arms whirl around and Cray is heaved backwards, crashes into the bars. More crazy-eyed than ever, Cray is spitting bits of foam as he denounces Jared, "You weren't supposed to be the one! You aren't the one!"

Jared's heart has stopped beating, he can't feel anything. Then in a weird gesture that totally baffles him, Cray drops to his knees; the baton bounces on the floor, rolls over and idles next to Jared's foot. "Love me!" Cray pleads as he lowers his head, half-prostrates himself before Jared, "Love me as you loved that kid in

Marion." Jared bends and picks up the baton. *There's just too much love here in Attica* . . . He tosses the baton through the cell door and out into the corridor.

"No more, Cray. No more suffering, man." Jared sidesteps him, doesn't know where's he's going, steps out into the corridor, turns and looks at the sobbing, pitiful creature. "There are no masters and slaves. There is no love at the core of violence. Jesus didn't die for anyone's sins." As he finishes, Cray lets out an earth-jolting scream and throws himself full prone on the ground, "Father! Father!"

*Love that comes to him from Matt.* "I told you—couple's karma." Matt laughs quietly. Jared: "Me and you, the couple you mean?" Matt sheepishly grins. Jared strives to understand. "Something we did in the past or are to do . . . Okay, hell, I'm never sure I get your karma spirituality stuff, man. Can you help me out?"

"What's more to say? What happens to us is less important than what we do with what happens to us. That's it."

"Okay, wise guy, fuck, what did we do?"

"Stopped the war."

"Fucking-a, Matt, don't go there. Nixon's the story, he and Ellsberg. Their duet."

"Yep, couple's karma, dig it?"

"After all this, you're saying *what?*" A long silent pause. It hardens. For the first time in a long time there's a palpable distance between them. Jared senses that Matt is slipping away, leaving him. "Matt?"

Matt's face is slightly twisted by consternation but his eyes twinkle, "Jared, my brother in crime, we did it! Dig that—we're outlaws, outside the law. *Free!* Man, we're free."

Jared starts but can't find the words; his mouth's ajar, he looks dumbstruck.

“Lighten up, man, we’re free. Dig it, we’ve got to do something with *that*.”

*Love that comes to him from Quinn.* It happens again this morning. “What are you doing today?” He knows he means, *What are you going to screw up today?* “I’m going to try out for football.” His father stops his coffee cup in mid-flight to his lips, pausing for emphasis, stares at his son. “You?” He hears, *You’ll just screw that up too!*

Jared and Tony are throwing the football around. “Hey, give me that!” Quinn rips the ball from Tony’s arms. “Go out for one!” he yells to Jared. Tony looks at him, terrified. Jared runs. Quinn throws the ball. Jared drops it. “You screwed that up you little punk. Get over here!” Too scared to run away, the younger boys gather around Quinn. Quinn slaps Jared upside the head. “Can’t you do anything right?”

Tony’s smart—Quinn is like his older brother. “You’re really strong. You threw that a mile. Are you going out for the team?” Quinn grabs Tony, squeezes his throat. Jared grabs Quinn’s hand and tries to pull him off Tony. “You’re nothing but little girls,” and in one powerful swoop Quinn knocks the younger boys to the ground. “Don’t move!” he growls threateningly. Jared and Tony wiggle closer to one another, bonded by fear of their neighborhood bully. Quinn starts throwing sticks, leaves, pieces of newspaper on top of the kids. He takes out a match, strikes it, it goes out. Takes out another, and as he does Jared quickly gets up, heart racing, words stumbling from his mouth, “Don’t hurt us, please. Don’t—” Before the sentence ends, Quinn grabs Jared’s left arm, twists it up behind his back—*crack!* like a small branch being snapped in two.

Jared is so shocked that he doesn’t immediately respond. Tony scrambles away and high-tails it home. Jared bursts into tears. “Aw shit, kid, you really screwed everything up.”

Inside the Bright Cloud Jared sees Quinn as never before. Tearing the world apart. Torturing people. A presence of endless pain, neverending suffering. Cray and Quinn: Jared accepts that they believe that love is at the core of violence. "Really screwed up, man! Really screwed."

*Love that comes to him from Aaren.* Love that comes from the underside of hate, a subversive hanger-on to evil intentions. He listens to what she has never shared with anyone, never, ever.

"You want some of this!" He's delighted, she's so young, wagging it, he's hard as a rock, ready to come, waiting for her lips. She's ten, he's twenty.

"You want some of this!" He's excited, has her trapped, ankles tied to the bed posts, she flails at him with her girly arms, his iron-grip athletic hands press her down easily. "Say yes!" He threatens. She wants to spit but fear clamps down her tongue. "Say yes!" Violently angry. *Say yes! Sayyes!*

"Yes."

He's a high school senior, star football center, she a freshman.

Inside the Bright Cloud, she wipes away the mist, opening a mirror into time. "You want some of this!" *Did he say that?* She turns and sees him—*what's his name? Jared?* He's mocking, fooling around, prancing on the stage, showing everyone that the gun is a dick. *Who the fuck does he think he is, motherfucker!*

"This is Aaren."

"Hi, I'm—"

"I know who you are," not kindly spoken.

She finger-beckons him closer, his eyes light up, she knows those eyes, "You fucking hypocrite," she whispers heatedly, "You're a motherfucking rapist at heart!" He can hardly move—*what?*

"You want some of this!" She's standing, and a Sister and a male Wargasm fucker are kneeling, all tongues out for her pussy. To her: "You want some of my cunt?" To him: "You want some of my clit to suck?" *Ha. Ha. Ha.*

Aaren appears, sitting right there in the mansion's living room. For some reason he realizes that he's not surprised. "I know about your fantasy about me."

"I'm sorry," he kneels down in confessional repentance.

"Get off your fucking knees, asshole! Don't you see, don't you get it? Don't confess, *profess!*"

*What?* His stupid look is just, well, too idiotic!

"You're a fucking fool, Jared. Look at your life, just a fucking fool's life. Man, you don't get it, do you? That you're the worst rapist of all!"

*What?*

"All this nonviolent rape. All this Sweet Jesus rape. It's soul rape, you stupid motherfucker. Guys like you make it possible for the hard-asses to rape us without pause. Why do you dream your little fantasy about me?"

"I'm sorry . . ."

"Stop it! Stop it! No more! Jesus motherfucking Mary Mother of God, when I've been raped good and hard there's at least been lust, raw violence, bile! But you're just puke. You lay me down and gently, slowly, tenderly, sweetly stick it in me, get your pleasures and off you go. You never even know I'm there!"

"But—but Aaren," he's desperate, a forlorn yearning that sends thunderclaps throughout the Bright Cloud, "I love you."

She drops her own atomic bomb, "No! Never! Stop! Don't you see, it's your love that's killing me, hurting me—it's the blanket you throw over my eyes as you rape me. Jesus, Jared, don't love me, *worship me!*"

Jared is baffled, hangs in the air. Aaren: "I am Kali, goddess." Patiently, she reveals the significance of the fact that Oppenheimer quoted Kali. "See, what the warrior scientists on the Manhattan Project did was an act of worship. They revealed to the world the face of their mother goddess, the dark mother, the Destroyer. In the West, in our Biblical tradition, the traditional teaching is that there is only a Father God, as in *Genesis*, there is no Mother God. But on August 6, 1945, She was revealed in an act of supreme Warrior worship—an act of total submission, of warrior self-annihilation. I know this sounds weird, but think about it. Oppenheimer chose the right words as he celebrated the presence of the devouring Mother. He used the Hindu Kali because in the West we *pretend* we have no Mother God, but we do. It is She, the Destroyer. It's She we've been worshipping ever since The Garden. Face it. Deal with it! We Christians have a Mother and a Father Goddess. They're both un-creators, not creators."

*Worship me!* As Aaren says this, everything, "Just fucking everything became clear!" *Hoover fucked up. He tested me by the Ride but the revolutionary he really needed was a woman. A woman who was confident in herself as Destroyer. One stronger than any of the male gods of violence. He needed Aaren, not me! To un-create the Old World, bomb it into submission if need be—Aaren was there all along, waving to him, talking with Steve—Aaren the Weatherman bomber!*

*Worship me!* Of course, the Revolution I've always wanted is the one countering the Bomb. But I can't do that. Not by myself. Only women can release the goddess energy that both destroys and heals. Only women! Fucking-a, man, it's Aaren.

Out loud, skipping around like a ten-year-old kid: "Aaren! Aaren! I love you! I need you! With you, we are the Revolution!"

*Revolution:* Within the Bright Cloud, Jared looks at Aaren and beholds all that he knows violates the First Commandment, "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me." On that day he feels that he's ready to leave, but just doesn't know how. He accepts that he has to be patient, wait, be a bit more like Matt.

Finally, *love that comes to him from himself.*

"Your leaving the monastery killed dad."

"Your plea for Conscientious Objector status is denied. America, love us or leave us!"

"You draft raiders are worse than the average criminal who strikes at the taxpayer's pocketbook. You strike at the foundation of government itself! *Five years, maximum sentence, no parole.*"

"You're a felon now, Jared, classified as a 'violent felon,' you've thrown away your life, your career. Aren't you sorry—at least for Mom?"

*Bruiser loves you, baby! Dikbar and Sally and the black kid at Marion, not to say the boys now dead at Attica. "There's just too much love here in Attica!"* Man, are you insane?

"Agent Jennings," he rises, steps towards the podium, The Boss leans down to pin the medal on his chest. "Good work, son. America is proud of you!"

"You've got to leave this place."

"But I did, Albert, I left, but look where I'm at now."

"Did you really leave?"

"Don't fuck with me, man."

"Something's still not right, Otto. You've got more work to do. Sorry."

*This is a joke, right? A dreaming joke, right?*

*Outside:* As he wanders through the Bright Cloud there are revolutions of unexpected turns. Hoover dies and Watergate happens the following month. If he were alive The Boss would have given up the ghost upon hearing how the mightiest man in the world pulled himself down into the gutter. Going to China is a mere blip when those cut from Hoover's cloth hear about the arrest of the White House "plumbers" at the Democratic National Committee office in the Watergate hotel in D.C. "Nixon must be mad. Simply mad," so many say. How else to explain it? If Jared had not unplugged the TV and stopped reading as he wandered through the Bright Cloud he would have laughed and confessed, "Not by student protestors. Not by draft resisters and draft board raiders. Not by our nonviolent acts or the violence of the Weatherman. No. *Can it really be true?* Nixon morally implodes. His paranoia—sent amok by Daniel Ellsberg's lonely heroic act—did what no one else could do."

*Nixon ended the war! Certainly not you, Jared. Blessed are the peacemakers, man, blessed be Tricky's Dick!*

The Paris peace talks are on and off. Hanoi and Haiphong suffer the longest bombing of the war as Christmas passes while Jared is inside the Bright Cloud. The beginning of 1973 brings *Roe vs. Wade*—possibly triggering his Bright Cloud scenes with Char? Then Lieutenant Colonel William B. Nolde, the last American to die in combat in Vietnam, is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. As such, the war ends, POWs start coming home—"Operation Homecoming." Yet did or does

anything ever really change on the Outside? Is there ever truly a revolution that is other than one on the Inside? The siege at Wounded Knee in South Dakota—71 days long, from February through May of 1973—gives the lie that America has done other than turn its attention to destroying another people, now not gooks but the ever-ready Hollywood savage, the Injun, the Red Man, the savage native.

Yet, it does happen, exiting the Bright Cloud, at least for Jared. Without his having a hint of the shift, and in an early morning Black Ops raid that Steve Witson knows nothing about—totally eluding and evading all of his computer tricks, taps and traps—Jared is, once again, drugged, dragged out, and dropped off somewhere.

It happens on May 17, 1973—the first day of the televised Watergate hearings.

## PART IV: DREAMSLIPPING

### 41 - GREYHOUND BUS DEPOT - LOS ANGELES

When they dump him off the Ride—for this is how he feels, like a piece of trash flicked out onto the highway—the last exit is Los Angeles.

He awakens, slowly focusing—*A motel?*— and is immediately distracted by a salty smell and a low humming roar that sounds like ocean surf. *How?* A memory is nudged—*San Francisco?*—he wonders but the breeze flapping the sun-stained window shade exposes a giant palm tree. It doesn't disturb him at the moment that he doesn't know how he's gotten here. *Am I still inside the Bright Cloud?* He leans over to turn on a lamp and a matchbook cover whispers, "Welcome to LA." A wry smile—*ain't Louisiana!*

Jared lies there for several minutes, then rises, not to dress because he's already wearing his clothes, rumpled from sleeping in them. He doesn't bother to wash his face or straighten his hair. Looking like a morning monster he opens the door and steps out onto a sand-blown walkway. He ventures forth.

Of the few other strollers he passes on the beach-walk, he doesn't ask touristy questions, although he's never been here and doesn't know where he's walking to—he's just walking.

"Venice" says the sign and he asks it, "Venus, great goddess, where art thine gondolas?" Haughtily, she snubs him. Undeterred, he continues walking through the bits and pieces of early morning trash that cuddle at the walkway's edge. The soft muted sunshine, the snappy kissing breeze, the crisp brightness of it all, such as he's never known—*bliss!*—he is on mindless lockdown. Not thinking, not plotting, not wondering who paid his bill, if it is paid, he slips his hands into his pockets and finds unexpected treasure—two one-hundred dollar bills. "Jesus! Wow! Fuck."

Jared hasn't held money for *how long?* No matter. *Wow! Fuck.* Unaware, he's attracting attention from two vagrants who sleep out under the palms most nights. They shadow him. Hungry, he stops for a doughnut and coffee only to have his C-notes rejected. The vendor says, eyeing his rumple-haired, wild appearance, "Go on! I'm no jerk, buddy. Pass that fake shit off on somebody else."

"C'mon, man, it's real!"

"Sure, buddy, sure. Go on, take a hike!"

Not quite amused, *I'm rich but starving!*

He catches the date on a newspaper: May 18, 1973. *Fucking-A, calendar time again!* He's got to find change to buy the paper.

The soothing beauty of sky-blue waves cresting and crashing in small chalk curls snags his attention, as it does most tourists, so before he goes looking for a bank to cash in for smaller bills he wanders over to the ocean's edge. He slips off his shoes and wiggles into the damp sand. *Brrr!* It's colder than he thought but he's hooked on the sunrise surfing on breaking waves and so he just stands there awhile. He jiggles in up to his trouser cuffs, rolled as they are up to his knees, and then suddenly—drawing a surprised laugh out of the two stalking him—he flops into the big wet.

The coldness breath-gasping shocks him, *thump!* throws his heart like a heavy stone at his chest, and the spray, salty and distasteful, makes him choke and laugh. But *whack! Whack!* Before he can right himself he feels the blows: one, then two, a kick and he's reeling. "What the fuck!" spurts like whale spume and he rolls sideways several times. Four hands are on him, two pushing roughly into his pants. *Rape!* images of prison swarm up—but there's no "Fuck the bitch!" so it's not rape, just robbery.

With an agility they hadn't anticipated—two as one, one as big as him, "Easy money!" they had calculated—Jared rises and confronts them. He hops sideways out of the water and crouches like a defender trying to stop a two-on-one fast

break. The muggers quickly lunge. Two against one they pull him apart, one on each side, yanking, but he holds. *Marion. Quinn. Attica.* The fury of his scar explodes and he crushes one nose and knees one stomach. Shocked by his strength and sudden rage, they read the taut line of his scar to mean, *Ain't some ass-fuck with early sunshine money.* Faster than they came, they're gone, doing what they do best—surviving.

Heaving and sweating and riddled with an uneasy anxiety, Jared turns this way and that, eyeing up and down the beach to glean signs of other attackers, but none come. As such he is facing LA, facing east, an updated version of the conquistador Balboa but backing into the Pacific, hardly pacified. *All we are saying is give Peace a chance!*

Angrily, he spits, "*Fuck you, LA!*" as if that is what the conquistador should have said, fuck finger rigid and pumping. But just as quickly, he's snickering, giggling, then laughing loudly at his miserable self. "Jesus fucking ass-wipe Jared, this ain't prison... It's fucking-A dangerous out here, man!"

A few moments pass and he's calming down, breathing regularly. With rueful laughter he wipes the sand from his trouser legs, rips open his shirt and plunges back into the water. *Dig it!* He swims a bit but tires easily. Splashing himself in the face, he licks the salt, then lies back and floats, lounging like a big whale . . . . sinks meditatively for a moment, seeking the deep embrace of Mother Ocean from which he knows all has come. Dropping into a sense of himself as slime emerging from the great primordial Ooze, he crawls out of the water, half-stoops, clumsily rises erect and walks—*totally blitzed!*—back to his motel room.

Three hours later, he wakes again. Lying there he wants to call, to say to someone, "I'm out!" He realizes he himself wouldn't believe the message. Still hardly believes it.

*Outside. The free world. On the streets.* Wherever he is, he knows he can never again be in just one place at one time. *Inside* has irrevocably screwed up the

flow between dreaming and reality. Every day from now on, his mind is like a wall stacked with TVs, each tuned to a different channel.

He rolls over, tugs on an ear, squeezes his eyes shut. *Am I still in the Bright Cloud? Am I just dreaming?*

He opens his eyes and there are no bars. "Shit! Fucking-A shit! I'm out!"

*What am I to say?*

He senses enough about the weirdness of the Ride to anticipate that Steve—and the Boss reaching out from the grave!—have created a fictional world for his family and friends, as they had for him on the Ride. *Postcards. Pictures. Secret FBI meetings with my Mom. Geezus fucking-A K-rist, I can smell it!* He's a bit paralyzed by the dawning awareness that he's been out of touch for quite some time—*can it really be a year?*—and he has no doubt that his story's been "managed" by misinformation experts. *God only know what people think happened to me!*

*If I call, how will they have changed?* What does he know about them now after, *what?*—he counts the months—*man, almost two and a half years? Fuck! Man, thirty months—about a hundred twenty-blah-blah weeks, Jesus! And a god-zillion hours.*

*What were they doing during my time Inside?*

He does know some of the Outside chronology. "Fucking-A, it be May of seventy and three," he falsetto pitches as he slaps his head. He's up and slowly pacing, trudging around the room. He's recalling a headline, "Ceasefire Signed in Paris" back in January. Out loud, "Ha, the war's ending!" He paid attention to some of it. Of course not even he could miss hearing about Watergate. *Just how fucking mixed up will everyone and everything be?*

He doesn't call—anyone. *Why try to explain it all over the phone?* Not even

Mom. *On vacation*—that’s how he sees himself. Lolling in bed he daydreams about San Francisco, how much he likes it, would relish walking right now through Golden Gate Park. Hitchhike up the coast highway? *Naw!* He knows he won’t delay leaving this place too long. *Snap out of this!* He’s aware that he’s caught in between, more than a bit overwhelmed by the dual facts of being not-Inside and of carrying the Inside with him. “Aaren,” he sighs. *I need closure*, he admits to himself. He has to get back to Minnesota, sometime soon. *But not yet—not today.*

In less than a day Jared sees all of LA that he wants to just by hanging out in Venice. He talks to the ocean. “It’s just like LA to promise gondolas and give you taco vendors! What a trippy scene! But it just ain’t my speed, man!”

Truly not on a vacation jaunt, he doesn’t hop on the Gray Line to see the “Homes of the Stars.” But wanting to see something of the much heralded Southern California beach, he does take a short hike, barely two hours up and back, on the newly opened boardwalk. Lots of renovation, some dumps, up into Santa Monica, truly a funky jewel, scads of scantily clad women—at least through Jared’s Midwestern eyes. Hip people, loads of money, hippies on the street—he wearies. A hand-lettered sign puzzles him, “People’s Republic of Santa Monica.” *Maoists? Are there Weathermen about? Aaren would love this! Ha.* Muttering to himself, “Just a fucking ignorant hick from the Minnesota sticks, what can I tell ya?”

*Gotta go!*

The Greyhound bus depot feels like a visiting room on the Outside. Many are folks who carry their world in small parcels—*like hermit crabs*. They scuttle, moving feverishly along, glancing neither this way nor that, afraid to engage an *other*. Bemused, Jared realizes that he now knows what only few know, that *they*—the gods of cruelty—use such places as their observatories. *No fucking doubt about it!* They sit behind the walls whose opaqueness is only created by those who do not want to be seen.

