



THE  
BODYWANDERER

Francis X. Kroncke

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By Francis X. Kroncke

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Alfred wants to breakthrough.

Not knowing anymore exactly to where or to become what,  
 accepting the fear, the foreboding presence possibly there to consume and annihilate,  
 this was always there: slow, torturous dying in *imitatio Jesu*,  
 yes, cruciform existence  
 but then also the embracing presence, blissful, fulfilling, rewarding  
 dying into a growing, a new life, resurrection.

Seven years?

That long since his first conscious step—the seminary.

Three, now? Novitiate. Simple Vows.

This a chronology of his ascent?

Or descent? Or just—no,

it's coming again:

he stifles thought and emotion, steadies, readies

like a wrestler waiting, but one blinded, not knowing from which angle  
 comes the first touch

## **PART ONE: MONK'S DREAM**

### **CHAPTER 1: Alfred**

As a whiskerless youth, Alfred had struggled with his Calling to the monastic life.  
*Vocatio*. But he found it all to be just overcoming the fear of leaving home. Once left,  
 nevertheless, he found himself still struggling with the Call but this time it was his calling.  
 Calling out: *Is this it?*

He was confounded by the institutional cheerlessness of the place designated the minor  
 seminary—just four walls, dormitory bunks and high school class schedules. Of course, lots of  
 Latin and work assignments. Prayer. Yes, daily prayer—the "Divine Office"—but then he had  
 prayed often and long when at home. He could read Latin by the age of ten.

*Is this it?* The question came especially hard and harsh at graduation. It posed a real  
 challenge. It was substantial—a weighty question as it came back to him as they called him to

name himself. To enter the Novitiate—the year of spiritual formation wherein he would become a friar, a member of a community, live the Common Life—they asked, "What is your holy name? How are you to be called, Friar {insert chosen name}?"

*This was it!* Calling as commitment, a thrust forward, a stepping away and towards—this, the monastic rite of Investiture. So just a shade after his eighteenth birthday, on Her feast-day, August 15th, 1963, "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven," Luke Jennings laid prone and full-body prostrate as he died to the world, the flesh, his family, his name. "Rise, Friar Alfred!" *Rise, Friar Alfred!* As if twirled about by a sudden gust of cyclonic force, all became what he had wished for.

He rose clothed in new spectral flesh with a bright holy name, swaddled in humble monkish robes—coarse wrappings that engulfed his strapping, athletic body and hooded his proud eyes and comely face. He arose a spiritual innocent swathed and bound by a white cord with three knots, each knot symbolizing a core commitment of a monk's life: Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

"*Luke, son of Man. Alfred, son of God.*"

As Friar Alfred embraced his father, kissed his mother, and floated out among all the families and friends gathered to witness the Investiture of their friar novices, he was ecstatic. *Peace that surpasses understanding.* Inner peace and calm. Soothed by the balm of Gilead. Words and images of promises often made by the Novice Master at Alfred's several vocational retreats. Words and images of promises made by God Himself, "I am the Way, the Light and the Truth." At this special moment, Friar Alfred was to all around a living testimony of the joy and spiritual ecstasy realized by one who is embraced by Sweet Jesus. "Seek and ye shall find!"

Luke sought what Alfred found. Before Investiture, during his senior visit to the Novitiate on Staten Island with other postulants, Luke had seen what others saw: rooms and hallways, kitchens and dining tables, gardens and baseball fields, but he knew, sensed that it was all illusion, a sleight of hand. In truth, he was amused by how the group, even the brightest in his class, commented only about the materiality of the place, noting its natural beauty, the crafted artistry of a stained glass window, the thunderous stability of the granite blocks that anchored the monastery to Earth. *Do they not see? Hear? Intuit? Were they not as scared as he was?*

As Friar Alfred he is now scared, once again, but not fearfully so much as fearlessly. Luke had sensed the ecstasy that awaits he who plunges fearlessly into the life of the monastery. Alfred now knows that the monastery is not like any other building. As a fellow friar he's ready for them to pull back its veil of illusion. The veil they keep intact for the laity—those from whom he has just come, the common people—the man in the pew. ...*What is behind the veil?* What practices will he be required to perform so that his mortal flesh will become Christ's immortal Body? When the scales fall from his eyes, as happened when Jesus so miraculously cured others, what will he see? *What do the monks see?* What is time and space to them?