As Jared sits and observes, he sees with Inside eyes. *Who takes the bus and why?* He sees the very poor who litter the landscape around the depot, not riders or passengers, but just hanging out at their day spot, begging at times, picking up a discarded fag. Stains and spots of human flesh. He notes the near-poor who labor and sweat for bare existence, always on the border of poverty with suitcases and duffel bags crammed with their life's belongings, their kids running around, comfortable here in a place not unlike their homes. Then a segment of the niggardly middle class who are pinching pennies by taking the bus, and whose eyes show fear that they might be touched, whose noses squinch from odors real and imagined. *Damn, this depot is its own fringe area of Inside.*

*Enough!* He slaps his cheeks lightly, fingertip-thumps his forehead and upbraids himself out loud, easily overheard, "Jesus, didn't you learn nothing? Fucking-A, *ex-con!*"

He wants to shout, "You are beautiful!" Say that to all his comrades in public transportation, but he knows they'd laugh. *Beauty—ah, ever the philosopher's quest.* It's a residue of his Earthfolk insight. "Truly, Mister, you are beautiful. Do you know that all creation has occurred so that you *are* now? So that you can feel and breathe and touch and fuck and eat and sleep and laugh . . . and just be!" *Why not?* Because he knows he'd get locked up. *Public nuisance. Ambulatory schizoid.* He's no dumb con, so he locks it up within. Just runs his script on a solo reel. *God, people are beautiful!*

He watches a child work hard at tying her shoe. She gets so frustrated, several times looping this way and that, only to have it all fall down like overcooked spaghetti. And the brother, the one who chases her and sits on her and causes her no end of annoyance, reaches over and says, "Let *me* do it!" Yet, although he's talking with a tone of superiority, his stooping to help is actually an act of affection, and as he kneels before her she hugs his head and kisses him. "Stop that!" he roughhouses and pushes her away, but not before the bond is strengthened, a memory encased for cherishing later.

An elderly lady of proper dress and careful makeup is asking for change from a ticket handler who's clearly tired and trapped within a moment of exasperation. Admirably, before dismissing her, he takes the twenty-note and walks behind the counter to make change. Her sincere "Thank you" heals this moment of ancient pain.

So it goes during this morning while waiting two hours for his bus, eating limp pastries with thick crusts of addictive sugar and an ever-filled cup of joe. Jared sits and digests and burps and holds on to his spot, ticket in his pocket, ready to go home.

#### 42 - THE RIDE HOME - MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

“What is America in the spring of 1973?” This is the question that he draws like a line across the map, those highlighted lines used by the Automobile Club to guide the wanderer to the *Right Spot*. “What is America . . . ?”

Jared knows that the landscape is the same. Give or take some developments, new roads, rising concrete towers in the large cities—*it's all as it was before I went Inside*. As the bus crosses state line after state line, passes through big, small, and disappearing cities, rural landscapes, there's nothing starkly profound about the changes. Nothing like, “It all went Dali!” as if buildings swooned across one another. Or “It all went Matisse!” and people transformed into a series of pointillist dots. Nothing like that. Much remains as Remington stroked the Wild West landscape, as Woods drew Iowa Gothic, as Hopper pictured the slow pace and frail light of coffeehouses on stopovers along the highway. Jared doesn't expect to see the obelisk from *2001*. Nothing so obvious. But what happened inside the Bright Cloud lingers, and he senses a change in the thoughts and feelings that meet him at borders—borders of the imagination. He's a new creature formed by the Bright Cloud, and as such he keenly senses that something has changed “in America.” It's not *Revolution!* as he once expected—it's more like he'd find some Earthfolk if he got off the bus in any town or burg and went knocking on doors. It's a quiet sensing that starts to nudge him, almost imperceptibly, towards excitement.

As he rides along, everything is slowly becoming alive—there's a feeling of purposeful activity, of vigorous life around him, so unlike the atmosphere of aimless deadness and dreary forlornness that permeates *Inside*. In no time, he's enjoying the vibrating rhythms of the bus, of the churn and chomp of the engine, of pistons straining and groaning up hills, switching to screeching air-brakes clawing the road going downhill. Forever embedded within his muscles and sinews is the lurch and motion of this highway liner. Resident in his ears is the noise from this road-roaring beast, the wind resisting it and the chatter of loosely held windows, and the whimper of seats being munched and gnawed by bodies stretching for comfort and squiggling into landing places, resting bored butts.

"Hi," comes softly but firmly. There's no doubt its target is him, so he chokes back the reflexive "Me? You mean me?" Instead, "Hi" jumps back, friendly. Considering herself invited, she slips in and sits down but just as quickly bounces up as if frightened by an unseen cat or dog on the seat. It's only his right leg, one of his overlong stilts that, although he is sitting by the window, are crammed this way and that, halfway across the aisle seat. Embarrassed, he crunches up more to make a spot for her because he does want her to sit down. "Bombs away!" she giggles and plops down next to him.

She is solicitous. Not a come-on but a friendly sort, someone who says to herself, "We're all in the same boat, so let's be friends!" He watched her walk up and down the aisle twice, once going to the john and the next—it seemed to him—just to scope things out.

He's instantly cornered by the awkward realization that he has forgotten how—*how to move among the bar stools! Cripes, fuck, am I once again the newly released Friar Otto?*

Within ten minutes Jared is silly-putty in her hands. Effortlessly, she seduces him with scents and wisps and sweet smells and that high energy thrill of the unfettered feminine that plays out when not wary of The Hunt. Jared is not coming on to her as most guys do and she likes that. He listens—she likes that; he smiles, and she likes that. His nods when she says this or that, which she thinks oh so clever and important, tell her that he's intelligent, at least as smart as she is, and she does consider herself smart.

*Lock-up and Count!* Jared keeps his legs locked, embarrassed by the pulsating cannon between his thighs! While his body is Outside his sex drive is still locked up—hopped up and about ready to escape!

"Your turn, darlin', what do you do?" ends what has been a dizzying recitation of "Coming from Fort Worth"—said with a gesture of steer horns growing

out of *Fort Worth*—and “Daddy’s in oil . . . but then isn’t everybody!” All embellished with a flutter of “My older sisters, do-tell darlin’ I tell ya’ll, two of them are scandals, if I do say,” and a clutter of local references and stories that just underlines “How wonderful I find this Minnesota, especially the winters, y’know I love the winters—can you believe me?!” which is delivered with a pat on his hand that burns into him like branding cattle.

*Thank God she keeps talking. What am I to do? Say? Christ, I’d love to lean over and slurp her, fuck, a long lick of her luscious self. God Almighty, I am a hungry man! ... Fucking-A, I’m Outside!*

From the start, he’s been waiting for the inevitable question: “What do you do?” *What to say? Can I avoid it? Lie about it? Should I? How do I say, “I did time . . . and I’m mighty proud that I did it well!” Should I say this? Fucking-A, what should I say?*

Bending the truth, he answers with what comes naturally: “Err, I’m a student.”

Coyly, with a backward moving glance, checking him out, she catches him off-guard. “You certainly don’t *look* like a student!”

*What? What could she mean? “Jjjenningssss!”* Shit, of course, the scar and his scraggly growth and the shabby prison-release dugs. He’s a bit rusty but he quickly recovers. “I’m a graduate student . . . in, um, anthropology, and see, I was back up in the mountains with, with the Hopi Indians,” and he runs it a bit longer, spurred on by her evident lack of knowledge about Indians and—*blessed be!*—she does sigh, “Indians?” with a tone of “Why would you study *Indians?*”

“It’s a hot topic. I’m sure you know about the American Indian Movement?”

Slightly turning away from him, “Oh, is that political? I wouldn’t know about that, darlin’.” She stretches her arms out and up above her head, distracting him as her cleavage is demarcated. She’s instinctively covering the obvious fact that she’s a bit out of her mental league.

*What to say?* They both turn to look out the window, distracted by the stone monument with the map of the state etched on it, calling out: "Welcome to Minnesota. Land of 10,000 Lakes."

*Great!* "What do you like most about Minnesota? Besides the winters?"

She wiggles an iota closer to him. Almost cheerleads, "It's so clean! I do say, darlin', just like the snow. The cities are so clean. The neighborhoods are so nice. The air is so crisp it almost snaps. And y'all are just so friendly."

"I thought Texans were the most friendly—like aren't Texans *the most* in everything?"

She touches him—she likes him, he knows this. Maybe he's her missing big brother, he doesn't know. "Hogwash, Texans aren't *the most* in everything. For sure, the most glamorous," and she hams it up a bit, patting her head and broadly smiling. "But darlin' Minnesota is so, so clean, y'know—for me, I'm just glad to be away from all those dirt farmers who have glory be made it, dear, dear, made it so uncomfortable." Not knowing this to be a serious topic, he asks the logical question, "Dirt farmers?"

"Yea-es, isn't it terrible! All that white trash, not to say nothing about the wetbacks and all . . . all . . ." and here she waves a hand in disgust as if flies have landed on her steak, "all those uppity *colored* folks. Golly gee, am I glad to be away from *those* Texans!"

Jared knows that he shouldn't take her on, but like B. F. Skinner's pigeons he can't beat back his operant conditioning. "But LBJ's a Texan and he introduced the Great Society. Didn't that come from the *heart* of Texas?"

"Don't you say that! Oh, Molly Brown, no-o-o-o! How can you say such a thang? My Daddy says he's such a rascal. What he shoulda done is corral them all up and ship them back. Darlin' you are so cute but oh so serious...student!"

"Back where?" comes as a mildly mocking taunt.

"Back where they all come from, silly." She taps his right forearm as if he should know where "back" is. Then she catches on just enough to snap the mood. "Darlin', you aren't one of those Northern Civil Rights types, are you?"

There's a century of fear in her simple question, and it causes him to back off for a moment—not from the fear but because he dearly wants her heat and her face and her smile. "Right, sure, I mean, let's not get into that, should we?"

Her smile affirms, *No. Let's not, darlin'.*

Catching a second wind, he launches into his life story—a heavily sanitized version, the saintly one, telling her more than she would ever want to know about Friar Otto. "Sure thing. I know Catholics aren't big in Texas, but then some of my best friends are Southern Baptists." *Did I really say that?* Nothing's going to stop him—he proceeds to lie the little lies, chit-chatting for several hours. *Hot stuff!*

When Sally Jo—"We all have two names, don'cha know!"—hops off at Mankato, they do *not* exchange full names and phone numbers. Not that he doesn't want to but he knows he shouldn't. She just too alluring, too much of a temptation for him to handle. *Same old shit, man. You're sucked in by her look, but you ain't looking at her! Fucking-A, you're still Inside!*

Jared's pulsating cannon settled back into a small staid derringer as they talked, but all throughout their innocent conversation he was nervously aware that the pent-up demons of Inside's sexual fantasies were overrunning his best intentions to be a new type of male. Despite all his Bright Cloud insights into his relationships with Aaren and Char, he admits to himself that he *really, truly* wants to jump Sally Jo right here on the bus—*everyone else be damned!* She's gone and he's glad that he didn't do anything too stupid . . . but 8867-147 knows that he'll always have "Sally Jo from Fort Worth, Texas, riding the bus" as "sweet bucking filly" syrup to drip and ooze over a coarser set of conquest fantasies on lonely nights. Sally Jo is definitely pure prison dream stuff: "Cream Puff!" "Sweetness!" "C'mon over here, little darling, Daddy's got something precious for you!" 8867-147 wants her *only* that way.

As her full Texan scent departs his area, only then does Jared realize that he is, once again, alone. *Alone:* As he catches himself in the window's reflection, he murmurs disparagingly, "Nothing's changed, Otto. Fuck, you're just the same old clueless shithead!" He rolls his head this way and that, trying to settle into a short nap before hitting the Twin Cities.

"Pow, you're dead!" His slightly opened right eye telegraphs back that a gun is being pointed at him.

*Praised be Black Intelligence!* Sweet Jesus, only the protective hand of the Guardian Angel prevents a terrible mishap as the little tyke slips away, running down the aisle, shouting "Pow, you're dead" with "Sammy, Sammy come back here" chasing him. Another skirt, a mommy this time.

Jared closes his eyes tightly, seeks a touch of inner quiet, isolation but the kid comes back and hops into the seat Sally Jo vacated, kneels and rests his gun barrel on the chair's back as he aims up and down the bus, *pow! pow!* at his mother and other passengers.

"I'm really sorry," she sincerely means it as she grasps and jerks the kid up and halfway out of the seat.

"It's okay. Let him stay if he wants."

"*Pow!* You're dead," right in Jared's face. He smiles and grabs the kid playfully. "A mean cowboy, huh!"

"Let me go! Let me go!" squealing and he breaks loose, runs down the aisle again.

"Quite a handful, so it seems."

"You bet he is. I just don't know what to do." Exasperation, road weary.

“Look, just let him be. The folks he bothers will chase him away. The kid’s been quiet for hours. I mean, I haven’t heard a peep out of him till now. So relax.” Then, with an invitation he had not intended, “Why don’t you sit down? I’m sure you can use some adult conversation.”

“Oh!” It’s an ambushed, embarrassed response, laced with a trained hesitancy, a somewhat bumbling, disguised “No.” Instinctively, she just walks away after her boy, moving in that motherly way that protects her from having to give a prolonged response.

“Sorry, folks, something wrong with the engine. We’ll have to make a stop.”

The road beast comes to a chugging halt at a crowded truck stop like a marathon runner hitting the wall. Everyone’s caught off-guard but few don’t welcome the chance to disembark and stand on solid ground. The driver makes a beeline to the mechanics shed. It’s evident that he’s been here before.

Jared de-buses, finds the restroom, empties, and then purchases a steaming sixteen-ounce refill. He’s always been a heavy coffee drinker but now it’s his only addiction. Prison has dried him out and right at this moment he has no craving for booze, his pre-lockup Irish heritage. *“Children, children, today is Saint Patrick’s day. You all have to stay in off the street. Listen, listen! Do not for any reason go near the bars!”*

Folks walk around a bit but after half an hour most re-board. The stopover is among one of many forgettable rests, and anyway most of the passengers have brought along their preferred entertainments. Books come out, magazines, crossword puzzles. As he gets back on, he passes the kid cowboy zonked out, curled up like a cat.

When the mom comes back and says, as if reciting a part in a play, “Is this seat taken?” he’s definitely surprised. This time he’s trying not to blush.

“Sure,” is all he can muster. He retracts his legs and scrunches up again. In not too long a time he realizes that she’s feasting upon him, not he her. Everything

is reversed. She introduces herself using her full name, "Donna Sindowski," and then expertly manages a check-off list of questions as if he's being inspected.

"I'm dying to ask, *what do you do?*" comes fast and quick, so he knows it will all be short-lived.

"I just got out of prison." And since this is the first time he hears himself state that to someone, he recoils as if from buckshot.

"Which one?" would have gone unanswered but for his reflex response.

"Uh, I was out in, well, LA?"

"You mean Lompoc?"

"Where?"

"Lompoc, the federal lock-up. Or were you in a state prison, San Quentin or somewhere?"

"How do you know . . . ?"

She feels flushed out. She was simply testing his macho posturing, as more guys than she can count like to pretend they're an ex-con just to impress her. Shoe's on the other foot here— she's nabbed knowing more than most do about prisons. *Who does he think I am?*

Direct attack: "You're faking it, aren't you?"

"No, no . . . ," sounding sincere, shaking his head slightly, "but it's all too involved."

Since he's entangled in his own thick web of lies, he doesn't take after her as she fears.

Before it all stalls out and dies, Jared asks, "Okay. What do *you* do?"

"Look, it's okay," and she begins to straighten out as if to leave.

"No—aw, fuck it!"

Oddly, it seems, cued by that profanation, she settles back down. This is the word breathed as only prisoners do, so casually in public. She knows the jargon. "*Fuck it!*" and kicking ass, and jamming any round hole available.

"It's okay," she soothes, "I just know too many people who are doing time."

"Really?"

Then quiet. *What to make of this?*

"The boy and me, we were just down at Leavenworth. My ex is doing two years for a dope deal."

He wants to say, "No kidding?" but just grunts, which conveys, "That's cool, I understand."

"So."

"So." They share a nervous laugh.

"So," she says, "what do you do, I mean, when you're *not* a professional criminal . . . or are you?"

"The worst kind, lady, so beware, I was in for fucking with the draft."

"I know some guys who did that. Where are you from?"

"Minneapolis. The Twin Cities."

"Oh."

"You?"

"Across the border." Humorously, he knows she means "Wisconsin."

"Hey, we might have friends in common?" he says.

"Probably." But it's soon clear that neither wants to hoe that row.

"I'm a teacher. At least I was. A theologian at that. Quite a riot, eh?"

"Sounds awfully brainy to me."

"Can be."

Casually she reaches into her purse, pulls out a squat travelling bottle of *Jack Daniels*.

"Want a swig?"

"Naw."

"No?"

"Okay. Sure. Why not? It's been awhile. Just drop some in my cup."

As he sips, he finally *gets* her. Knows her game. She must have radar. Must've known, from all those others she's known once, out from the bars, not the stools but the real things: the Inside bars.

In this way Jared is welcomed home. Laid and fucked silly in a signless motel in downtown Saint Paul. Taken by the hand and led to her car, a battered old Rambler waiting, two parking tickets secured by rusty wipers. She leaves the kid sleeping in the back seat. Jared's not thinking now about that. She knows it's a bit warm but as safe as anywhere for the boy. *Won't take long*, she giggles to herself. She knows Jared's ready to gush, hopes that he can hold it till she's ready. Most definitely she doesn't want to take this one back to her house. Not because of its poverty or any sympathy it would evoke, but because it's her spot and she doesn't want to meet him on her spot.

The motel's just across the street from the bus depot, *a friendly place* she remembers. She knows that he'll have enough for the place. Got it from his get-up that he hasn't blown much. He confirmed her analysis when he faltered at taking a swig. She assessed, *Not a boozier. Hasn't been laid*.

In truth, Donna is being “a nice girl.” She no longer says, “I’m a nice girl.” She used to but stopped that one too many bus rides back. Now she doesn’t care to say anything, she just wants his juice. She knows *he has juice*.

Juice Jared does have. Feeling a bit more virginal than he’d like, he wonders if it’s all on ice, freezer burned, in need of more than hot water. Right now, with her, it’s unlike ever before. *He’s* unlike ever before.

When she leaves the kid across the street, at the same time *Jared Jennings* crawls into the car’s trunk with 8867-147 and other howling demons from the Ride, from the Bright Cloud, and from behind the monastery walls, all come out to claim their due. The trunked Jared is snoring away, dreamlessly, as she wraps herself around him, climbs on him standing, his cock almost breaking through his zipper, kisses that are gulps and gasps and hands like tentacles latching on and sucking soft flesh—no words, lots of grunts from him, she moans, orgasmic shivers. *Fucking-A! Fucking-A!*

He comes at her like a man falling down, totally forgetting how to lie down gently by a lady. All that his Inside cock has known for too, too long now is his hand—“*Five against one!*”—the herky-jerky of masturbation. “Two, three times a day, Jesus, who’s counting?” It sustained him in the Joint but it also cursed and accustomed him to false flesh. The moist tingle of pussy-lips only came to him through mental tricks in his dreams. It was a lust unfailingly aroused by synapses in his head and gateways of hormones being unloosed, actions happening in artificial time, seeing himself like a cow being artificially inseminated—always he had that cock-dampening thought, seeing the long-gloved farmer stick his hand, then his elbow, *Jesus fucking-A Christ his whole arm!* up the cow’s ass. “It’s science,” an Ag major classmate once stated proudly. “You may be a fucking rich farmer, but man you won’t catch me butt-humping cows even for a million bucks!”

Pathetically, Jared did. He humped his own cow, sticking his hand up his own ass, reaching for those dam-break prostrate glands, and triumphantly squeezing some sperm out of his cuntless dick.

Despite his growling desire, in this effulgent moment of sensual resurrection, even her touch feels uncomfortable. He's hypersensitive. It takes herculean strength to accept the pleasure of her smooth motion over his cock, her kiss and lick of him, her very practiced and wonderful rub of creamy soft teats, all that he so, so wants to relish as she floats above him. Donna is a redhead who sways and bops, almost dancing as she rides him. Rosy cheeks and soft-cushion eyes and the sweet impression of cheap perfume, all of which, all these minute effects at this time are flip-out hallucinogens and monster aphrodisiacs for him.

She moves with the patience of a nurse, somehow pulling pleasure from his plasticized self. "C'mon Big Man let me *have* it! Let me *feel* it!" And *it* isn't just his cock she's pleading for, a cock now as hard as the piston rod the bus threw—the broken rod he now blesses for the time it has given them—*it is him*, not it, and he knows that she knows.

Her fangs pierce and suck him. Her snake-tongue steals heat from his heart. For she knows that he is buried within several folds of his self, but from experience she also knows where he has it hidden.

He knows it is hidden and he doesn't want to give it up. He stashed *it* there after the first few months Inside. Secreted and locked it up as a virgin stashes herself when given in marriage rather than being married by choice. That *it* which is her but which she always protects, and even when she is eighty she will give only and ever to a man she really loves—or else never to anyone.

*Big Man!* How she wants this juice, craves it, is addicted to her suck upon him, feeling him vulnerably sweet like her son now asleep, quietly dreaming. She needs his juice. Without doubt, she knows she's woman enough to handle it, can easily handle it. This is a fact that Donna Sindowski knows because she knows that he needs her more than he could ever fathom—this is a truth about ex-cons that she knows only too well.

Donna knows because when this first happened back five years with Ron, just after his first parole, it had scared her. He was giving what she didn't know she

should take, and he almost killed her—not physically but with savaging emotions. One time, she ran from the house half-clothed into the backyard maniacally dancing with a late spring snow flurry. But now she knows better how to handle the Big Man.

Oh, she wants it and she's getting it! Donna Sindowski *wants it, wants it, wants it*. She's on the prowl, baying at the moon, riding high on her broomstick—his cock!—knowing that she's going to get it all, every last drop. Jared just can't stop her.

Merciful goddess, she tenders him, holds him, lets him cry, bite her, grab at her shoulders as if to wrench one of them free. She knows his thirst, the gut heave that desires to erupt and splatter all over her. Knows that he's hauling buckets of sperm, wants to back up the truck and overwhelm her with sperm. Lovingly she eats him and licks him and sucks him and slides upon him until they're both raw. Absolutely crazy, murderer, mauler, madman, mystic, he comes to her in forms and guises and flashes and evaporations. Blessedly, she comes right back at him. Laughing, screaming, while from next-door comes thumping, yelling, "Quiet down in there, goddamn it!" *Alas!* She wins. He cannot keep it, at least not keep all of it.

In time, they conclude with the stale courtesy, "Was it good for you, too?"

When *it* comes, car trunk Jared wakes and 8867-147 and cohorts dissipate into the cool knowing that he never wants to see her again—that Donna must be obliterated and only, only Sally Jo remembered. That if he will perchance ever see her on the streets of the Cities, he must pass by her like a blind man. For she's come and she's taken more than sex. She's taken a piece of his imprisonment: one part yell, one part fury, a dash of the crazy, a rattle of chains and a fistful of him dying. She even gets more than she's ever gotten before—she sucks in, holds her breath as if smoking dope, swallows a bit of smoke from the Bright Cloud. *Ah!* She is totally blissed out—zoned and zonked!

But neither can nor wants to fall asleep.

"We can't stay here."

"Maybe you can get your son to sleep on the floor?" A tinge sadly, he knows that he wants her to say no.

She rises, starts to dress. "You stay. You've paid for the room, after all," comes on a twitter, a high school cheerleader giggle. With haste, she leaves as she should, with a whispered, "Welcome home!"

*Welcome home!*

### 43 - CHAR ON THE FARM

After her first visit at Millston, Char went back to the farm. It is her ancestral home but at that time she sought it out for a bit more than that. She sought it as a holy place for herself, a wholing place. It was fitting to return to the farm to begin preparing for the baby. She also sensed that it was fittingly there where she would begin preparations for Jared's homecoming, *whenever that will be, dear Lord!*

The farm means opening, once again, to the dream she's had since childhood. She's out tending the chickens, lazily scattering feed when all of a sudden something frightens the fowl and they scatter, running crazily amok, bumping into one another, fence posts. It's absolutely comic, like a Keystone Kops chase. "Stupid chickens!"

Although it's a mildly cool fall morning, Char fully buttons up her overcoat just as a wintry chill runs through her. She stomps on the ground as if shaking ice from her boots. It gives her pause. Farm child that she is, she looks for the shadow, but there is none—no hawk, not even a blackbird.

On to her next daily chore, she walks into the barn, begins to scoop some feed for the cows but oddly they too turn skittish. They jerkily shake their heads, anxiously lowing and moaning. She looks about, certain that she'll feel the heated breath of a predator. She looks hard but sees and senses nothing.

Stepping out to slop the hogs, it seems like the ground must be swelling with snakes because the porkers are all running wild. It's a melee like the greased-pig chase at the County Fair. She hops and skips, misses most, runs into one, *ouch!* Looking around again, hard as she might, she strains but still can't see or sense the danger.

As she turns towards the farmhouse, suddenly *poof!* it bursts into flames. At their bedroom window she sees that her mom and dad are trapped. They can't get the windows open. Upstairs, at his attic bedroom window, her little brother is also locked in. All of them are screaming, wild-eyed, pushing at the window frames.

Horrified, she watches as each of them slowly surrenders to the flames. Snapshots of melting humans . . .

Heart pounding, Char awakens, snorting out an acrid smell.

The farm is where she was born. It's where Mom and Dad and Gary live, still. They courageously struggle to maintain the family's heritage as tillers of the soil—but agribusiness being what it is, they've been losing ground for decades. They've become field hands, cheap labor. In their better years—just a generation back—they were owners, now they're merely hired hands, renters of the hoe, men and women who bathe in animal mud for reapers who live on far-distant ocean-viewing hills. They're sharecroppers to a mega-corporation who is not a landlord seeking to be benevolent. Whose "farm managers" are sweetly scented, green-shade accountants and assorted econometric bean counters.

In truth, Dad hasn't worked the land for five years. He took a job in town, pumping gas. Cargill, Inc., who owns the farm, lets him stay at the house because they're caught in some type of entangled litigation, and it serves their purposes to let the land die slowly. For some convoluted legal reason, annually just after Christmas, he receives a letter stating that Cargill "appreciates" his living at the farm.

Mom manages her days as she always has. She's the picture-book farmer's wife. Always busy, dutifully wiping dust just before other dust falls, baking pie after pie: rhubarb, peach, pear, apple, every seasonal delight. "Amazing, Mom Clark's pies!" A local legend, she's won Blue Ribbons at every County Fair since she first greased her mother's tins. Of course in the fall she cans a small grocery store for their winter table.

Gary doesn't really live here anymore. He's a renter of the renters, more like a boarder. He wanders, like so many rube youths do, in search of that good job in the City, coming home now and then to recharge, touch his roots. Farm boy that he

is, however, he's not at all conscious about that. Sometimes he taps into this while drinking late into the night with his *good buddies!*

Gary's no longer a bumpkin or country kid yet he's not truly adapted to urban ways. He's a midway creature, half-formed, and so a free-market dysfunctional. He's a minor character right out of Thomas Wolfe's novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

Gary drinks hard, often, picks up odd jobs but blames no one for the hand dealt him. Truth be told, he just wants to die, even though he's only twenty-six. Wants soulfully to die planted in the dark, summer warmed earth. When the tall corn rises, he fancies himself the tassel gone to pollen in the air.

Char is a mystery to them. Not a mystification, just a conundrum, the type that's eventually solved in mystery novels. They believe there's a solution to her *problems*—if she'd just "Listen to your father." They don't understand why she's so politically active with *City problems*. Their Catholic faith is very conservative and traditional, even in these times of heady church reform. Concerning politics and religion, they've been molded by the Benedictine monks from the College of Saint Clement who staff their rural church—a "mission church"—on weekends. If in nothing else as liberal, they believe in the *social justice* of the Papal encyclicals and accept a *spiritual* equality of the races.

With almost stolid equanimity her parents readily resolve the plethora of rancorous issues that concern Char concerning Church and State. Simply put, for them it is an article of faith that the Church and that State are one and the same thing, meaning that the Catholic Church rules the State and so rules their secular lives. Being so harmoniously ruled, *religion* and *spirituality* are not passions for them. Rather, obeying the Church is the way they order their lives. Faith means primarily following the priestly counsel—"Listen to Father Boyle. He speaks with God!" The road to heaven starts with fulfilling their Sunday obligation. For them, religion is a way of farming one's spiritual life. Like plowing straight rows, it's adhering to traditional sacramental and liturgical cycles.

For Char, in sharp and heated contrast, faith is all and only about passion—or, as her family realizes now, *once was*. For—*Horrors!*— she has clearly stated her rejection of the “all-male Roman Catholic Church!” As is their way, heeding Father Boyle’s advice, the family has adjusted to Char’s radical change quite readily. He’s told them that she has chosen a harder spiritual pathway—farming the lower forty that’s boggy and hilly. “In time, she’ll return. They all do, these young rebels,” Father consoles them.

Without stating the obvious, they are steadfast as to the “real solution” that will solve all her problems: *marriage*. More specifically, marriage to Jared. But, “These kids. What’s happened to young people today?” They understand neither their daughter or their once-beloved potential son-in-law, both of whom have become crazy radicals.

When Char tells them she’s pregnant, it’s acknowledged with a bitterness only slightly tempered by their joyful anticipation of a grandchild. Here, their being farmers carries more weight than their being Catholics. While they prefer a quick marriage—and presume she’ll name Jared, so everything will finally be “set right”—they accept Char’s way of handling the matter rather more easily than Jared’s family would, if they were to know. Even Gary, who’s never been close to Char, accepts her choice: “Whatever you want, Sis.”

Little do they know about Char’s intense struggles—the battle within herself and with the highly charged “free advice” from different Sisters. Some want the abortion as “a testimony of your total rejection of the Male in any form or power.” Others want her to keep the child, “Because it’s a sign of your effort to eliminate male warfare, as you will raise the child—boy or girl—to be a nonviolent and anti-sexist warrior.” One of the Sisters, with a tinge of goddess mysticism, encourages her, “Talk with the child. She will let you know!”

As is her way, Char’s decision is based less on intellectual analysis than on how being a farmer’s daughter makes her feel—that she should help life grow. On the farm all that counts is what lives, and to live requires impregnation. From the

animals to the plants to the Clarks themselves, there are fields to hoe, seeds to plant, life forms to be cultivated.

They want to ask her what Jared wants but they simply do not talk about his being *in there*. “Fiancé in prison” is not found as a tagline in their family photograph album. Everyone in the area knows but they just don’t want it discussed. When she visits, they talk cordially about Jared—“How is he? Send him our love,” and the like—but without talking about *that place*. Her Dad has no sympathy for Jared’s anti-war shenanigans. He’s always effectively ignored him when it appeared that a tussle over patriotism loomed. He simply lost too many buddies in World War II to wax enthusiastic over this Vietnam thing. Too many Memorial Days and too many wreaths and too many even more flowery sermonettes at gravesides. He doesn’t need any more of this. He settled the issue quickly. He told Char, “It’s his generation. He’s got to do what he’s got to do, gal. What you got to do—if he’s your man—is stand beside him.” That was that. *Amen*.

She hears her Dad, loves him, but is compelled to do more—whatever “more” might mean. She always has more to say, and she’s not shy about speaking up. She vociferously stated her mind in nursing school and the nuns almost kicked her out. “Can you imagine? One of our students advocating Planned Parenthood!” At the teaching hospital, the quick feels copped by the young interns reaped slaps—not just taps but harsh whacks. “Just a cold-assed bitch, you can bet!” When she became a public nurse, she hit her stride when working with the migrants who provide stoop labor on Minnesota’s farms. Just last week, she shrilled on camera at the populist governor’s ability to turn a blind eye to “this racist injustice that is a form of slavery!” She gives no quarter to newsmen, academics, preachers or teachers. All feel her righteous wrath.

Ironically, behind her back it’s often heard that “She’s incredible!” Few can hate her for long because she has a way of finding what you need, what your real cause is, and sympathizing with you, even if you see yourself as her opposition. For Char, only ideas and values are enemies. People are always adversaries or The Opposition. After meeting her, few forget her.

"Mom," Char turns from the stove, holding a steaming kettle, "I want you to know that I'm going to raise my girl by myself."

"Girl?"

"Right, I'm sure. Aaren and her coven made contact during the solstice, and we know for sure."

"Hmmm." Mom pours, filling two cups with bobbing tea bags. "My great-grandmother used to say that a woman can know, but she never told me how!"  
*Coven?!*

"Gee, I didn't know that."

"It's okay," she laughs, "its fifty-fifty, no matter what! Whether guessing or *knowing!*"

They sit and swirl the bags. Mom stirs in two large teaspoons of sugar and a large serving of milk. Char idly plays with her teabag, dragging it back and forth, waiting for her cup to cool. She likes straight drinks with their plain and original tastes: no sugar, no milk, but cooling away from hot.

"I'll be on my own, by myself. I want you to understand."

Mom sips, letting her daughter talk. She knows she'll hear more by letting Char wander than by making her defensive with questions.

"Look, Mom, I know that what's all happening today—the War, riots, pot and radical priests—must be threatening to you and Dad. I mean, what's been coming down, none of us anticipated, and we have to keep working hard to keep ourselves together and moving forward, not just being paralyzed by events. Do you know what I mean?"

"Sure I do, honey. Maybe. Tell me some more."

"Sometimes, I don't know where to begin. I don't know how it really all began. I mean, the real change, not just the stuff we call reform but the new vision—you know, like when I knew, not in my head, but in my heart, that I'm a lesbian."

The L-word is its own conversation stopper. Like the bathtub plug dangling at the end of a long silver chain, she says it and *plunk!* no more talking. Yet only when the stopper falls in place can the tub be filled.

For Char, *lesbian* is a familiar word, but her mother has heard it only a handful of times in her personal life. For one it means freedom; for the other, terror.

Char doesn't know why it's such a freeing word, and her mother is unsure why the terror lingers. Char has thought so many times about discussing it in depth with her Mom, but usually when she comes to the farm it never seems that there's enough time. Other matters just eat up the visit.

Today the word was not listed on the agenda, so when it jumps out, it causes her a moment's alarm.

"Gees, I said it, Mom . . ."

"Go on," and a sip, a long sip, and eyes alive at the edge of fascination.  
*Mom, really? You mean it?*

"I *am* a lesbian. It's important that I hear myself say that. I don't want to lie anymore. I don't want to talk as if I'm a patient in the psych ward, afraid to really tell others who I am."

Mom catches that image, feels her way through her own fear *that they will know who I really am*. As she listens, within herself, she monologues. *You were afraid, Bertha, weren't you? Yes, I was. Afraid that they would know me in those ways they didn't really want to know me. You mean that the men didn't want the full knowledge of you? Oh, yes, I love Frederick and I gave him all that I could. I*

*tried to be faithful to my vows, but I always knew there was something I shouldn't say. You're telling me there's something terrible about yourself? Terrible, yes. But not terrible to me, I don't think, but it would make him terrible! So who can you tell? ...No one.*

"Mom, is this okay?"

Mom nods.

"Men are not enough! I don't know how else to say it."

Mom nods.

"It's not that they don't try. I mean, take Jared. He tries but he just doesn't know what it is I really want."

Bertha's listening to her daughter but hearing as if she herself were speaking.

"When he talks about love—and he is romantic in his moments, I've told you that—it's like he gives me all the strength of his right arm without knowing that he has a left. I don't know . . . is this making some kind of sense at all?"

Bertha has been running with Char's words, back over her fifty odd years, back to when she first heard one of her aunts say to her mother as they leaned over her newborn brother, "Three will surely fill up your time. Just don't think about anything else."

That bit of conversation has remained in Bertha's mind, and it has surfaced now and then throughout her life, but—*why?*— it always leaves her with a sharp headache. Right now, it's a pointer, a magnetic arrow pointing towards other remembrances that begin to link up.

As a teenager, Bertha was a step behind the others who always giggled when the boys walked by and then exhausted a great cloud of heat in saying, "Golly me, I

can't wait till I have a baby!" Even then, she knew that it meant something more than what they themselves didn't know—couldn't know, being virgins and all. That somehow the word *baby* had something to do with being filled. With filling that void which being a girl meant. Those empty spaces between the girls as they looked at each other, seeing each other as dolls on a shelf, wind-up dolls not yet wound up, and baby-making being the winding.

She had not been as compelled by the word. Others called her a "hopeless romantic" because she wanted someone to love her and *her alone*—not love her for having babies. In the movies she'd always drift towards Bette Davis and the tougher femme fatales, but she didn't know why. Although somewhere within her she knew that "they make men work for your love!"

Frederick had been the kind to work, at least a bit more than her other suitors. He seemed to appreciate her. One time he even confessed, "Maybe I should be ashamed, Bee . . . but I love just looking at you. Watching you. I enjoy the lust you fire up inside me!" That had been *just before* Char was born. Having babies changed him too, but the memory was sacred and powerful in its own way. She spent many a frigid Minnesota night being warmed by it as he snored in seeming bliss.

"Yes, dear, I understand," is all she manages to get out. She's unpracticed in this kind of sharing.

"Mom, you drive me nuts! *I know* you understand. I've known all these years that you understand and support me. I just know that otherwise, so I've told myself, I don't know if I could be doing all this. But you've got to help me here. I worry at times that it's just us young women, maybe deluding ourselves . . . I don't know, things are really fucked—*oops, sorry*—really a mess in the world, and maybe we're not on the right track. But I can't see *how* we're not!"

*It is time.* Bertha retells the aunt's conversation, and she reveals Char's father's cameo of love. Much to her surprise, she finds her tongue painting thoughts and images which, not being of the therapeutic generation, she fails to recognize come from her dreams.

"On the farm, a young girl quickly learns she's a sister to the cow. Men talk about her, value her, and protect and possess her just like the cows. They love our big teats. They want us to calf each spring. They build fences and hold us—*stupid as cows!*—from wandering away . . . and they feed us!

You may think that's odd but it's not a bad thing. Maybe it *is* all that men can manage, I'm not sure. Maybe they can't change. Or—now dear, this is an odd thought, but since we're here *drinking—*" and with that word, for some inexplicable reason, she breaks out into a titter. Char is snared by the comic energy and starts laughing with her. It gets funnier. Their laughter sets one off, then the other. *Contagion:* They laugh even more as their faces become spotted by raindrop tears, and only slowly, as if carefully walking down steps in the dark, slowly do they begin to stop. Just as they do, Mom says again, "Drinking!" and they swell up, the energy almost knocking them off their chairs.

"Oh, dear, I guess it all seems so silly. Men drink whiskey and tell tall stories. We're sipping *tea*. Oh my, I've got to get myself under control. *Tea* and off we go!"

To steady herself she gets up and pours herself and Char another cup.

"What's in these herbs, Mom?" Char giggles.

"Oh, no, don't start!" Mom returns the kettle to the stove. "If we don't stop, your Dad will come in and say, *What are you silly geese doing?*"

"And if he does we'll have to say, *We're not geese, we're cows!*" This gets them rocking again like two kids telling naughty jokes on the porch when their parents are away.

"Gees. *Stop!* Let's get serious," Char slowly comes down. "I want to hear you out."

"Oh, dear, I'm not so sure there's any more to say."

"But you feel there is, don't you?"

"To tell the truth, yes. I just don't know how. All I know about men and women is what the Bible says, and it doesn't really help me here. I once asked your Dad how he knew what men must do, and he brought the Bible over to me and said, 'Sweetheart, *everything* we need to know is in the Good Book.' But I wasn't satisfied. I didn't know what to say."