Such questions, such endless questions! A flood of questions—so few answers. Soon answers did start to come. All begins as the Novice Master's morning arousal wakens him, each day. The Master raps on the cell door intoning, "Benedicamus Domino!" Groggily, Alfred responds, "Deo gratias." No exclamation point!

Within a few sluggish and blurry minutes, slipping his friar's frock over long pants, cincture tightened, cowl adjusted and hair smoothed, he hears the Novice Master strolling for tardies, urging in a commanding tone, "Friar Alfred! Friar Alfred! Up, up. *Quam celerrime!*" Within another few hurried minutes, Friar Alfred reaches the chapel and sidles into his spot in the third row of novices. As he reaches for his breviary, he glances across the sanctuary and

observes the other rows in the monastic choir stall as they fill with older friars: some teachers, some custodians, others cooks, all friars, all sharing in the Common Life.

Sacred chimes tinkle, commanding his attention. Friar Alfred raises his eyes towards the heavens and sighs gratefully, *This is IT!*

*It is delivered to him as all friars rise to intone with one voice the preparatory prayer.*

"Aperi, Dómine, os meum ad benedicéndum nomen sanctum tuum: munda quoque cor meum ab ómnibus vanis, pervérsis et aliénis cogitatióibus, intelléctum illúmina, afféctum inflámma, ut digne, atténate ac devóte hoc Offícium recitáre váleam, et exaudíri mérear ante conspéctum divínæ Majestátis tuæ. Per Christum Dóminum nostrum. Amen.

Dómine, in unióne illíus divínæ intentiúnis, qua ipse in terris laudes Deo persolvísti, has tibi Horas (vel hanc tibi Horam) persólvo."

"Open, O Lord, my mouth to bless thy holy Name. Cleanse also my heart from all vain, evil, and wandering thoughts. Enlighten my understanding and kindle my affections that I may worthily, attentively, and devoutly say this Office, and so be meet to be heard before the presence of thy divine Majesty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

O Lord, in union with that divine intention wherewith thou, whilst here on earth, didst render praises unto God, I desire to offer this my Office of prayer unto thee."

As Alfred sits down and lifts his voice to begin Matins it is as if he's fallen onto the lap of God. A fatherly god. Comforter. For a blissful moment Luke Jennings now Friar Alfred is at home.

But then—in a flash, just an instant, microsecond, nano-impulse—*This is it?*

Friar Alfred, as a newly minted novice in the Order of the Strict Observance (O.S.O.), nicknamed but reverentially called "The Brooding Ones," is at the instant his heart feels the presence and embrace of his Loving Father besieged and beset upon by disturbing, unsettling doubts and humbling fears.

Within a breath, he begins to oddly feel. To soufully feel.

While feeling deeply at peace...he also senses that he is on a battlefield, under attack.

While feeling content, soothed...he is surprisingly riddled with dreadfulness.

Shocked....awed by both depths of dark and bright feelings, he hears an ancient query, one shared by many who aspired to the common life but which is novel to him, a question he had never seriously asked, which now indicts him:

*Am I worthy?*

Worthiness is what the Novitiate year is all about. It is the year that starts with the young friar hearing the Call to Perfection. As Luke was told when on his senior retreat, a novice is to seek perfection through every sense. He is to sense fully, deeply, passionately—hear, smell, feel, taste, touch, see—but then deny, destroy, obliterate every sense through purgation, purification, even at times, torture. As with all who seek holiness—all saints—he was to lay down on his flesh the scarred signs and bruised tracks that are evidence of the search for sacred truths. But back then—now just two paltry months ago!—it was all just words. *Ah*, in this flicker of heartfelt awakening he realizes the enormous and harrowing gap that stands between *Words! Words!* and the gnawing feeling that now is ripping his heart, knots his gut, is clutching, strangling his soul. He is here. This is the place. It calls, true, and he hears, definitely, but the divinity behind the monastic veil also wants him to feel deeply. But feel what? At peace? At home? In hell? *What?*

All this newly minted novice can feel is unworthy to even feel unworthy.