"I do," Char states firmly, "I don't think women are more than cows either when you read the Bible. I know *you* find more in going to church than I do, but I don't feel good there. I mean, what was Mary? She's not God, is she? No. You know that. What more is she but a Holy Cow? A barn animal who bore the great Male Son? I mean, the virgin birth's almost like artificial insemination, don't you see?"

As if answering a starter's bell, Mom stands up and walks over to the sink and begins to fill the basin, pours liquid detergent, grabs a few dishes and starts washing.

"I don't know. This makes me nervous, somehow. I can feel what you're feeling but I'm afraid it's sinful. Whatever the Church says about Mary is not as important as remembering that God touched her. Men cannot take that away from us. God touched Mary. He didn't touch Joseph." She continues to wash, even washing things that aren't dirty.

Char pushes her chair back. She must give her Mom some space but she's also aroused, sensing that they've picked up a keen scent.

"Mom, look—men have turned the Bible, certainly the New Testament, into a male religion. Talking about a Father God and making much that Jesus had a pe—err, male organ and that the Spirit's neuter. When what it's really all about is that a

woman, a female, a young girl shared herself with God. What did she share? Her female self. Her feminine soul! Just like with the calves, they're part cow and part bull, and who is Jesus but part Mary and part God! Tell me, how does *that* image of Jesus make you feel?"

"Yes, yes," anxious words and breaths, nothing left to clean, almost desperation. "Oh dear, I guess you might be right, but I must admit it makes me feel scared. Like something's hovering over the house, something powerful and angry that will cast down a ball of fire and kill us all!"

Mom's words are toned with hysterical fear. She blesses herself two, three, four times! Char stands and steps towards her mother, throws her arms around her, hugs her.

"Oh, Mom, Mom, I understand, I understand," and they sway together. Mom is slightly trembling and releasing a low moan. Char hugs and hugs her, pulling her towards her, trying to leap over their physical barrier and touch the soul she just saw as herself in her mother's words. "Sit down, Mom. Don't worry, just listen."

Char goes to the kettle, fires it up, rinses the cups, puts in fresh tea bags and takes out the heavy cream that she knows her Mom prefers when she drinks more than one cup at a sitting. During these few minutes Bertha slips into a moment of intense inner praying: uttering one prayer for peace of mind, another as she imagines herself as Mary holding the Christmas Babe.

"Mom, do you remember me telling you about my dream, the burning house one?"

"Of course I remember. Why?"

"Because you just freed me from it!"

"What?"

"It's hard for me to believe but it's true. Oh, Mom, can't you see now, begin to see what happens when women, Sisters—and you are my Sister! *my Sister in*

*soul*—when Sisters talk, new revelations erupt. What’s happening to us is what’s happening all around.”

Char’s enthusiasm brings a flush to her Mom that rises with the wet warmth of the tea. She feels as if Char’s energy is running down her throat and splashing into her stomach.

“Mary is a cow! Oh how true, and it’s she who is touched by God. So you see, what Jesus has is—what Jesus *is*, is a male who’s touched by God only as God touches the feminine!”

Char’s mind is ablaze with ideas and sky-rocketing images. Mom is still the somewhat bewildered spectator.

“I’m not sure, dear, what you really mean.”

“Geez, Mom, look, what we women—and men, *everyone*—have to find is the feminine which God touched. *If* God is filled with masculine energy, and even if this energy is divine, what we are, who we are as full humans—I mean, isn’t Jesus in the Church’s theology the ‘perfect man’? Right, look, he’s only perfect because he has the God-touched feminine!”

A moment of quiet enwraps them, one filled with a deep conversation of heart. Char is smiling that deep smile that Mom often sees when women first announce they’re pregnant, and which others gain when they finally give birth. It’s a smile of wondrous connection.

Char sees her Mom as she feels her Dad must have when he had his *romantic* moment. She sees a woman who has opened a door for her. A woman, a Sister whom she longs to invite to walk through that door with her.

“Mom, I hope you can see now why I must say openly that I’m a lesbian. It’s an affirmation of that feminine which was touched by God. You know, maybe you can even understand this better, that it is *not* a matter of sexuality. Sexuality is not

the issue. That's where the traditional priest theology loses itself in sin—it's all focused on genitals.

I'm having a baby. I am *having* this baby *because* I am a lesbian!

I want this child to come into this world knowing that she—or he—is loved by me and by God, by the Mother God. And the only way the child will know is by knowing that I have loved the male *and* the female."

All throughout, Bertha has been watching her daughter closely, feeling her truth more than understanding her words. "I can, I think, maybe I can believe in what you're doing, but who else will? You could be hunted and beaten and driven out of town—don't you fear that?"

"Possibly."

"I'm not sure," and a terrible spectral hand grasps her throat, "I'm not sure even what your father might say."

"I've thought about ...Yes, I know. It really hurts that he and I can't have this, be like this. I know."

Mom stands up, and in doing so picks up her daughter's hand. She carefully draws her to herself, bringing their stomachs together as one. She opens her heart to feel what must be felt—flying deep within her is an image of the Pieta. She hugs Char steadily for a full minute and then releases her, catches the back of her head and seals all that she seeks and has given with a full kiss on the mouth.

"I love you Char. You are truly my love child."

As the dream comes again, she is inside it and outside of it at the same time. When the hovering presence comes, Char plants herself into the ground. Her toes root and her calves and thighs become the firm stock of a great-breasted Weeping Willow, tall as the house and so heavily bursting with clusters of catkins—tiny,

yellowish green flowers—that it appears to be embracing the house. As she transforms, she names the terror. “Male-without-female, you are known to me!” At that, the wind becomes crazed and tears at all that stands in the ground, blowing deeply into the earth around her, ruthlessly trying to expel her roots. Yet the malicious fierceness succeeds only in opening her flowers. They split and shower the air, the house—pile like haystacks in the open field, a network of silky hairs like the sheen of snowfall.

“Male-without-female, you are to die within me!” Erupting from the sky, a great fireball tears into her breast and scorches a deep hole. Smoke pores from her mouth and she throws a great sound—not of pain but in song. “Male-without-female, we are One!”

It is then that the rest of her transforms back into herself. She is now laden with a blossom-necklace. All about, the land is quiet.

Joyously, as she stands by the tree which once again is embracing the farmhouse, she watches her family—Bertha, Frederick and Gary—sit down at table to say grace.

#### 44 - UNWRAPPED

South Minneapolis is a blue-collar coat, edged as with fur by richer homes that lap at crystalline lakes in the enchanting "Land of 10,000 Lakes." South's neighborhoods bear names made legendary by the American poet for whom one of them is named: Longfellow. There is Nokomis and her son Hiawatha. There is Minnehaha and the Great River itself, Mississippi. The area is seedily spotted here and there by poverty and—unheralded by the Chamber of Commerce—it's the locus of the netherworld of urban Indians: Hiawatha's off-the-reservation progeny. "Largest Urban Reservation" is not a civic boast written on highway billboards. Politically, it houses a multitude of locals who are enraged by the American Dream and its many violences, especially the endless wars waged to fulfill its alleged Manifest Destiny. It's where most of Jared's draft resister friends and fellow ex-cons live.

Longfellow becomes Jared's parole home. He sneaks into the neighborhood, masks himself with a Twins baseball cap, dark sunglasses, fakes a limp with a cane and smoothly taps a prisoner assistance program at, naturally, the local Catholic church for some clothing and rent vouchers, even a bit of charity dollars, then goes and obtains a room, magically becomes a specter in the attic of a friend of a friend who asks no questions. The rent's dirt-cheap but no one's paying for hot water, either. A coldwater flat—a winter's subzero delight! As he wants, the dude, hardly a landlord, confides, "Whatever you wanta do, man, it's cool. *Whatever.*"

Not far from where he lives, the city of "Minneapolis-Saint Paul" (several words, one sound) has at its mythic core a honeyed well: Honeywell Corporation. It issues forth the nectar of the military-industrial complex, to wit, antipersonnel bombs. These are easily the most hideous weapons used in 'Nam. They are iron balls filled with razor-sharp fragments that barely harm property as they hideously shred, flay and infest human flesh: of the aged, the weak, children, the innocent. Not the image most locals want. They prefer "Minnesota Nice."

The Twin Cities are also a historic player in General Custer's quest, the obliteration of the Red Savage. Cavalry and troops gathered nearby at Fort Snelling

and systematically drove the native peoples out of “America” and onto the numerous Heartland reservations. Likewise, the Cities’ vaunted earthen giants, those agribusiness mainstays of Pillsbury, General Mills and Cargill, seek to plow graves for the family farmer. Many call the region “the Heartland,” but “heartless” is how he finds it. Truly a “Twin Cities,” Janus faced, with a twice-tricked heart: one seen, one not; one felt, one not—European invaders and America’s *Natives*.

On its upbeat side, it’s a polis that echoes with the calls of pioneer women, leaning against prairie doorframes, huge with whale children, shouting to hayseed-haired boys and black-soil-clogged men to come in from the fields and wash up, eat, rest. They are families reverent at meals and likewise faithful quaffers of the malty brew. Sadly—a deep motherly sadness—their boys are prime fodder for the war machine. The Vietnam era draft made it statistically clear that Midwestern boys are healthier, enlist in higher numbers, and pass the Selective Service’s exams at a higher rate per capita. *More body bags per acre!* In parallel, Minnesota ranked high in the number of draft resistance cases and trials. At the height of the Resistance, over fifty percent of all cases on the district’s federal docket were draft related.

*Am I on the reservation, still? Shooting baskets with Iron Moccasin?*

Thoughts course through, about the city, prison, the farm, and now where he actually is, sitting by the window looking out on Elliott Avenue.

At an unlocked moment, the inevitable becomes the obvious—facing up to it, Jared accepts that he’s really back in Minnesota, but as inevitable he’s straightaway overcome by dreadful anxiety. It’s almost clinical. Like an allergy test—*here, sniff this*—he breaks out in hives, all over his body. He starts to sweat profusely as his heart races with a wild rhythm. He can’t find any spot of comfort. His body spreads out on the bed like formless putty.

“Fear, it’s simply fear. I’m just fucking-a scared shitless,” he admits out loud, being his sole audience. He’s definitely frightened. He dreads not being able to get back on the bus. He envisions himself as being spit out. But it’s simply all about his fear of being welcomed home.

In his mind, he runs the scene. He's sending a telegram. It reads, "I am not on the bus. Send everyone away. Dismiss the band!" What he doesn't admit is that it's not "being seen" that he truly fears—it's "*not* being seen."

Not knowing the time of day or night, he just lies there, moaning within, "Welcome home!" The words fly on bat wings, flutter and screech and bounce off things, come back mocking, taunting, in sharp rebuke, sarcastic slice. *Welcome? Is this the way to welcome? Back at square one just doing one-night stands, fucking-a shit!*

Jared doesn't want to think of Donna as his first betrayal of the insights and vision bestowed within the Bright Cloud. He convinces himself that getting screwed naked with her doesn't count—that although they got off the bus to play "hunt the beaver" and "lick the stick," they were really still on the bus. He absolves himself. What they did was not *here* but *there*, over somewhere in some corner of some alien space and time box—still *doing time*! He has no inclination to pursue any of this through deep reflection.

*I fucking-A am not off the bus yet, motherfuckers! So it doesn't count! Can't a guy just get laid?*

But it was betrayal! Aaren's face looms. He knows that *it*—the juice—was for her. He's whimpering, kneeling, begging her: *I've got more juice, baby, really!*

Light filters through thin drapes. He rolls out of bed. Lugs himself over and gazes into the mirror hanging above a rickety clothes bureau. "Home? Is this home? Have you a home? Or is it the hole in your ass?" Jared goes back, collapses, nearly cracking the low-budget bed frame, sleeps. *How long?* No clock in the room.

Upon his second waking, without thinking, he gets up, opens a window, accepts that it is late morning but misses the fact that he's standing buck naked in the window frame. He scratches his groin, then realizing his state, laughs a bit as he looks out down among the parked cars—*unseen by human eyes!*

After putting on his trousers he steps outside into the small patch designated “back yard.” *Free!* He fingers the hibakusha—*always with me. Caged with me. Free with me!* To celebrate this fact, he takes the wooden toiletry box that houses the hibakusha—his last physical connection to the Inside— just knows that it is time for its transformation, so shouting joyously and with a fiery heart, “No more boxes! No more cages! I’m home!” he stomps. *Stomp!* Stomps and shatters the box to smithereens. In respect and gratitude he softly prays, “God help Uncle Sam, wherever you are!”

Upon his chest, the hibakusha throbs, at once hot and cold, at once a cross and a dagger. Raising it before his eyes and then pressing its dagger tip against his third eye, he celebrates, “Let’s get it on! Let’s get the fuck out of here! Let’s imagine a fucking-*A new life!*”

*Ready or not!* Jared leaves his apartment and strolls aimlessly around the nearby streets—actually looking for a coffee shop. He realizes that more than anything he needs some soulful nourishment. He’s tired. Worn down. Past the end of the proverbial rope. Willfully, he focuses upon every positive change he sees as he walks about. He’s strengthened by seeing a black woman pushing a baby carriage, walking with a white man—*husband?* He’s cheered by watching a papa hug his bearded son on a street corner. As he sits down, he’s delighted to see a guy at the café table just across the room reading *Siddhartha*—*not a kid, some old geezer!*

Yet, Jared still doesn’t know what “Welcome home!” could possibly mean. *Who were they expecting to get off the bus? How should I prepare?* He’s not sure whether he should deny himself the praise of “Welcome Home, Our Hero!” Why should he punish himself with the pains of defeat? *The war goes on. Nixon imploded. What we did, did it matter? Fuck! Does that make me a failure?*

For an hour or so he sips one French roast after another. He’s weighing his life, assessing. Seminary. Draft raids. Trial. Inside. The Ride. The Bright Cloud. Violent felon. Ex-con. Outlaw. *Fucking-A, man, for sure, it was worth it!*

*Welcome home! His heart is stuck in his throat as he glances out the window and sees the street filled with a crowd of hundreds, a gaily decked-out marching band, "Peace" banners fluttering. He opens the café door, hears the brasses blare, the drums roll and the crowd cheering, "Welcome home!" A small plane flies above, trailing a long banner fluttering, "Proud of You! Minnesota Hero!" Jared is happy.*

Happy.

Back from his walk and quick lunch, Jared goes back down and sits on a rickety plastic chair in his back yard. He's bathing in the early afternoon's warmth, sipping his umpteenth cup of java. Remarkably, there are no neighborhood sounds, no cars honking, no lawn motors starting up, no kids screaming, no sounds to break his reverie. His face, still brightened by May's soft sunny kisses, exudes the happiness of being welcomed home.

Happy is Jared because he is home—*alone*.

No one was there to meet him. No one knows where he is. He's happy because he is solitary, alone within his memory. He's happy hearing what he wants to hear and seeing only what he wants to see.

He remembers the first day he arrived here in Minnesota, back over at the train station, the whole family arriving in St. Paul on the train from New Jersey. He remembers standing on the station's cascade of steps, twenty, thirty steep, and for the first time ever gazing upon the Midwest. He'd been happy.

Like then, he's happy now.

Only someone's rude *honk! honk! honk!* impatient for whomever to come out and get going somewhere, jerks him back. *How long have I been sitting here? Does it matter?*

He doesn't stop to count the minutes, just gets up and heads straight back to bed. Fully clothed, he slips under the cover sheet and pulls the two scraggly

blankets full over his head. He boxes in his ears and covers his eyes with two small, understuffed pillows. His long-john legs he folds up like a card table, knees almost to his chest. He's ready to seek deep comfort.

He knows he wants to sleep. He just doesn't know that a part of him never wants to get up.

And so, finally, the welcoming home begins.

His sweat is so thick that he can smell his own saltiness. He shivers so violently that he wishes there was someone to tie his legs down. Although he fears being restrained again, being immobilized, he prays that a huge thick blanket of something would materialize and press down on him, hold him steady, mold him to the bed. His teeth are tapping and grinding and he can hardly bear to lift his left hand to wipe his brow because in doing so he loses the tiny caves of heat he holds hostage under his armpits.

Dry retching comes in due course, and he swears and implores and submits himself to God's every mercy: "Please! Just a steaming cup of coffee, just one cup!"

As he drops in and out of consciousness like a ping-pong ball, now on this side, now on the other, nothing within him is recording the phases of this day. *Your whole life flashes before you as you lie dying!* He asks within, *Do you fear dying more than you fear living?*

To Bruiser, now past: "Man, look, I'm sorry. Shit. This place has me all bent out of shape. Believe me, man, look, I don't want you hurt, fuck, so what do you want me to do?" Tenderly, he yields to Bruiser's incursions, nurturing him, reaching out a motherly hand, calming him, cooing, "I love you, Bruiser. Know that someone really loves you, man."

In the courtroom, now past: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I can't really say why I did what I did. I just had to do it. I don't know why the government's lying and acting crazy. But I just love my God and *bingo!* I just had to do it. God

wanted a new symbol and He chose me. What more can I say?" He stands there iron-legged as their laughter and shouts of ridicule cleanse him.

During his dreaming scene-shifts he vomits—sometimes a little puke, sometimes just gnarled air. But these are just intermissions, not the dream's end.

"Scene 37: *Char*. Take One!" He's bringing her clothes—expensive clothes. At times, jewelry. He piles them upon her so that she's laden, almost hunchback bent. With each gift he feels himself at a safer remove, until he has to shout to have her hear him, so thick is the mound of presents.

In this scene, not numbered by any logical sequence, he repeats himself over and over while running around her, she now almost obliterated by his mountain of gifts, but inside them somewhere she hears, "I'm sorry about all the jerking off! I mean, it was the joint, you know. Sweetheart, I really wanted *you*, you know. Don't you know that?"

*Ta da!* Aaren waltzes in, arm-in-arm with Witson. Jared raises his shotgun and blows their heads off. Knee-deep in blood, seeing what he has done, he jumps up and down, splashes gore all about and with great macho posturing boasts, "I killed the motherfuckers! Me! One mean-assed son of a bitch. Don't fuck with me, fag-assed FBI man, dumb-assed Bitch!"

*"Look, motherfucker, the days of nonviolence are over!"*

In time, another part of him arrives to pardon this sin, this error. He's dressed in priestly robe. Oddly, it's himself peering back out at himself on this bed. A self too, too close to him. He feels the cloister's breath, senses the Novice Master's sharp eye, hears the thoughts before they are spoken. "You have sinned, my son! You have transgressed. Throw yourself upon the merciful Father. It is never too late!"

Darkness like confessional gloom, not just an absence of light but the presence of oneself behind the door of conscience, this darkness blankets him. Frightened, he throws off his covers, so wet are they that he has to peel off his

sheets. He stands, wavering, weak in the knees, starts slapping himself upside the head, this side, that side, and falls to his knees, crashes down. There's a thud no one hears and there is badly bruised cartilage which no one tends. Down he plunges, bouncing off the bed, landing with arms wide and face buried into the soggy, dank sheets, screaming, "Where is my home? Where is my home?"

Drop-dead weary and worn out, he sleeps for twelve hours straight.

For the next two weeks Jared acts roles within a play as he stealthily travels around the Twin Cities. He tells himself that he wants to see the town as it is, not as others will try to tell him it is. He convinces himself that *this is the best way back in. Slowly, reading the town, letting it back in slowly*. So he contacts no one. Decides that his well-known frame can only be hidden by not being too clever, yet clever he must be in light of his limited funds. As the leopard cannot change its spots, so Jared resorts to wearing clerical garb—what investigating detectives would have anticipated as the obvious route. In priestly black, white collar, hidden by sunglasses and a secondhand-store fedora, he's a natural for the role of a visiting cleric, casually meandering around town. He plays it possibly too well, presenting as a pious asshole, one exuding an air of aloofness.

Jared enjoys this sleuthing around town, *casing the joint!* He's his own tour guide. The IDS tower, the Guthrie—*Shakespeare, man, Lear. Still radical!* Over to the Walker Art Center. *Lots of blown-out minds twisting junk into beauty!* Next, over to the Great Muddy, following it from West River Road across and down through St. Paul. *Pig's Eye!*

He's just window-shopping the city. In his mind: *being unknown, unspied upon. Adjusting to the city again. Like a new pair of shoes, breaking them in. Adjusting to new cloth, a fine suit of clothing*. Modestly, he succeeds. Those who know him see him but then don't.

He anchors his homecoming days with this ruse. His nights, however, prove less merciful. He wakens time and again, profusely sweating, most often with chills and shakes, other times overwhelmed with such a vast emptiness that he tells himself, "You're dying! This can't be living!"

Mercy is rendered—the mad swirl of dream flurries lessens with each ensuing dawn. He's getting things under control. *Or am I?*

He faces himself. "Am I? What's this shit with the white collar and the stupid hat?" Righteously, he chucks his clerical disguise.

He can't hide. The hard-edged reality of Outside makes itself fully present. *You're running out of money. How many more soup kitchens can you hit before someone suspects?* Out of familiarity, he's come to eat by volunteering at various non-Catholic religious shelters. He ladles out soup and free food, and so gets a free meal.

*I mean, Jared Jennings, you, you flaming asshole! What's going on?*

All in all, Jared stretches his homecoming into a two-and-a-half month event. A map of cheap hotels, soup kitchen charades, always on the move, evading this shadow and that brightness. Nevertheless, everything from Inside thins out. Loses its strength. Ultimately dematerializes in this Outside space of time. No longer "Inmate 8867-147 reporting, Sir!" No longer the clanking sounds of his spectral chains. He's left facing what he's heard so many old-timers describe. "You're a loser, Jared. One stupid ass-fucking loser." He's reached the border crossing marked *The End*.

*It's time. Doing time's over!*

Thoughts about thoughts: He turns his palms over and stares at the back of his hands, he observes the way his large veins submerge and disappear into his envelope of flesh. He raises his hand and in memory of his trial judge he points at himself and pronounces the verdict. *You're guilty. You sinned. You erred. You lied.*

*You did everything to protect yourself. You failed to resist while Inside. You succumbed and licked their dicks! Jesus, they fucked you in your ass—bung pussy!*

He flips back to look at his palms, watching how the lines intersect, cross without cutting, carve deeply but do not strike blood. *You're just like every other ass-wipe motherfucker! When the Man said jump you jumped! When he put you on the Ride, you went! No protest, no lock-up, no escape for you—fag breath! When it came time for you to suffer, you pushed everyone away. Your Mom, Char, Matt, Sean, Harley . . . do I need to read the whole list?*

*Why did you beat Bruiser? Why didn't you save Dikbar? Why didn't you jump Witson? Why do you long for Aaren? Admit it, she's the one you want, not Char. Fornicator! Bastard! You've always betrayed Char, right from the start. In your heart you lusted after Aaren, you dreamed of Aaren, Aaren is all you wanted. Her fantasy, not Char's look. You gutless motherfucker, Aaren should've sliced you with that stiletto!*

*Coward! Yellow belly! Scaredy pants! Admit who you are!*

*You're such a wimp, man. They got to ya, didn't they? They got to you, didn't they! You're no different from the rest, motherfucker. THEY GOT TO YOU, DIDN'T THEY!*

*"They got to me, motherfuckers!" They got to me, motherfuckers!*

Jared whips his arms around himself, hugging, squeezing, strapping, straining, and his legs start hopping, jumping up and down involuntarily. A great pain, a huge, rising serpent of air emboweled deeply within, hidden in his toes, moving like a clot of razors up his legs, blasting through his crotch, up his intestines, bounding loose and about his bowels and jamming into his chest, to be irrepressibly released, streaming out his mouth, "Yes! Yes! I am like the rest. They got to me! They got to me! *They got to me!*"

Two nickels clinking, *Clark Kent undressing*, Jared is in the phone booth.  
"Truth, Justice and the American Way!"

"Char. Sweetheart, I was waiting for my birthday. You know, like something that could mean something. August 6. Yeah, baby, I want to see you. Don't cry. Don't say anything. Just meet me at the farm. Love you!"

Stunned, before she can clearly grasp that it's really him, he hangs up. Char wonders, *No anger? No threats? Did he get my letters? Does he know? Did Steve . . . ?*

Jared: *I hung up, Why?*

#### 45 - JARED ON THE FARM

Char leaves two days early to find some time to sit with her Mom and to prepare for meeting "Your daddy. He's coming." She knows that Jared wants to come to the farm because of the rural quiet. He's told her often that that's something he treasures. "That moment you find yourself in when talking with the animals or trying to insert yourself as an adverb among the corn stalks. Yeah, sounds nuts but it's something lost in the city. I mean, even the monasteries in towns are different. There's something about your family's farm that's like, face it, a holy place. I don't know."

It isn't that he wants to meet her dad again or Gary or even her mom, though Mom's pies are spectacular. "Thick apple slices you can really chew, so sweet but not too sweet—mmm, hot brew and Mom Clark's pies. Jesus, life can be good!"

What he really wants is Char in a place he knows is specially hers. The farm is where he first saw her soul. "As she fits in the picture, I mean, not just a nurse—hell, you'd have to be there. Like when she walks around, her body's different, it's . . . right, shit, man, I can't explain but the farm makes me feel good. I tell you, I think I can know what I need to know about her down there."

Jared realizes that he needs to know about the abortion, interpret his own dreams about that, ask her forgiveness, find a way to embrace her spiritually. Just as prison was that dark place Inside where his soul was savaged and ravaged, so he returns to the farm seeking its protection, its earthen goodness. At some level within, he knows that the farm is their personal Garden of Eden, and it is there that they must start over again, begin to look at one another, male and female, and imagine as he imagined within the Bright Cloud.

When Char calls to say that Jared's out of prison and wants to visit, her mom becomes distraught the moment she hangs up the phone. In other times, she'd be excited, anticipating some long overdue announcement. She'd even be thrilled to accept what the Church condemns, "We're going to live together." But now? What to anticipate but that these children have to talk—have that Big Conversation like so many returning veterans had with their wives after her father's war.

"How old?"

"The child's two. Today's his birthday. Same as yours, isn't that swell! Welcome home...*daddy!*"

*Whose child? (Is it really mine?)*

Mom fears for her daughter. She still hears the startling, "I am a lesbian." It's a word attached to Char's radical actions and her own terror. Every night since that conversation she's been praying an extra rosary. It's still the only sacred gesture of blessing that she is confident will bestow protection on her bold, brave, fearless, but *oh, so vulnerable!* daughter.

Denial now no longer necessary, Mom asks, "Child, how long has he been away? Does he know? When, how will you tell him, if he didn't get your letters?"

The roads in southwestern Minnesota cut through fields that offer the stuff of life to humans. "Minnesota soil is so rich that just standing in it makes you grow an inch," is one of Jared's favorite "on the farm" jokes. Today, as he watches the farm appear, turning right off the Interstate at Highway 75, he's more than ever conscious of the fact that the farm is as much a state of mind, of soul, as it is a locale. It's picturesque with a landscape dotted with old buildings and dilapidated signs, ones from the

era of Burma Shave. It has its own cultural markers, such as the five or six bullet-blasted, paint-peeling signs offering something—tobacco or some brand name that’s been shot to hell. *Farmers and hunters*. It’s all that but more. It’s that the land exudes the virtues of human effort, of sweat labor. All in all, the farm demonstrates the Biblical admonition, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground. For out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Genesis 3:19.

Say “farmers” and the word draws up a flock of images of nameless men and women. Here, they’re mostly Germans and Scandinavians with a splash of Scotch-Irish, who are born, live and die behind the plow: horse drawn, mule drawn, tractor drawn, all dropping their seeds and reaping their harvest of body and soul.

They die, going to seed for the next generation, which eyes the fields just as they did. “They plow in such incredibly straight lines. I mean, it’s an art, really. You fucking better believe it! I once tried that and god, did they laugh at me. Like a kindergartner drawing lines with a big bulky crayon, I was zigzagging all over the field!”

This land brings good memories to Jared, about the Clarks and about his own soul comfort found here. Also some odd, funny thoughts: “Like, and listen—*am I stoned?*—when you crap, you know it’s good, you’re fertilizer! It’s really far out. Strange, that’s true, but it feels good in your gut.”

Jared laughs as he remembers saying that to Bart and a group from the food co-op after one of his trips to the farm. Being back-to-the-earth hippies into developing an alternative economy—their being so much into organic farming, composting and all that smelly stuff—he hears, “Right on, brother! Right on!”

*Mystical, man, mystical.* Jared chuckles softly.

Cruising along, suddenly he feels frightened. His fingers grip the steering wheel, arms clench, body goes rigid as if prepared to fight off a force that could throw the car off the road. His legs are in flight mode. He's sucking air. As he turns left onto the county road that marks a mile from the farm, he slows, shifts his aging Vega down to second, then first, does not heed its noisily metallic protests, its screeching whines, its sudden chokes and jerks. He ever so slowly creeps alongside the farm's west pasture's edge. His fear is not as if a gigantic bird of prey might swoop down and eat him, rather, he feels a bit like a pilot of an armored tank, maneuvering towards a target, armed to the teeth, waiting to launch a first strike.

He stops the car but doesn't pull off the road. Sits there for five, six, ten minutes. He rolls down the window, pauses, then yells, "It's not her sin, man, it's mine!"

Fingers freed, body disarming, Jared shakes his head, pulls down the visor and glances at himself in the vanity mirror, hears within, *Absolvo te!*

He starts rolling again.

She sees him from afar. He's a speck on the horizon, she knows it's him *for sure* because she's seeing with farmer's eyes, spotting at long distance the advent of something new—a traveler, an animal, a gust of wind rising in the field. Just now he's turning onto the dirt driveway, an eighth of a mile. She continues to steadily rock back and forth in August's early morning warmth, a close warmth, heavy with moisture, the tears of clouds.

She rocks, humming to herself, neatly dressed in a simple earth-tone skirt and blouse, loosely fitting. Her hair is long the way he likes, set

with a twist of two Roses of Sharon: one lavender, a delicate pale bluish purple, the other almost pure vanilla white, a touch creamy, pinned by Mom over her right ear while sharing tea just after breakfast. At the moment upstairs, Mom makes the beds and keeps her men busy doing things, she ever the assistant preparing the scene, ready to help.

Jared pulls up and parks by the weathered mailbox. On the porch, Char smothers a small laugh at seeing the Vega she thought long dead. Its mere presence reminds her of so many adventures and mishaps, breakdowns and long hours being patched back together by her father. But her merriment is quickly muffled by a creeping dread, a fear which she finds puddled upon her lap and seeping into her. This is something she hadn't anticipated, thought she had under control.

Her feet are like lead blocks, he rises above the car tall as ever, she watches him like a stalk magically erupting from inside the Vega, and all she can feel is her heart thumping and the pain of her breathing and the wetness upon her hands she wipes three, four times like a phobic patient. He comes towards her, is approaching, the strength in his long stride, the walk and dip of shoulder she knows so well, has dreamed so often, and is before her, she sitting, looking up, feeling so raw, so dissected as if her heart were on her chest beating like a drum announcing his arrival and he reaches towards her, she whom he has feared to meet, at once confident of what he has rehearsed, at the next moment blank of mind like back years ago on the stage, a second grader, awed by the audience, but her eyes save him—*It is her*—and all the rancor, all the flechettes of hatred he once clustered to throw at her, all the confusion from the past years drain away from him, vanish in the moment he is snared by her eyes: "jasper!" he has penned, pleased with the adjective that so accurately describes the change in her eyes during moments of passion. He reaches, she reaches, they stand and embrace, pull each other bone by bone, breath by breath, muscle by muscle onto each other, hugging so hard

that they hurt together but do not let go, so deep that there is only dryness, meeting in the desert of their hearts, all his time Inside flashing in vivid colors before him, no sense of calendar, no markings of the loss, just deep blues and lightning silvers and dark, dark shades beyond the black of night—they burst into showers and brilliant sun, pressing cheek to wetted cheek and he’s heaving and she rocks with him, she whispers “Jared! Jared!” and he’s consumed, enveloped. They kiss, mouths coming like birds returning to the nest, bits of food they are each to the other, feeding. Only the ache, the steel hard ache of his straining muscles rouse him to the moment, and he releases her and she slips from him back into the chair and he, still tethered to her eyes, sits down at her feet, wraps his arms around her legs—they are still, together.

Bertha doesn’t know whether she should, but she does, partly moved by curiosity, partly by concern, sidle to the screen door and peek, finds them in the embrace of stillness, and once sensed, savors the tender quietness. As she opens the door a crack, the top hinge’s squeak rustles through them and both turn towards her, “Mom!”

Jared unfurls himself and steps up, greets her. They touch hands and he kisses her forehead, then swoops her up in a big bear hug, lifting her off her feet.

“Oh, my . . . I didn’t even bake a pie!”

He sets her down, full smile and a tender laugh.

“Oh my goodness!” She blanches, watching the scar wave across his face as he smiles and unsmiles. She reaches out to touch him but hesitates to feel all that the slash might say—all the intimacy it demands be explored.

Char has been too absorbed to notice but now does. “Jared, what happened?” All three are standing, poised as if waiting for the *click!* of a

snapshot. "This? Err, see, it's a long story. But don't worry, I'm okay. Later, okay?"

Char stands and crooks her arm with his as Mom says, "Come on you two, your dad and Gary want to see you."

*Jared, oh, Jared, hug me, crush me, take me into your heart!*

After two handshakes, a round of coffee and some honey rolls, with nothing much said other than, "Glad to see you, boy," and, "Welcome back, Jared," with no discussion about prison, not even an observation by the men about the scar, now partially concealed by a month of whiskers, so no questions asked, Jared looks at Char: "Let's go for a walk."

It's a familiar route. Down the road a quarter of mile, right turn at the ruddy weathered barn, a relic of past harvests, and another quarter mile to the pond.

They just walk. No words during the first several minutes, and then his dammed questions break-through and long-suffered emotions tumble, emptying his brain.

"Look, Char, Sweetheart, you know I love you. I want to say that. Despite my insanity. Forgive me, please. I know I did that, said that. Jesus, this is harder than I thought. But you know that . . . there's just loads of stuff we need to talk about, but I've got to know, I mean, I know why you didn't but it's you, Char, I expected ..." he chokes, throws up his arms, asks from within anguished abandonment, "Why didn't you write? Why didn't you try to contact me?"

*Finally!* She was always certain that her letters didn't get through. Sadly, she realizes that he *doesn't* know. It's her worst-case scenario.

"Jared, I did."

"Did?"

"Yes, months and months, but you didn't answer."

"I didn't?" *Witson, you bastard! Liar!*

"And since they weren't returned, I thought, you know, you just threw them away . . . or something."

Her words, her story, the truth of it he knows is undeniable. *Them.*  
"Bastards!"

Certainly, it was part of Witson's plan.

"Aw, fucking Mother of God holy shit, the bastards!" He kicks the dirt, hard, scraping his toe, almost gouging out the leather tip. The hateful anger of his words, the lash of his arms as he spits *Bastards!* makes her realize—throws her into an instant panic—the gap between them, the one she knows they have to close. *Admit it! It's not just a gap but a chasm.*

Char watches Jared drift away as if on an ice floe, far out onto the thawing lake, trapped, caught—out of control. In a desperate effort to hold on to him, she blurts out, "You have a son! A boy, Jared. *A son.*"

The effect is sudden and complete, like a scythe executing a corn stalk. Jared falls—*thud!*—one hundred percent deadweight. A motion that has no cascading parts, no knees first, waist second, arms third, head fourth. No cut and hack at the stalk. No second swipes needed. Just one swoop of graceful, soundless, death-cutter energy. The fall is smooth, swift, *thud!*

Char's nurse's mind races, *Code Blue! Code Blue!*

She kneels down next to him. Trickle of blood stain his twitching moustache, small stones pockmark his forehead and cheeks. Only his quivering lips assure her that he's alive.

She rolls him on his back and begins to dab, spit and dab, clean, clear away, smudge, finally raising some color to his cheeks. She holds a hand, then a forearm as he shakes and shivers. When he does come to, it's an all-at-once resurrection like a child thrust wildly upward on the seesaw by an older, heavier sister. In a flash, he rolls left, anchors an elbow, for a wink steadies himself, then rights himself, flips up onto his feet as if performing a callisthenic. She stands, reaching for his hand, again. He starts to speak, totters, falls back down on one knee, head down, woozy...minutes not timed, gets up, steadies himself with a hand on her shoulder, the other clenching hers.

He towers above her. She sways into him, close hugging, just holding and holding on tight. Abruptly, he grasps her forearms and pushes them backwards, not in anger but to have a clear look at her. He steps back and echoes, questioning, calmly, strongly, "A boy?"

Char breaks into a broad, beaming smile, nods *yes!* He beams back, eyes wild with glee, a tad stunned—this the look she was denied on their birth night, that idiotic, totally goofy, look-laugh-holler-craziness which two share when that which is greater than the sum of their parts emerges: their mutual passionate creation, flesh from their flesh, eyes from their eyes, heartbeat of their heartbeat. Jared grabs her, quickly lashes her to him, holds her arms around his back and spinning, spinning, jumping—a touch of the berserk: a mad but blessed touch that dismisses all and any pains which wait in queue.

As they walk back it is with inward eye that they see the day and one another, each sending beams of light from within their hearts to join

with the other in a hand-holding, arm-swinging walk along the path of forever.

Towards their child, their son, their boy, they walk.

"I haven't named him."

"What?"

"I—I thought about it a great deal, and I wanted to wait for you."

"But what do you call him, *boy*?"

She laughs, "No, silly, I call him *Sweetheart*. Or Heart . . . he doesn't know any difference. Besides, it's a word of love, like you call me often, *Sweetheart*. Anyway, I knew someday I'd have to give him a male name, and you can guess how upset Mom and Dad are about this. 'Child, you *must* get him baptized!' They wanted me to name him Jared, but I wanted to wait."

Back at the farm, in her old bedroom, the new parents stand holding hands over their son's crib, beaming love down to the sleeping child.

"Just two, today! A toddler. Lucky you, darling, paroled just in time for the Terrible Twos."

"I, I just can't believe we have the same birthday! That must mean something?" He hears Matt chuckle, "Karma, J, deep karma!"

Then the barrage: "Is he like me? What will my Mom say? Who else knows? What about the Sisters? Why didn't you *tell* me?"

"Later. We can talk." She tugs on his right arm, indicating that she wants his full attention. "I wanted to wait and have you and me name him, okay?"

For Jared this is a moment of rapture—gazing upon the face of Divine Love which is the mingling of Char with his soul, together forming the presence of this other who is not him or her but whose presence makes them family.

Gazing down, totally awed, Jared is for a moment back inside the Bright Cloud and he hears a name that he echoes out loud: “Joseph. He’s Joseph.”

The child wakes upon the sound of his name.

*Joseph:* “It’s just so unreal,” four, five times he says this as he holds the child, lifts him up to eye level, kisses him on the mouth and cheek and neck and sweet powdered belly and pudgy feet. He nips him around the ears, whispering, “Daddy’s here, Joey. I love you, son!”

As all readily notice, the child loves the man. He’s wild at his father’s beard. Wrestles with his slightly curling hair. Finds on his tongue “Jey” and practicing “Da.” And Jared dutifully attends and cherishes all his fathering tasks—“Diaper duty again? I think I’ll go back Inside!”

During their visit, at lunch, dinner, and in between family and neighbor visits, it’s heard a thousand times over, “He looks like . . . ,” and a few pressing, “When will you . . .” Fill in the blanks: *Have him christened? Get married?*

At bedtime Char and Jared place little Joey in his crib, which was once his mother’s. They stand, arms around each other’s waists, adoring, at times rearranging the small mountain of pillows and long-retired stuffed animals that secure and protect him.

Each knows that this child is the symbol of their time apart, that “never to be shared” Inside passage. Blessed, they know him as their

bridge, bonding them together forever. As family they pray aloud, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . ."

As they commune through prayer, Jared lays the *hibakusha* upon his son's tiny chest. Char reaches to touch one end. "Like the Tree of Life," she says, "a root, strong, gnarled but vibrant."

This is what the *hibakusha* is to her. This, it becomes for him. When touched by the child, it glows—just as it did when it led his father into the Bright Cloud.