Furtively looking out and about Alfred sees the others as haloed saints and himself as a miserable failure, a wretch. *Why am I here? Why did I come? Why did I give them a holy name?*

The other friars chant. They pray. They rotely follow the morning ritual. All Friar Alfred can do is sit there semi-paralyzed, half-voiced, deeply puddled in doubt. Near Matins' end, slipping between the chorused antiphons of morning praise, an answer comes. It is an ancient answer. It is the ancient answer, "Thy will be done."

Of course, truly, how else to proceed?

Through the years his father advised him, as did the Novice Master and all spiritual counselors, to focus on following the directive, the command, the imperative nestled in this simple phrase. *Dear Father, of course, this phrase sums up all this!* It's an inner exclamation that rides upon the sweep of his eyes around the chapel, encompassing all the monks, all spiritual space and time.

In this light, it is fitting that the young friar questions whether he will fail to will himself to faithful obedience, to the total surrender of his will. Again, what was once just a word—*will*—now conveys a shocking and truly menacing realization. Alfred must surrender unto death, die, truly die. No bones about it. Nothing else will do. *Thy will, not mine!*

Quietly he prays, "*I will*. I will surrender through purifying acts my body unto death. I yield the death of my body, of he once named Luke. I am now Alfred. I can. By God's grace I can! So do I will it! Amen."

In this frame of mind and heart, during every waking moment, every sleeping second, Friar Alfred prayerfully utters the battle-cry of both his greatest hope and most trembling fear, "Thy will be done!" Not mine. *Thine*.

But how does a friar die? What are the acts that effect the surrender of body, mind and soul?

Among The Brooding Ones the Novitiate year dictates and compels a rigorous faithfulness to an especially harsh discipline. The Order is committed to a Strict Observance of its own particular tradition of rules and practices which are the tools Alfred is to use to break-down his fleshly self. The Brooder's discipline centers on fasts. Notably, the Black Fast: water-only, one-week a month, urged to be more often. These fasts are twin-pillared by The Silence: an absorbed state of meditative quietude where the only sound is of one's soul confessing. Confessing all that is flesh, all that is desire, all that is ego-conscious so that for the celebration of Holy Mass will the friar be made worthy. Be purified, cured, absolved, cleansed. Be struck humbly worthy to receive the sanctified Bread and Wine, the pure and actual Flesh and the redeeming and true Blood of God in Jesus Christ. To be in that sacred moment—*Whoosh!*—consumed, and so one with the Divine Body.

As the first six months go by Alfred diligently follows the rules and perfects the practices of the discipline. He fasts—no, he never eats as he once had—he always fasts. Down twenty-five pounds, his muscles are sinewy. He sleeps but rarely a full night. Even then he startles awake almost hourly. During these interludes he strips naked, drops full body onto the uncarpeted concrete floor and starts flailing himself with the flagellating knots of his cincture. Most morning knocks and calls of "Benedicamus Domine!" find him exhausted. He awakens more often on the floor than under covers.

On other even more restless nights he kneels in zealous prayer until Matins' call. As desired, his body soon bears nicks, scars, scrapes and bruises that never heal. Calluses thicken to leathery hide upon his knees. Yet, although aching and in constant pain—as if already an aged, gnarled and creaky gray-haired old monk—in rare moments he snatches joy out of the clutches of anguish. At such moments Alfred is comforted by the knowledge that he is not alone in his

suffering. He is buoyed up, even elated by the heartfelt truth that he is one in a community of disciplined sufferers.

Nevertheless, despite all this, despite his commitment and passion, there is one pain, a deep pang of troubling sadness that he does pray would be lifted from him. It is the forlorn feeling that binds the thrashing question: Can you, Alfred— mere mortal, scion of Adam—can you ever become *truly spotless*?