*Amazing!* As Jared lifts the *hibakusha* off his son, he is struck with a profound understanding—that a mission has been fulfilled, an obligation discharged, and an anointing made of a leader of the next generation. *We have the same birthday!* The *hibakusha* forever links Joey and Char to his time Inside. As they complete the prayer, "and if I die before I wake," he senses that this is an exceptional moment. A flood of caged and chained down emotions burst upon him: fear, hatred, self-loathing, despair—and as quickly are lifted from him. In this moment he is free of the cage and the chains. He breathes a sigh of deep, center-of-the-earth deep relief. He hears, *You can go now. She awaits.*

Overwhelmed, humbled, challenged, he looks at Char, feels her look deeply inside him. Although Jared wants to leave, this isn't all that this day is fated to witness. Before the presence of Joey jolted everything a quantum level, his main intention was to come to the farm to have Char walk with him, from their past to their now. He had planned to ask her forgiveness, to tell her about the Bright Cloud, to see if somehow she already knew. Right now he is so full of love that he fears it will divert him from what he must do. He needs to break all his chains before he can begin to heal. There are some things that only she can heal.

As little Joey falls back to sleep, Jared picks up Char's hands, engulfs them and sighs, "I have to show you my prison heart!" They go

downstairs, hand in hand. The living room is empty. No one else is around. Char flashes on her mother in the kitchen shooing her Dad and Gary away, "They need time, now, you two. So shoo!"

Char listens—she had feared worse. He's all choked up. "Will you forgive me?" She beckons him downward, locks her fingers around his neck, kisses him. "Yes." Kisses him again. He kneels down before her, embracing around her waist, presses his head lightly against her stomach. Her hand upon his head. "Really, there is nothing to forgive. This was our path. How we were to learn about the sexual violence that curses us all."

He closes his eyes, hugs her harder. "You are simply an amazing woman—no, more, an amazing lover." He frees her, stands up, cups her face in his powerful hands, "Your love sustained me through hell, I know that now. You are truly a daughter of the goddess!" He kisses her and kisses her and kisses her till she starts laughing, pushes him away, "Okay, okay. *Stop!* Obey the goddess!"

Hand in hand, they walk over and sit down on a couch. He's beaming: "Right. F..., oops, true, I do understand." Then corrects, "No, not understand but feel. *Together*, we have some sight, but—I think we have to admit—we've been more like a blind couple struggling to find the bed together."

It's an image that starts them laughing, but it is mirth edged with a trace of sadness. He sighs: "A bed, my dear Sweetheart, which we shall not share again. Isn't that our fate?"

She leans on him and lays her head against his shoulder. They sit together, mother and father. Hours are not counted. Summer night's fireflies dance.

#### 46 - COLDWATER FLAT

For days Jared sits by an open window and reads and re-reads the copies Char made of the letters she had sent—those which “the Man ate!” Before he left the farm, she gave him several small boxes. “You certainly came prepared!” he laughed. Now as he reads, he muses, *Clever as a fox, that girl!* He admires her foresight and cleverness. “Damn, Char you actually beat the fucking-A system, babe, out-manuevered the censors, even Steve as his Black Ops best. Damn, girl!”

Jared winces at the memory, his own stupidity. He had argued with Matt, “Come on, man, you’re getting paranoid. They can’t do that. We have rights even in here!”

A sudden sliver of wind blows an updraft, rustling a loose stack of letters. A handful of pages flutter away. Jared hurriedly catches them all, before any fly out the window.

Each letter refers to and expands upon the storyline that took form during their very first visit Inside. That her Revolution took a heartfelt lesbian turn. She wrote, time and again the key line, what to him is *the line* that marks the road taken, “I must find out, explore the meaning of *I am a lesbian!*”

Jared holds up the letter with that line. Say out loud, sincerely, resigned, “Babe. Blossom, babe. Love and blossom!” He pauses, can’t seem to put the letter down, tears well up in his eyes, he bursts out sobbing. *Looking at the letter, sobbing.* Hand shaking he lays the letter down, back-hand wipes his eyes, looks outward and upward, “The Revolution, babe. It fucking-A hurts!” Gathering himself, he knows he has to get out of the house for a bit, go for a walk.

Somewhat later that same day, the letters find him practicing how he’ll talk to his family, answering their question, objections. He’s anticipating that visit, *Soon. Soon, Mom.* Hears himself saying, “Our son. The kid . . . Well, I’m as proud as the proudest papa’s ever been.” He knows that he and Char are cutting a radical pathway, one that will strike many in his family as incredulous. “Char’s going to

raise him on her own?" He accepts that no matter how he'll try to explain it, they simply won't, can't get it. All that he knows to say is, "Physical proximity doesn't ensure spiritual closeness." He'll tell them, "Me and Joey, we're a fillip, a cosmic sound. I'll father him as fervently and soulfully as life allows."

Jared had gone down to the farm to find closure for his relationship with Char. On the other end of things, he's waiting here inside his apartment for Aaren. He doesn't call her; simply waits. *Karma, man, can't rush karma!* A week goes by, then several—slowly. A month. Two. Early October. An early, bitterly cold frost comes, then an ominous snowfall, foretelling a long hard winter ahead.

Waiting. He takes no time for formal prayer. No recitation of the rosary. No jaunts on Eastern roads, no gurus . . . just a lot of music. No reading of any serious sort, just music: deep, velvet-blooded blues, Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, BB King, old chain gang chants and the "smokin' shooter" of Sonny Boy Williamson.

Blues and hot baths in an ancient funky tub that is his apartment's one delight, sporadic but intense workouts, living off the food pantries, the Free Store, this church and that church's charity, just getting by, blowing smoke up his parole officer's ass. "Three interview last week. Looks promising!" Lying to the Man: He doesn't care. He just waiting. All in all, a lot of just looking out the window onto Elliott Avenue. *Waiting.*

Early one day, the doorbell buzzes, wakes him. *Seven?* Not an ungodly hour for the working class, but Jared's gotten used to snoozing till ten. *Who?* With two blankets, fake furs snatched from a pile of six or more, he wraps himself, half-arsedly, cursing the cold uncarpeted floor, a brevity of curses to awaken the day, and with the look of a hung-over man, which he is not, he looks through the peephole.

*Aaren stands there!*

*Jennings, report to the visiting room!*

It what he's been waiting for, but now that she's here, he hesitates—more, he resists opening the door. *Aw, shit!* He knows that he can't keep her out—*Karma*. So he unhooks the safety chain, twists open the door handle, makes a hurried turnabout and shuffles back to his room.

Aaren quietly enters and while he's in his bedroom immediately goes about being Miss Nice. She starts up a pot of coffee using a banged-up, cratered tin percolator left by a former resident or maybe his landlord friend. As the java bubbles and brews, she sets about tidying up this and that. Giving him a few minutes, she assumes that he's dressed by now, possibly even shaved, so she brings the pot and cups to his room.

*Interesting!* She senses that no women have been here. There's no perfume, either cheap or expensive. No telltale long hairs in the comb or brush loitering on his bed stand.

He's sitting by a window, looking far away. She's surprised that he's no further dressed than when he came to answer the door.

"It is a bit chilly here. Are your windows sealed?"

"It's okay."

She slips off her overcoat, keeps her sweater on, and again starts rearranging this and that, tidying up the room just a bit.

"Only half-insulated. Your plastic sheets will need to be re-stapled soon. They say we're in for a lot of snow this year," she says as she hands him a cup. He takes it, she pours and fills it to the brim.

"Whoa!" as hot drops splash the back of his hand.

"Sorry!"

She sets the pot aside and sits on the floor, her back against his bed. *It's barren*, she observes silently. *No. That's not it. Not really barren, just sparse.* It

isn't ascetic as the way her place is now, a place consciously devoid of *things*. This room's more just a dab of poverty. *His brother must be helping*, she doesn't say, but knowing the Jennings siblings, she senses it's true, although it's not.

Jared settles on the floor too, back against the wall, directly across from her. The room's narrow and he has to half-tent his legs not to kick her toes.

"Feel at home here?"

"It's mine . . . sorta. Yeah."

The psychic weight of the moment is almost unbearable. Jared doesn't know whether he should try to lift up and throw the weight away or wait for Aaren to do something. *What?*

In unplanned unison, they blow, sip and then hold their cups in both hands. Out of nowhere, some magical bell must've rung because they both burst out laughing. Just laughing, trying not to spill their drinks. Slight teardrops hold at the corners of their eyes. He heaves a deep sigh; she too.

Without words, they hold their cups up to toast this moment. *Clink!* A sip, blowing, steam fluttering, they drink.

"Sure is hot." She blows, popping a sound with her lips.

"Yeah."

Nothing more said, all the way to the bottom of the cup.

*Oh, how I want to flee!* In chorus, two voices within them chime, but both stay put.

He knows that it's his to open. A simple question, flat-toned, "Why are you here?"

"Because I love you."

“Love?” Something within him fears the moment, wants to test it, throw some acid on it, make sure it’s real. *Am I dreaming? Witson, are you fucking with me?* With smart-ass tone, “What does that mean besides loss? Do you want to lose me?”

“I did lose you . . . and you me.”

“But I love Char, you know?”

“Truly. So do I.”

Jared wiggles about, but only to relax his long legs. He’s feeling the pin sticks and stabs of legs beginning to fall asleep.

She reopens, “I love Joseph, too.”

“You know his name?”

“Of course.”

“When?”

“A bit after you, when they came back from the farm.”

She’s sharply focused on his every movement, that of his left pinkie, the way his lips purse, the shrugs he gives to shift into a more comfortable spot. She reads his mind. *Her meeting with Witson at the Black Forest. Of course, how can he trust me so soon?*

Aaren startles him by picking up on his thoughts about her and Steve. “I tried to tell you in DC. That I had left everything here: Mao, the Sisters. I’m on my own. Believe it or not, I’m back in graduate school.” She stops, then, “Look, I’m not here to chit-chat. I’ve changed. Oh, Jared, how can I convince you?”

Having practiced this a thousand times, she is now ready, jittery but ready. “Everything Witson told you is true. All my Weather involvement, my betrayal of you, all—”

“Wargasm?”

Fingers like wings flutter to her mouth, a slight cough. “True.”

“Really?”

“Wargasm.”

“Humph.”

“What else? It *had* to be my journey, I mean, look, you and I both had to become warriors. To battle in the streets, under the sheets and inside the sanctuary. Isn’t that true? Don’t you see, we’re like mirrors to one another. And I—I—oh, how painful!—*only* when I had battled with all my weapons, only after I fired every stock of ammunition: bullets, bombs, knives, only then, only after fucking and being fucked, inside and out, only when I thought I had won, captured the warrior male and his fire in my every opening,” and she points, mouth, cunt, ass, hand, teats, lips, tongue, “only then did I experience defeat. Defeat and victory, what *is* the difference? You know that.”

Jared stands up and walks about, more like shuffling. “Ha! Maybe it *is* just like me, I don’t know.” Turns. “But I have to say, I’ve prayed—no, not with my monkish prayers but with the hope for a new fire—that you are who you said you were . . . back in DC, that is.”

Aaren stands and moves towards him. He holds her off at arm’s length.

“But let me tell you, I’ve seen myself from more sides now that I can count. I was turned inside-out and outside-in, almost crossed over—yeah, both crossed over to them and crossed the line, I mean,” and he’s no longer holding her off, she stands there, steady. “I mean, I betrayed myself. You didn’t betray me. I fucked myself. You didn’t fuck me. I—I imprisoned myself. You didn’t imprison me.”

“Amen,” she whispers, floats into his open arms, they embrace.

Hours, days, eons, timeless moments they are there, just there, waiting together.

It's like they're inside the Bright Cloud. All they've meant to one another, for good or bad. All that they've felt, from dark hatred to molten desire. All that they've sought to know, now opens to them. At this moment each senses that they are together, teetering on the verge. It is as intense as the stiletto moment back before the raid. Their hearts are pounding heavily, they know—*Yes!*—that they are about to launch forth on their personal Revolution. With intimate eyes they painfully see two broken-down, impoverished, damaged and crushed youths who have lost first bloom. They sigh, do not have to speak, it is simply known, shared. With heartfelt kisses they melt together for the first time ever as a couple.

"Beloved, Aaren. You are my beloved."

Their hands touch, slowly they move towards the bed and ease down onto it. Minds, hearts, muscles, desires all gradually relax as they lie in each other's arms and breathe together. For the next few hours this seedy and rickety bed becomes the cradle of their newly coupled impassioned and fiery heart. From within their embraces arise a twin-flame glow that bathes the room and lights up the morning sky.

Many a wind has raised embers to spectacular fire. Here rises a wind, a fiery daughter of *Ruah*, "The Rush," that cloaking wind which moves lovers to huddle so close in intimate flesh and bone that the betrayals of the past are purged and the purity of that primal blaze which fashioned the heart of the First Lovers bounds free.

She is to him a box of precious gems, and as he opens her she bequeaths him gold. He is like the goldsmith upon her, lightly pounding the malleable metal, forming a necklace for himself from her kisses, drawing from her breasts light pearls. Sweet and salty he licks her, sucking from her soulfully healing milk, tapping into her warm heartways through her dark nipples and delighting in the

softness of her hillock as with spring's first grass, tender of shoot and blade, he feels her, pets her, and breast to breast they couple and lock on. She kisses him, his eyes the entryway to his soul, and she watches his hunger for her in the movements of his play. As he turns to her, she slips her hands under him and strokes him, raising moistness in her delta and crack-hardness in his shaft, and they roll to the side, playfully, tenderly stroking, kissing up and down, feeling electric thrills bouncing off their skin, static electricity *snap!* Their lips entwine, dip and dart. He is the strong west wind blowing the ocean towards her desert and she is the hot flaming flashes darting from the wilderness, seeking his cool embrace. Deeply they enter each other's intimacy, pressing cheekbone to cheekbone, legs latching, arms pulling ever closer until they almost pass body through body! They laugh, gasp for breath, he licks her ear lobes and she palm-surfs on his back, fingers dive and pinch his buttocks, loving the length of him, feeling buried by him but not submerged, actually emerging through him, and he is molding her, moving her soft-lands and entering into her, right hand calmly touching her panther hairs, parting her and feeling within her, finding that wet warmth which enters his hands and fills them with artist's power, for he moves her and she is pleased. He presses her clitoris and she is aroused, heat sears from her loins and he finds her liquefying and he sways and swings around, lightly, finger-tips tenderly massaging her clitoris then thumb on top and fingers inside he ups the beat, plays her like a fortissimo piano, all the while kissing her on cheeks and neck and tongue caressing her now fully raised nipples and she finding that he's falling into her, following her lures, coming to rest, that he is listening to her music and he's down upon her sirenic mouth and she without pause and within the beat has him hard to suck, and they lie there joined as only humans join, in that embrace of divine coupling that celebrates the erotic power of cock and cunny, intensifying that coupled charge, transforming flesh into heart, heart into soul, soul into flesh of a newly birthed presence—the twin-flamed lover. It is a magical moment of *flash!* An unnerving moment of *love!* The delirious moment of two who are now coupled and manifest as one presence. *Yes!*

"I love you." *You love me. Love!*

They are love, each to the other, they join fierce hearts to fiery souls, are the juice of life, flowing onto each other, bathing each other, raising each other, now rightly and newly named as *we*.

They rest, a long time silent, he drooping, nodding off, she elbowing him, smiling. "You know," and he hears in her tone that her mind's been racing around, doing what Aaren does—working out the ideological framework, the theoretical basis. So just as she begins, a huge broad smile whacks his face. She stops, "What?" He laughs, leans over, kisses her on the forehead. "Oh, nothing. Just that *it is you, Aaren. It is truly you.*"

"Hang in here with me, big boy, okay? See, I've been doing some of your stuff, believe it or not, theology and all that, myths, so look—okay, let me ask instead of tell—isn't what we've been trying to do ever since we met—wow, seems long ago!—is deal with violence, really our sexual violence? We, you and me, we were mythic enemies, true Warriors of the Sexes." He's totally wrapped around every word she's saying, with every syllable he's falling more madly in love with her than ever before. "If, not *as*, I mean, right now, I know you're here, just like me, to form a common life together, right?" He smiles. "So—" she pauses, waves her hand at imaginary demons: old Marxists, raving Maoists, all the Revolution's crazies. "So," she pauses again, places her hand in his. "Trust, my love—it is all about trust, isn't it?" She sighs, he presses her hand affirmatively. "As we seek deep intimacy, we need to be aware of the mythic challenge. Eve was Adam's enemy. I am not yours. You are not mine. So—" he's waiting "—love as if you are no one's enemy."

As in the Bright Cloud, Jared is being drawn forward. Aaren's heart is drawing him forward. "Fuck, man, that's really beautiful." Kidding, "Wish I had come up with that!" Tickles her. This breaks her serious mood. They tumble back into intimate exploration. Their fire burns, flares, roars, and by day's end greets the night with glowing embers.

Aaren and Jared slumber, arms crossing and intertwining, legs laced,  
dreamers within each other's dream, alive within, *Beloveds* who are together a  
virgin fire, twin-flamed.

*Love as if you are no one's enemy.*

#### 47 - DREAMSLIPPING

"Love as if you are no one's enemy."

They stand six paces apart and bow slightly as they say it. He folds his hands in prayerful gesture and then opens his palms, raising them high, looking intently, passionately at her. She, with hands at her side, steps towards him, coming to rest within his alluring gaze. He lowers his hands and cups her breasts. Slowly, they move towards each other, he inclining and she stretching up on her toes. They kiss.

Released, she turns and from the fireplace mantle takes off and sets in front of them a candle. Thick, three of his fingers thick and blood-red. Although she has blues and whites and all colors, today she selects as she feels, a darkling rose petal of the universe. Lighting it she says, "As we see our light, so let us recognize that it is but the center of our darkness."

"Right. Truly."

He touches her face, fingers slightly dipping and dotting her flesh like soft raindrops.

They make present the enemy each seeks not to become.

"You are daughter of Eve, my enemy."

"You are son of Adam, my enemy."

Then he places the hibakusha straight up on a small, round wooden block whose sides are inscribed with their names, gouged in trembling letters, stiletto scored.

Against the wall, as the candle brightens, is cast the hibakusha's quivering shadow. It makes present a form, one of Her, a goddess. *Flash!* Aaren detects Her presence, feels Her tangible touch, the room warms, for a moment Aaren is transported, bewildered, aghast, frightened as she looks around and all is devastation, she's seen pictures of Hiroshima but never smelled the stench of burning flesh as now, the emptiness of the air as if it itself were dead, the bodies,

just bodies everywhere, she turns, She comes, fingertips under Aaren's chin,  
"Daughter, heal the earth!"

Strangely, this most abstracted of metals, twisting between dimensions,  
delivers ethereal presences from . . . from where? Out of the hearts and souls of  
the hibakusha? Whatever its source, it fills the wall tonight.

She has come. They accept Her shadow.

"Love as if you are no one's enemy."

He has come. They accept His shadow.

"Love as if you are no one's enemy."

They kiss again. Then together bend and settle, sitting down touching her  
calves to his thighs, she pressing inside him, he like mountain cave, she like mist  
floating in on a brisk wind.

They sit quietly together, listening to each other breathe, consciously alert to  
the many little presences of the other.

Breaking their brief meditation, he picks up a peasant's shawl which is in  
arm's reach and draws it around them. It is damp with smells of past enactments,  
and its roughness matches their own state of desire: its fibers are coarse and  
uncolored, its state, raw wool.

She invites him. "I desire to become you ... I desire for you to become me."

He responds. "I desire to become you ... I desire for you to become me."

She's a bouquet of flowers his arms have swept, magically, from out the air.

He's a roar of thunder she's drawn from the sky and tamed with sweet  
cooings of endearment.

For an unmarked stroke of time they sit, slowly allowing the other to fill up  
their senses. He is drawn by a faint scent of lilac, an indulgence she allows herself.

This entwines with a slight aroma of herbs dancing on her softly hued black hair. Both mix with the dusty odor of her blouse, the residue of her day's work at the school. It is her: Aaren in all her subtlety and complexity.

For her, it is his size that always impresses. Jared's presence settles upon her like a cape. It's as if he emerges from the floor, rising, hovering above, and his manly odor is all about her. It's a mingling of naked heat and musty early evening manliness. Yet, now as always, she finds distraction in his eyes. They betray his mounting impatience. *He's burning tonight!*

For him, her foot, still booted, resting high upon his thigh makes him shudder. He slips off her short furry mukluks, strokes her up and down, ankle to calf to thigh. He loves the swoop and naked line and up-rushing arch. It's that which is source to her liquid movement. *Liquid Fire!*

In his mind's eye, Jared is watching her walk in front of him and as ever he flushes from the sway of her. She moves as if about to take off—fly-up and away into the clouds.

He leans towards her blouse and unbuttons it. One at a time, while pulling the bottom out from her skirt. Having loosed her, he lets his arms fall away, so that she knows he wants to observe her, behold her with eyes admiring, lusting, hungry.

He patiently tracks her as she opens her arms and causes the shawl to drop and her blouse to slide fully open. In another practiced motion, she unclasps and frees her bra, half naked, ever a mite of flesh in comparison to him, but with every slight motion making present her inner vortex of yearning.

She stands, fully undresses, letting the blouse fall away, the skirt drop. He picks up her blouse, glides it over his face, rubs it into his beard, inhales her essence.

She invites, lures him. "I am candle ... I seek the matchmaker ... for I need fire."

He kneels before her, struggles to discipline his hands—they seek to betray his iron self-restraint. Her mere presence easily sets him off on a wilding wide-awake dream. He is drowning in a torrent of erotic juice. His whole body is sodden, drenched with the sperm of a desire so strong he fears that his hands will disengage from his arms and tear her to shreds. He's mad with desire to have her. Possess her. Penetrate her. It's as if his toes are ten little cocks ... his fingers ten medium ones ... his tongue a larger one ... and his bodily self so large and gargantuan a penis that he bawdily laughs at seeing himself pull it up and position it atop her southern mound, there positioned like a phallic cannon all ready to *Boom!* But he has worked and labored to master himself and be here as heartfelt sculptor not as a fuck-warrior. He has, all day, warded off the many temptations to simply take her, have his way. He dispels, *Fuck the bitch!*

*Wait for the moment!* he reprimands himself. Through sheer strength of will he holds at bay the churning, ravenous monster moaning throughout his belly. *Belly. Grrr, I want to eat her! I want to be in her belly!*

The moment comes: As agreed, he repeats now what they've chosen to chant and image themselves with – *I love you. I am not your enemy.*

"I love you. I am not your enemy."

"I love you. I am not your enemy."

They do this to make present what is novel and fresh between them. Chant it because the sexually violent ways of the predatory Warrior are always there in their minds and hearts, as past is ever present and future ever past, and all must be acknowledged before they can be dispelled. "I love you. I am not your enemy." Through this shared mantra, Aaren and Jared make conscious the sexual violence of the predatory Warrior. He who dominates and conquers her. *Rapes.* Who trivializes and casts off the females after she has quenched his sexual desire. *Booty.* Who obliterates any memory of Her or her as all he can see is Him and himself. *You are my flesh. You came from my rib!*

It is the mantra of a fresh beginning. It enables them to exit the mythic world in which they grew up. Together, they want this. To start anew. Be fresh bodies and souls, each for the other.

He half disrobes, exposing a heart-heaving chest, with thick pectoral muscles that flex and delight her. He kneels down again, kisses her, embraces, sighs. Standing back up, she un-girdles him, assisting as he steps out of his trousers, then both kneel. They kiss lightly, several times, then tear into a passionate dive, deep and deeper.

She pulls back, "Whoa!"

He says, "No whoa!" and eagerly tugs her back. But then he freezes. For she tenses, has a hand on his chest pressing lightly, holding him back. Her eyes are closed. Lips shut. It comes to him that his small act of lustful snatch has evoked a past act of violence—a strike at her person.

Both are on hold. They loom. He struggles with inaction. He wants to know her heart. He whispers, tenderly, "I am not your enemy."

Within an awakening smile, she drops her hand, then places both on his shoulders. His fear recedes and they settle back and play a little. She runs a hundred nippy kisses like skipping stones on a lake around his lips and over his cheeks and down his neck, finally stopping for a large smacking suck on his neck. She kids him, "Oooo, a hickey for sure!"

*It is time.* He takes her hands, holds them and indicates with a head nod that he's inviting her to bed. She flirts with her eyes blinking a shy, "Me?" He glares back a firm, "Yes, you!"

They lay down within the flickering candlelight and frisky splashes of moonbeams. Like jigsaw puzzles pieces they are a fit, one for the other.

He begins gently and tenderly stroking her body, all her length and fullness. She is eyes closed, allowing herself to be washed by the soothing energy flowing

from his palms. His gentleness eases the tensions of the day and sets loose couriers to parts of her heart and soul announcing that the time is now ready to move with him to the next dimension.

He rolls her over and initiates a more serious search for her inner self. He begins to deeply massage her. This greatly pleases him because it is a knowing of her that completes what he felt when he first called her Liquid Fire.

For him, she, her body, her skin is a great pleasure. As he presses a calf, hot sluices shoot up his forearm. As he tends her feet, taking each toe by toe and balling his hand to work the small of her insole, small fires flare-up, slowly, one by one burning a pathway zig-zagging up and through and all over the inside of his chest to his heart, fingers and palms radiating intense heat, he feels connected to her organs, as if moving through precious channels in her feet, touching from this lowliest of her earthly parts the fleshly innards which carry her intimate passions and store both her cool and fiery emotions.

As she relaxes, lets down her guard, his cock becomes primed to the point of self-propulsion, and it is here that he looks at her, helplessly, vulnerable and knows "One strike!" just one strike and "Take no prisoners!" and into her like a rampaging Warrior he could dive and from that dive delve into her passions through panic and fear and steal her booty! Take her prized womb and spurt all over it with his flags of conquest, ten thousand soldiers of sperm at his single behest ... he has to turn that violence of capture to capture himself, to let her have her body, not take it as booty, to feel the fullness of his cock and then slowly and carefully suck it back into his inners, re-deposit it in his erotic Cauldron, let it simmer and brew, so his crazy self of discipline agonizingly laughs, *It'll be better the second time around!*

*Grrrr, he aches!* Tenderly, she's aware of his long-suffering. Yet it must be so, for if they are to reach beyond, they must first find a balance—one of pain that carries deep pleasures. Quietly steeled, she has herself labored to trust his exploration and become each time increasingly more relaxed and vulnerable, pliable and submissive. *Open*—submissive to the greater force that they have conjured

together. She knows that this simple body-wandering ritual is what he needs. That it evokes that something from beyond himself which puts him in touch with other phases of himself. It's a ritual that holds him steady, for she knows the scorching wind that whips around him, and she knows she is this wind, she is not fooled by her own howling, that which she once acted out when at him with slash of stiletto, that which scarred him on his soul as another had upon his face, all this she knows, so now together they are a terror and as a terror the vendor of the most stupendous violence, more bombastic than any Weatherman booby trap, they together work towards the moment, drawing the darkness around and within, swirling it as to make fire, and she is at him as flint sparking against flint, her flesh is his kindling and he moves to her back, fierce fingers so delicate upon her, she is fully aware that with one snap, "Just a twist of his wrist. Exactly, he is that strong," that'd she'd be dead, for she has been murdered within his embrace—finds ancient Sarah glaring at her in fright as Jared embraces as if she were the Lamb of Sacrifice—and she knows that he knows and that he trembles knowing that it is he who has the dagger always as part of him, his body being the dagger and the bludgeon and the axe, fully the Warrior's instrument of murder, so does he find but they are finding it together through this ritual and their shared quest, this insight, this harrowing feeling that mingles dread, desire and delight at the instant moment before entry of each into the other.

"What is it that you see?"

He says, "Your heart in my hands." Greedily, together they drip her blood into their mouths, she licking his arms and sucking the drops from his fingertips and together they return the heart, restore it as they enter, cock and cunny.

"Come touch my heart with your knife of flesh," she invites, and he enters her deeply, feeling as if he is slicing her with his cock, entering he sees her halved and her heart throbbing, "Come touch my heart with your lips," and he kisses her heart, "Come fill my heart with your blood," and he sees the connection, himself sliding as penis attaching as artery and coming inside her filling her with sperm and she, "My heartbeat is your cock pulsing," and he cries—sound like a sharp blurt as a

rusty lock snaps and cracks open, then his tears puddle upon her breasts, his head now lies exposed upon her chest, she almost dead from his weight but holding him to herself with soothing pats, long and short, calming wild beard hairs and the Medusa flight of his head hairs ... he falls quickly into a depth of sleep marked not by time but by sensations.

He feels himself being bathed, as child in the baptismal font, as back one mystical day LSD-tripping in the Minnesota Northland floating in a lake with late afternoon sun and all the world glistening and he the lake, so it comes and he awakes so aware of the immediate, so sharply cut off from her, feeling the full weight of his frame and edge, he bolts away from her, *Gasp!*

Within this *Gasp!* she is all and more and he nothing and less. A mere carrier of dying seed, a seed that only lives as she so haughtily selects just one, a single servant, a slave to her passion for life, to impregnate her. In this *Gasp!* all that the Warrior fears is so deeply revealed to him, and he knows why the Male God lies about his body being the birthing body, why males fear the worship of Her through her body ... *Gasp!*

Yet, it is exactly this for which he has come. Exactly this that all his time Inside has prepared him for. She is now his way to find their shared Inside, their intimacy.

He steadies his breath and slowly moves a hand towards her head, placing his fully stretched left hand upon her, sensing that he could palm her like a basketball, he works fingertips upon her scalp, moving like a tap dancer stepping this way and that over the long filaments of her raven hair, some matted by perspiration, he dabs at her forehead with his discarded tee shirt and rolls her back to front and kneeling upright, arms raised, he yells, "I am not your enemy! I am your dreamer!"

Enthused, he thrashes his arms about, jumps up and *Whoops!* into a wild dance, prancing from one side of her to the other, making unintelligible noises. "Whoos!" and "Booda boodas!" She giggles, he stops. "Funny? This is funny?" He

plunges down upon her, faking as if to land on her but rolls with her back and forth lightly tickling, squeaking tiny laughs, for they have slipped through the comic knot, the absurd, the plunge into the giddy and the giggle as necessary moments of distraction that allow the fury of their passions to settle down. Settle but not die down! Rest a bit. All merely the pause before their quest begins, again.

For their quest is yet done. All has been but prelude. They are now poised to move beyond being sexual athletes whose "love-making" is all *Fuck!* and "mutual masturbation" and being sexual objects, erotic toys, one for the other. They know that moving beyond can only rise from within themselves. They seek *whatever it takes* to transform into, to birth and be birthed as a new body, as a coupled body. And it is working, for he has already added to their mantra a key that unlocks one more doorway through which they walk into a coupled freshness. "I am not your enemy. ... I am your dreamer."

*I am your dreamer.*

They know that they want to stretch their bodies and souls for more. To become a fuller body: *coupled, cosmic, fresh*. They know that they must dream this body. It comes to them, mutually voiced, "Dreamslip. Beloved, let us dreamslip!"

#### 48 - REVOLUTION!

Everyday going forward, Aaren and Jared seek to dreamslip. They move in together and begin to construct as normal a life as two can who care not for the normal but for the “moving beyond.” Truly, they sense that there is still something “beyond” the Warrior culture’s vision. Still young at heart, they seek the elusive *Revolution!* They are still committed to making something happen to change a world that is so insane that it is endlessly at war—finding enemies both Outside and Inside.

They’re more than prepared to throw out the political and theological baggage— *Violence/nonviolence. Sin/Redemption.* “The war still on, isn’t it?”—mainly because they’ve used these words and *they just don’t work.* Try as they may, Christian or Marxist or Democratic or Western terms keep them trapped and they don’t want to be trapped. At the base, all the visions they’ve ever heard about—whether from the East or the West—still hold that someone is the enemy. Someone is to be violently hurt, tortured, murdered “in the name of ...!”

All Aaren and Jared can figure is that it’s up to them, that the Revolution must be something that rises from within their personal quests to go in the opposite direction, move beyond where they can live as if they are no one’s enemy. *Where to begin?* “Let’s begin to build a life together, Sweetheart.”

She finishes off her Masters. He returns to graduate school to work on his doctorate in history. He wants to tell not just his-story or her-story, rather, humankind’s story. *Our story.* She works organizing and directing a small network of pre-schools. “Rich, poor, black and white—kids!”

They move into a rented house in South Minneapolis on a street “as near to a lake as we can get!” From all external observation Jared is “adjusting” or as his parole officer writes “being rehabilitated.” There are moments when they laugh at themselves with more piercing jabs. “Burned-out hippie weirdo Revolutionaries making sponge cake!” They are aware that even some close friends cannot let them let go of their past personal stories. At times, they over-hear a derisive “becoming so Middle Class” or “Establishment” or “They’ve sold out!”

It's true, they know. They have moved beyond the Warrior story that—as they've come to experience—includes the Resistance and the Church and the American Way. They focus on developing a Beloved's story, one that rises from their heartfelt intimacy, not from some mental analysis or revealed truth. For them "the personal is political" means that "the personal is sacred" and that "the personal is the creating, godding force."

*Godding*: A word of heresy. Sacrilege. At first they like it because it steals the word "God" that's been used to separate people from one another. "My God." "Our God." "Not your God." They take it and use it in a most profane manner.

Aaren: "For me godding is a bridge word. See the supposedly great claim is that God became human, but the reverse is true. The human gives rise to the presence of God. From within you rises a male god, from within me a female goddess. Lower case "g" because it is a common word, describing the most obvious human fact that we become fully human when we embrace one another."

Jared: "Right! There's heat in that embrace. Feral, lustful, forging, fierce heat! You forge me, Sweet A, make me feel I'm fully me when I've been with you as a we."

But soon the word—"More tortured theological babble!"— makes them stumble, so they cross the bridge it provides and drop it. Once crossed Jared states, "Let's just throw out all references to spiritual or religious or holy or sacred or profane or political or whatever ideological jargon, imagery, analysis, et cetera, et cetera, that still pollutes our brains!"

"You know if those words, those images made me wet, made my cunt run, maybe then I'd say okay. But they don't. I'm with you. Let's just chuck all that crapola!"

He playfully mocks himself. "Hey, I studied all that theology for nothing?"

"Theology?" she presses her hands to her breasts, places fingers on her pussy.



She knows this—that her body is now the inspiration for the language of the Beloved. He must learn to read her, hear her revelations. Then they will talk as inspired Beloveds. More, every girl, every woman, broad and cunt will come to proclaim, “We are the fullness of life! Come into me and live!”

*Revolution:* What is it? What do they do? What do they seek? It’s amazingly hard work, daunting to try and create a new mythic moment, but it all begins as the Warrior story also begins—as he looks at her. They know that they have woken every previous day of their lives to that Warrior dream: “So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs.” This dream wherein the male exists before the female, where Eve is molded from Adam’s body and that heralds that the male body is the birthing body—*mythic theft!*— they rise and counter as they touch one another, “I am my body. You are my body. We are our body.”

The Warrior male only dreams her as being derivative. He does not celebrate her as the birthing egg or her monthly moon blood as a sign of life’s everlasting vitality. For she is *not* a goddess, never, her embrace is a temptation to fall from grace. Coupling with her is for reproduction—*Sons! Heirs!*— not a moment of ecstasy.

As Eve and the Mother Goddess were rendered invisible and the presence and power of the feminine obliterated, so now the first Revolutionary act is for him to look at her, see her and make her fully present by recognizing her using every sense: see, smell, taste, feel, hear. And she to him. Together they attend to one another. Declare their intention to be together. *Celebrate!*

*An average day:* All dressed, ready to leave for work, he muffles a laugh as he kids her, “So it comes down to this—fuck me and leave me!”

"Listen," she walks across the room, pinches his earlobes and pulls him down so as to snare his eyes. He does not resist. "I want to be *here*."

As she affirms it, he knows it as another form of mantra. He responds, eyes tightly fixed on her, leaking his soul love, "I also want to be *here*."

With this said, they begin another day with an act of intention.

*Intention.* They talk: "Not something romantic like bubbly ooze. Not something bug-eyed and stupid. More like awareness. That you are my body and I am yours."

Each day they begin by becoming aware, taking some moments for their private waking and approach one another and touch drawing one another into the coupled body they become together. "Celebrate!" becomes a phrase that opens them to dreamslipping and starts them countering the erotically violent Warrior dream. "Let us become one couple who is not waking to the Warrior dream."

This Warrior dream rises every day to divert and block their dreamslipping. Fiercely committed to the Revolution, Aaren and Jared engage their erotic fire, embrace and consciously intend their coupling to be a first act of a new mythic story, that of the Beloveds who embrace and behold one another as cherished lovers.

Dreamslipping is a rigorous venture. For as they dreamslip, they encounter many Warrior stories that they must bring to full light so as to defuse their dark powers. It's a time of great inner struggle, a time of risk—"I've betrayed you," opens his account of "Aaren's fantasy." As happens, she responds dramatically differently than anticipated. "My, my, you're at least half right!" she laughs at him. Not forgiving but having mercy. "I also wanted to fuck their wives and girlfriends!"

Then, they confront the many political stories that so heavily impacted their lives. At such times they seek forgiveness for others, as when they dreamslip to a village called Mylai.

"A. Told him if he couldn't move the people to waste them, sir."

"A. To waste or destroy the enemy, sir. To go into the area and destroy the enemy that were designated and that is it. I went into the area to destroy the enemy, sir. I never sat down to analyze it, men, women and children. They were the enemy and just people."

.....

"Mylai Four! You had a woman down on her knees, didn't you. And you threatened her baby."

"No."

"You opened your pants and you told her to give you a blow job ..."

"I object!" ...

"and Lieutenant Calley stopped you. Didn't he?"

Dreamslipping is indeed a rigorous, dangerous venture. Nothing is without risk. Demons pop out of nowhere, so it seems. Stories bring tears, recriminations, deep sorrows. Quite often, the darkness resists the light.

"*Quinn*. Honey, I need to tell you about Quinn ...and about Marion..."

"Go on, it's okay. Anything. Tell me everything."

*Just a piece of shit!* "I can't. I want to. I just can't."

She holds him. Tenderly caresses his forehead. Whispers, "Later. We'll get to that, later."

Adam and Eve, Lieutenant Calley at Mylai, and Quinns from all ages continue to wage their wars—everyday, relentlessly. Equally so have Jared and Aaren begun to live as Revolutionaries and daily engage in their radical practice of intimately coupling with intention as they dreamslip anew and so make present one another as Beloveds—creating themselves as Earthfolk who "love as if you are no one's enemy."

*Practice.* She tidies the bed and he puts on some music, a long, endlessly looping play of Mozart and Beethoven and Bach on a daisy chain with Clapton's "Layla," Moody Blues' "The Far Side of the Moon," and some dark, sweltering fantasies of Santana. She lights several candles, he opens and burns a fragranced incense stick. The candles cast flickering shadows.

"I am not your enemy. I am your dreamer. I want to be here." She in front, sitting within his legs, and he long arms down hers hanging down onto her thighs and they breathe together, slowing to sense the other and working to be in tandem, their natural rhythms on different cycles to serve the needs of their quite different bodies, in a hush they reach it, in and out, breaths breathing a common breath, allowing their full body to feel the other, belly to back, legs nudging legs, thighs of his encompassing hers and half her calves, and over her he drapes his head, placing it astride her right temple, his chin is almost her cap, and they move ever so imperceptibly on the whispers of flesh that they have come to hear and allow to speak, the smallish call of skin to skin, "Touch me! Feel me!" and his nipples harden as his hands cup hers, and she is soft, and he presses her, binding her inside his palms and his lips find her ears and he nips her, pulling softly, gathering her cheek within a slight suck, he's breathing her into him, she is falling back as if picked up

by a strong gust and she releases into the fall and around her she hears the invitation, "Come! Let us celebrate, my Beloved!"