For only when spotless: perfect and pure, will he be worthy to become a priest—*Priest!* "Father!"— he who is the Shepherd, the Voice of God, the comforting arm of Jesus. Not all friars seek ordination, not all are accepted as the community selects only the few who bear the mark of God's hand upon their souls. Who—though all are sinners, sons of Adam—are judged worthy.

*Worthiness* haunts him and all his prior doubts return to sorely fester within him, crawl upon his flesh. They all re-emerge because once across the monastic threshold he confronts the terribleness of what it truly is that he aspires towards. *Priest*: as supernatural being to enter the Holy of Holies. He whose words *are* Christ's Words! He whose mortal hands hold the sacred Body and whose profane mouth drinks the saving Blood. *Arghh*, so clearly does he now see and step back to contemplate the boldness of this desire, the fearlessness it requires. He remains steadfast only because his priestly desire is that of a pure heart, of one unworldly yet exuberant youth. Yet, he must answer what only the ancient among the monks know is the serpent's hiss: *Dare you? Dare you seek to be like God?*

This latter dare once faced broke many wills stronger and souls more holy than Alfred's. This breakthrough question—challenging, life-threatening, damning—requires a clear answer before he can proceed towards ordination. He must commit to break off from the course of "normal" life—even the normal monastic life of those brother monks who do not choose to ascend—to become in his flesh and soul that extra-ordinary place where truly the Old Man, the former self, that base Original Sinner is shed, as he is ordained...set in a new direction; inward towards his own inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies within.

He must ponder and incarnate the Scriptural answer to every monk's

*Q*: Am I worthy?

*A*: "No one who sets his hand to the plough and then keeps looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

*Mere mortal*, Alfred cannot summon either a Yes or No to this daunting question. Truly, he has no answer except to trust in the Brooder discipline. He has no way to feel spotless except for the Brooder discipline. It is his only answer. It has been his only answer. More, he knows that he will personally fail only if he weakens and refuses to be, body and soul, this disciplined answer. As such, once the question is asked, so once more does he set forth to respond by living the disciplined answer.

As living answer, young Friar Alfred accepts—almost as a stupid knowing, as if looking into the snake's eyes and asking, "Who's the charmer?"—that he must break himself. No, more, crucify himself. That he must be the wheat cut-down, winnowed, ground up and transformed by fire. He knows that only he can be the answer, that no one can do it on his behalf.

Only he himself can break-down and so break-through his body, mind and soul. Yet this troubling pang of sadness he notes as a weakness, a telltale sign of his mere humanness. He hears this whimper of weakness still resident in his soul at those betraying moments when with a heartfelt plea—*Isn't this itself evidence of Luke still resident in Alfred?*—he resignedly turns toward God desperately seeking rescue—*death!*—imploping *Take me now! What else can I yield?*

"What else can you yield?" echoes the confessor back to the sobbing penitent.

*Do I really have to answer this question?* Having heard like desperate questions before, the priest is confident that inevitably and in due time the discipline will reveal the answer to the novice. But then—despite his years of confessing novices, and so always on guard about letting slip a command before they are ready—his own voice moves despite his priestly resolve and he hears himself issuing an insight into Brooder practice well before its time; this an advice given only after the Novitiate year, to those monks who are selected to study for the priesthood...

"Yield to your dreaming."

Once said, the confessor immediately slides the confessional screen shut, blesses himself as he stands, and quickly departs the chapel. He simply knows that the special and unique "Brooder Call" has just now been heard by yet another young monk. *Thy will be done!* Alfred hears, but then he does not.

"Father, my dreaming?" is nervously queried. No answer comes. All dies into the dark silence as Alfred—aware of the shut screen—blesses himself and with head bowed rises and slowly returns to his cell. There he kneels to pray but no penance was assigned except for this odd answer, "Yield to your dreaming."

*Dreaming?* He must accept, obey.

Perplexed, he loudly utters, "Thy will be done."

*Yield?* Alfred thought that he knew the field which the monks plowed. In which they toiled and labored...which fruits were to be harvested. For the last several years, he had intently listened to the recruiting monks at the annual "Is God calling you?" religious vocation retreat. If asked he would say, "The fruit is my soul and the monk's field is that of the supernatural." It was a somewhat obvious, time-worn answer. Namely, that a monk labors to break-through to the supernatural. That he seeks to become a supernatural being. To live in the supernatural dimension. Which means not existing on a continuum with natural reality, that world of everyday mundane experience, of profane life lived in rhythm with the sun and the moon. For Alfred such is what the monastic life is all about. Or at least so he thought until now.