He holds her gently, lifts her up under her arms, not pinching nor hurting, and in one motion turns and places her upon his cock, calmly and assuredly—they are totem, Sky and Earth, Air and Water, *conjunctio oppositorum*: one coupling as two and shuddering freshly becoming the new one of we.

Embraced, they work to dreamslip. Their motion together is a gentle rocking and they search for each other in this calm before the storm, that period of heightened sensitivity, of alertness, for it is their storm that is forming, their deepest yearnings...inside her he submerges, swimming as they breathe, stroke and breathe, and she offers herself as water, ocean, pool and lake, calling to her lover, "Swim! Swim over here!"... they share "I love you!" "You are my beloved!" over and again until it fades into a faint echo...it is quiet, only the wind of their breathing, they are unaware of the room and the candlelight playing and the dying stalk of incense and the savory delights of Mozart, they are strolling together along the beach, disappearing into a sunset and returning upon sea gull wings, rising from a burial of sand, playfully scampering after each other and tossing themselves into the sea ... they swim and she is porpoise and he seal, blustering lion seal, they sound the song of the sea, catching their play among seaweed they rise and frolic themselves as cloud and breeze, forming and unforming in shapes, some monstrous, some silly ... falling but emerging into each other's arms, they feel the hot sun rise and the delightful shout of the moon in response... they are face to face, she straddling him, he undulating her, fused within his thighs, a blessing of his prodigious length, he is rocking chair to her, her softness the rider on his stride and roll ... they settle into this wave of motion, like an egg attempting to stand on its end, a bit of a wobble, he and she embrace in the small of their bodies, becoming as one cell in the their fuller coupled body, he sperm, she egg, they as one are yoked and yolk, and within this coupled body bursts that moment of creation—"Flash!"—that stroke and slide, that tap on the door and the wondrous moment of opening: the entry, the rise, the Up The Lights, the Rolling Away of the

Stone ... they are blessed this moment as One in the Other, that coming of themselves which is future and will be past and present, their child, so it begins, they dreamslipping, he and she, Jared and Aaren chanting sweetly, hearts afire.

*I love you.*

*I am not your enemy.*

*I want to be here.*

*I am your dreamer.*

Aaren and Jared: *Beloveds.*

#### 49 - EPILOGUE—WE'RE HERE TO SING, 1981

Shifting Amanda Rose to his right arm, Jared knee-bends slightly to turn up the TV's volume. A voice, mellifluous, strong and confident speaks. Although melodious, it clearly seeks to inspire. More, with artful pacing it rises to oratory and hammers home its message—"An iron fist in a velvet glove!"

From time to time, we have been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by and of all the people. But if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then, who among us has the capacity to govern someone else?

"Is that the president?" Joey asks, taking a momentary break from his latest obsession, "Frogger."

"Yeah, yeah," Jared responds while waving away his son's question, dismissing this moment of potential parental education so that he doesn't miss a word of this ardent Revolutionary leader's vision.

The face is handsome, star quality. The voice attracts, engages, allures, even tempts. Truly a sirenic power.

It is time for us to realize that we are too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams...We have every right to dream heroic dreams...And as we renew ourselves here in our land, we will be seen as having greater strength throughout the world. We will again be the exemplar of freedom and a beacon of hope for those who do not now have freedom.

*What's more to hear?* Jared assesses as he turns down the volume, shifts Amanda, this time to his left arm, turns and totes her with him to the memorial on the mantelpiece. The large, shiny black ribbons that frame the picture of the "Imagine!" Revolutionary are festooned with twists of white, yellow, red, blue, even

purple flowerets. *Rainbow people!* they shout out to Jared. For the shortest of seconds the irony of having both these Revolutionaries present in his living room, both here seeking to inspire the minds of his young son and daughter, this irony cuts him deeply. *Who has won?*

“Did you hear that crock of shit?!” Aaren almost snarls as she enters the adjoining kitchen, arms filled with grocery bags, head shaking disapproval.

“Mommy! Mommy!” Joey jumps up and runs towards her. She reflexively deposits the bags and automatically opens her arms, picks him up—it’s more like *Swoop!*—undeterred from continuing her venting.

Jared knows his wife is an “MPR junkie.” She has public radio on all day, everywhere: bedroom, kitchen, car, even in the garage. So he knows she’s been listening to the Inaugural Address.

“Those guys just have no shame!” By “guys” she indicts all Reagan Revolutionaries, all Republicans, throw in all Democrats, *Christ!* all men, males, patriarchs ... “guys” swoops up everything she and Jared dreamslip against.

“Won’t they ever get it?” is thrown out not for an answer but as her way of engaging their dreamslipping quest. “They’re still making someone the enemy.”

Aaren kisses Joey on the forehead, puts him down, steps towards her approaching husband-with-daughter, hugs and kisses them both. Jared sets Amanda down. Says, “Joey, play with your sister for awhile.”

At nine, Joey is proud to be a big brother. He takes his little sister by the hand and they cross the room to settle into their favorite reading spot—the pillowed corner of an old sofa in front of the fireplace. “*Cat in the hat*. Okay?” he asks, although he already knows she’ll squeal and shout, “*Cat in the hat! Cat in the hat!*” Joey loves his little sister’s wild abandon. From her first steps—Amanda actually

didn't step as much as run: *She a scooter, this one!*—everyone's been trying to keep up with her, Joey, especially.

Temperamentally, Joey's more like his other mommy, Char. He's a bit introverted, gentle, even uncharacteristically—in respect to his father's side—slightly taciturn. "You're lucky, you have two mommies who love you!" is all that he's ever heard. As have several of his playmates whose mothers also live at The Sisters as he's come to know his other home is called. "You're very special. You're all children of a great big family." It's a family with many *aunts* as the Sister's call themselves, three sets of grandparents, and numerous *cousins* as every other child is called, except of course for Amanda. And just yesterday, with both mommies present, he learned that this is all about to change, as his dad said, "You're going to be a big brother, again." Not unexpectedly, he wasn't sure which mommy until Char takes his hand and says, "Place your hand here," as she indicates Aaren's belly button. "*Our baby* is growing inside, here." His quizzical look draws forth Aaren's sweetest of laughs. "Just wait! In no time, I'll be as big as uncle Eddie's belly! Then, you'll even feel the baby kick."

*Family.* That's what they've been building ever since their first dreamslip. It's been a rough road, replete with lots of breathtaking walks, runs and treks, but worth it, all in all. The first great fork in the road had been the simultaneously *eruption*—Jared considers this the only proper word—of their marriage and the Sisters' divorce. Marriage of Aaren and Jared, August 15, 1975. Divorce of the Sisters, just about the same day.

Char had worked hard to prevent the blow-up, but the recently revived chapter of SCUM —Society for Cutting-up Men—prevailed. They stormed the wedding, marched in from all sides, raucously waving banners, whooping and hollering. Aaren and Jared had chosen Excedra—Como Park's most exquisite outdoor garden—for its floral beauty and nature symbolism, and also because its spacious front-lawn provided easy access for and readily served the several hundred guests. Unintentionally, for SCUM's raiders, its rim of striking firs and pines

provided unguarded access and ample opportunity to rampage and desecrate both human and mother nature. "Marriage is evil! It is the rape of our Mother!" was shouted, screamed as Frog Pond's sighful waterfall ran red with blood! Or, obvious to all, with red dye.

In concert, a dozen or so hideous butterflies burst forth from the adjoined Enchanted Garden, which is widely acclaimed for its majestic lepidopterous display. These were wing-damaged, beheaded, squashed and uglified creatures who flitted around the crowd with the intent of unsettling everyone, notably the men. They pushed their bodies and faces lip close and twittered, "Kill all the males! Kill all the males!" These butterflies were not in any manner the Enchanted Garden's "magical creatures of transformation" as described in their wedding invitation. For Aaren and Jared, the humble, hairy, squishy and unremarkable caterpillar symbolized all that they, this day, came to proclaim as the core meaning of their marrying. "We seek to transform and be transformed," they wrote, "To marry rightly by honoring and making present through our everyday embracing the heart and spirit of the divine male and holy goddess. We do this as two separate, autonomous individuals who intentionally seek to create family—at once civil, holy and mythic."

While at first shocked and dismayed by the uglies, most in the crowd—surprisingly, even Jared's siblings—quickly adapted and took it all in stride. Some even thought that it was a planned guerilla theatre routine, as was so common back during anti-war rallies. In fact, the butterfly raid was quite quickly defused as Jared shouted to the crowd, "The raiders get raided! Rich, ain't it! There's a humorous justice here!" Amused laughter softly rippled throughout the garden. Booming, Eddie rejoined, "All's fair in love and war!" Just the fact that Eddie spoke and joked eased many a more moderate heart. Aaren responded with a sincere plea, "Please, welcome our Sisters. We need them. I do not deny their truth!" Stepping up next to her, taking her hand, Char, in a flaming red Matron of Honor sheath set off by a headdress wreath of violet blossoms, settled everything by sweetly voicing, "These are our Sisters. Bring them into our family. Welcome them. Embrace them. Come Sisters, mine!"

*Family.* It had actually and truly begun with the wedding. Which was a day filled with amazing rounds of singing, dancing and unfettered camaraderie. Even two of the butterflies stayed until the end—*Converts? Spies?* Yet, as the raiders intended, the dark, shadow side of family was also made present, conjured. At day's end, Jared's heart was heavy. Intentionally or not, the butterflies made manifest the evil touch of prison, of its evil truth that so many humans still need an enemy. Here were these radical women still hating men, still needing to approach the male as enemy. *Intimate enemies. How can we move forward unless women accept men who seek them with humble hearts and emboldened spirits? Emboldened to dreamslip together?*

Aaren and Jared took all the joys and sorrows of their wedding day into their honeymoon dreamslipping meditation. They honored all. Blessed all. And for the first time ever dreamslipped as husband and wife—divine spouses creating a holy family. Chanting: *I love you. I am not your enemy. I want to be here. I am your dreamer.* In turn, "You are my beloved!"

"*Small dreams...heroic dreams.* You know he's right. He is a Revolutionary."

"Really. You believe that? A month ago they killed John Lennon. I bet that was part of his heroic dream."

"You know what I mean, Sweetheart. He's also calling people to dream. If they cop to that truth, then they'll have to see that to change everything means we need to dream differently, as we are, do. You know, dreamslipping."

*Dreamslipping family.* He comes to her. Kneels before her. He remembers the Bright Cloud: "Don't love me, worship me!" *How majestic the female body! How touchable is the divine goddess! How majestic the male body! How touchable is the*

*divine god!* These thoughts transmute into feelings as their hands clasp, the warmth of their lips turn into souls speaking one to the other, his hand upon her womb receives the blessing of the being-born, for they are themselves being born, this they have often shared during the last decade, "Two as One so that the Third appears." Magical. Mystical. More, mythic. This is the message they've shared, time and again, with other folk who they found were also seeking an intimate revolution. They use new words, images, call themselves Earthfolk, discuss intending, analyze the lack of embrace between Adam and Eve, and practice as Aaren and Jared do.

Aaren, with a passion only intensified by age and travails: "This is our Revolutionary witness—that as myth grounds conscious reality, so a new mythos emerges as we realign, re-word, re-feel, totally re-sense our conscious ways through intimate embracing, embracing as divine spouses. As god/goddess, as male/female, as caterpillar/butterfly, we couple and so make present the Revolutionary fire of dreamslipping."

*Outlaws:* From the start they quickly learned that they remained outlaws. Out of the moral, spiritual, political and sexual laws held sacred by family, friends and those who still see them as dangerous radicals. It is this new mythos of sensual intimacy, based upon "loving as if I am no one's enemy," that so many of their friends, family, even other radical activists—*believe it, one of The Four!*— angrily reject or cannot discern or simply refuse to believe is possible to create. While at the wedding it was SCUM—whose actions were deemed "heroic" by more Sisters than Char had time to weep over—at large there are also just too many others to count. So many Lefties, radicals, hippies and liberals who took a dramatically divergent path, going either farther Left into ultra-violence or wildly Right and joining Reagan's narcissistic navel gazers.

"J, are you still wasting your time with that crap?" Bart keeps talking as he sips his umpteenth Cutty Sark. "Look around you"—his sweep includes the resplendent although somewhat overdone opulence of *Dreamtime*, the Twin Cities most upscale disco—"This is the dream. Money. Women. Good booze. I should've named this place *Garden of Eden* when I bought it," pauses, exaggerates a wink,

speaks louder, "Guess, I'm still a bit too much a half-breed Lutheran for that much blasphemy!" Bart roundly laughs at his own joke, and all the groupies around the table do likewise.

Jared doesn't want to go over the same old bullshit with Bart. However Bart doesn't wait for him to politely excuse himself and exit. He rolls a high price Cuban cigar towards him and snaps his fingers, indicating to the buxom Bunny waitress to bring a new round. "What more do you need? I got you a great paying job with Control Data, *didn't I?*—after you soured on grad school. Hell, I bet you royally pissed-off old Professor Noble! He thought you were going to carry his torch – all that Civil Religion and American exceptionalism crap you've been spewing, just like your Uncle Sam." Bart sips, sucks a smoke, blows out, "Hee, hee,"—*he's drunk as a skunk!*—"You pissed off both your Uncle Sams, what a joke!" He thumb-nose salutes, mocking each Uncle Sam. "You pissed off the archbishop, too!" Smirking, he goofily blesses himself. "Bad boy, J, very bad boy. Hey!" finger-pointing at a young under-twenty boob across the table, "You think my boy here needs a good fuck? Why don't you fuck him? Right now. *Here!*" Bart forearm-sweeps the table: dishes fly, glasses spill, people jump. Then he palm-slaps the table—once, twice—indicating, *Right here! Fuck him right here!* Jared bolts up from his chair. "Enough! Simply enough, good buddy. I'm leaving."

As Aaren sleeps that same night, Jared wonders again, *Who won?* Reagan is president. *He's an idiot, but he won.* Bart's a millionaire. *Did he win?* He has his East River Road mansion, three yachts, former *Miss Minnesota* trophy wife, and a small army of bimbo mistresses. Uncle Sam, *Did you win?* A total recluse now: *Is that winning? Solitary confinement in your own hermitage?* Then, without invitation, a rogues gallery of faces fly up from the darkest pits of his memory and flit through his mind. *Fucking-A, no way!* Jared really doesn't want to revisit these guys' fates. So in an attempt to ignore them, he gets out of bed and ambles downstairs into the kitchen. Stealthily, he opens the fridge and grabs a diet coke, a

hunk of Swiss cheese. Then, with practiced parental expertise, he tip-toes back upstairs to peek in on the kids.

Joey sleeps like an angel. *God, just like Char. So beautiful.* Jared's heart begins to bleed—it's the old wound of the visiting room, of her first hoisting the L-word banner. Deep within him, her words cut him, again and again. So deep that he doesn't hear his own mournful, *What if?* With a sigh he glances across to Amanda's crib. *God, just like Aaren! There's a red glow around her, even as she sleeps. Blessed be!* With a heart brimming with fatherly love, he turns about ever so silently and makes towards their bedroom. With skillful movements, he slips back under the covers without disturbing Aaren. *Crap!* a half-hour later, he still can't fall asleep. His mind's just racing. He can't stop *them!*

*They come; they all come. Parade before him. Cray—was it really true? How sad. Murdered. Killed by an inmate. Then, the word, the rumor—could it be true? Sexual molestation? Boy, is that mythic justice!* Then, they jump on him, he feels mugged. Fights them off. Shouts, *"No way, motherfuckers!"* to Bruiser, Dikbar, Burston and *"Witson. Stevie boy! Fuck you, man. Never again!"* Jared shifts to blessing them, his way of exorcizing them. He prays, he implores, *"Okay. I love you guys. Hate to admit it. But, please—Please!—go away once and for all!"* He intones and opens his heart, *"I am not your enemy. You are not my enemy. You are me. I am you. Amen."*

*Pssst! Hey. It's me, Arnold. You didn't invite me but here I am! Think you could not dream me? Fool! Of course all this crap is true. Cray was a pervert, man. But what's more true, why I'm visiting you me-boy, is to kick your stupid ass. I mean, fella, why are you still just an old burned out whack job? Did you miss everything that goes on in this here Attica paradise? It's still going on. Say, you're not going to listen to me, are you? Just like you, yeah, you're going to try and undream me. Good luck with that. Oh—Fuck you!—there, always wanted to say*

*that. Wonder why? Because you're still Inside, stupid motherfucker! There, said it again. Ta ta!*

Jared works hard to get out of this looping prison reverie. *Matt. That's a good story. Running a natural foods cooperative. What a guy! Hmm. Corey. Where'd he disappear to? He rolls over, lightly punches, bunches the pillow, but they're not done with him yet. Maybe only Ho Chi Minh won? At least he believed in the people. Always liked him. Though he should've read Gandhi more, less Machiavelli.* Then, the table is turned: *What about you, Jared? What have you won? No prize from the Church. No prize from the State. No honors from Academia. Nothing but your freaking sales awards. Can you believe yourself? National sales manager of the year—three year's running? Are you insane? Making "must feed the children" excuses? Maybe one of these new companies Bart keeps getting you to invest in will win? This vaunted Computer Revolution, get the joke? Like Apple—God, back in the Garden! Aaren wouldn't mind. Would she? Does she? Does she think you've won? Does she look at you and say, "I've won!" Are you a prize?*

*Fuck! I don't know who's won. Maybe nobody's won?* ejects him from the bed one more time. *Christ!* How he hates these nights when he can't sleep. When the question nags and rags on him all night. Dogs him. Bites his psychic ass. It's at times like this that he almost envies his nights back in the joint where—*drugged by fear?*—he at least slept, didn't dream, at least any he remembers. Without disturbing his love, he slips, once again, out of the bedroom and goes downstairs.

With a glass of warmed up milk stirred with honey, he realizes that John had the answer, still has it. *John, do you? Who better to ask?* So Jared settles down on the fireplace couch and sits quietly waiting. Soon the appropriate moment comes. Jared slips on a headset and clicks the remote to start the tape. This is his song; Jared's anthem. Fittingly, it soars and swells on Joan Baez's intensely passionate, clear voice. She offers to John the song that, for Jared, sums up the Sixties. The song that raises that generation's unanswered question, *Who won?*

Why all these bugles cry  
These squads of young men drill  
To kill and to be killed  
Stood waiting by the train

Why the orders loud and hoarse  
Why the engine's groaning cough  
As it strains to drag us all  
Into the holocaust

Why crowds who sing and cry  
And shout and fling us flowers  
And trade their rights for ours  
To murder and to die

#### CHORUS

The dove has torn her wing  
So no more songs of love  
We are not here to sing  
We're here to kill the dove

Why must this moment come  
When childhood has to die  
When hope shrinks to a sigh  
And speech into a drum

Why are they pale and still  
Young boys trained over night  
Conscripts payed to kill  
And dressed in gray to fight

These rainclouds massing tight  
This train load battle bound  
This moving burial ground  
Goes thundering to the night

CHORUS

The dove has torn her wing  
So no more songs of love  
We are not here to sing  
We're here to kill the dove

—Jacques Brel, *La Colombe (The Dove)*

Jared pauses the tape. Asks out loud, "What do you say, John?"

*It's not over. That's only the question.*

"Gimme a break, John, I know. I know. I know the answer. We're here to sing, right? We're here to free the dove? All that symbolism. I get it. You're a fucking genius. I love you, man."

Jared leans back, remotely clicks on the next tape selection.

In the morning, Aaren, half-awake, sneaks her hand under the blankets to stir her beloved spouse—*Again?!*—all she feels are cool sheets. She throws on her robe and as expected finds him—her lover, her husband, her divine spouse—snoring on the couch, earphones askew. Gently, she lifts them off his head. She doesn't have to ask. She knows the question. Looking up at John, she also knows the answer. Aaren knows. *She knows*. "Imagine!" she whispers to her dreaming beloved intimate Revolutionary. "Keep imagining!"

As Aaren turns and goes into the kitchen to brew a pot of coffee and set out the bowls for the kids' cereal that portion of their wedding vow that they sang to

one another, that launched their own coupled Revolution hums through her head  
and becomes the day's heartbeat.

You may say that I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us  
And the world will live as one.

END