*Dreaming?* Without a doubt, the young monk is profoundly baffled.

Again, until now Alfred would have further stated that Real Life is life lived with Jesus become Christ. It is to live with this unique but historical person who died but then did not die, rather who lives with us today. It is to live with this dead but resurrected He who can be part of everyone's daily life but not in everyday clock minutes. More, that he knows how to achieve this supernatural transformation—how to die and be reborn.

He would clearly affirm that Real Living occurs only at those times of ritual, of the breaking-down and through of the world of senses. Living is real at those extra-ordinary moments when the ones called priests enter through repetition of the Scriptural and Traditional words and actions of Jesus into this realm of the supernatural. It is at such moments—however mystically fleeting—when the tasteless wafer melts upon the tongue, when the bitterless wine slips over lips and into the mouth, during these seconds, moments, nanoseconds, unmeasurable and out-of-sense instances of detection that Real Life is lived.

Alfred believes this. Knows it as certain. It is why he faithfully attended Mass and Communion everyday of his life since his First Communion at seven years of age. As directed, young Luke prepared: confessed, prayed and humbled himself. He did everything prescribed to be worthy to receive the holy bread that is Body and be mystically one with Jesus. Moreover, this is why Alfred seeks not only to become a monk but also to be ordained a priest. As priest he



will be anointed and become the mediating fleshly instrument by and through which Jesus makes Himself fully and truly present before His worshippers. *Real presence.*

"Dreaming." What could he mean? Did he mean to say that? *Actually?*

A clarification comes, the very next day.

A knock on his cell door. Without waiting for a response, the door is pushed open and he's commanded, "Friar Alfred, this way."

He is led by an elder monk, Friar Elden, a cook, to The Master's room. The door is ajar and Alfred is motioned to go through. The cook turns and starts to leave—in Alfred's mind a fleeting image of the friar basting a chicken flits by as he steps into a candlelit cell.

In the muted light, for over an hour Alfred patiently and raptly listens to The Master instruct him about dreaming. The Master began speaking the moment Alfred sat down at the solitary chair in front of The Master's enormous dark wood desk. He was not lecturing, not even explaining, just talking. He began speaking with Alfred as if what he was saying was the matter of a casual conversation. Yet it was anything but casual or conversational. As he listens—slight nods, no words in reply—for Alfred almost everything The Master utters flips up and over facts, truths and beliefs he once held.

"The Brooders' Strict Observance is not of this world, which we actually honor and term 'this film of fantastic flesh.' To the contrary we strictly observe all that is not observed." In sum, that was it. But this hour was nothing if not a total summing up of Alfred's past understanding and its jettisoning out the proverbial back door.

What Friar Alfred now knows is that the Brooder's daily discipline is *not* as it is for all other Orders of monks who follow the well-known ascetic path, that of the *via negativa*. Like him—as he himself has been—they observe and deny the body, the flesh. However, although Alfred—as did all the other young friars—suffered as they had walked this ascetic path, he is now forthrightly told and instructed that this is not the Brooder's path.

Shocked is a measly word that tries to express young Alfred's state as he hears, "This film of fantastic flesh is what you are called to Brood upon." More consternation: "Fantastic in that it is not your flesh. It is *ours*." Absolute incomprehensibility: "You fasted and whipped and beat and tortured your every sense, as we intended, so that you would know that such a path leads nowhere. Not to the supernatural." And then heresy was loosed, "There is no supernatural realm." Alfred stifles a cascade of gasps. "There is no other reality but this reality." As The Master issues this latter ontological truth, he pinches his own flesh. "What there is...*Pay attention! Pay attention!*...is a fuller reality. It is that of the communal body." He pauses, assesses by observing Alfred's eyes, then proceeds. "It is a body that you can only experience through *communal dreaming*. This is what Jesus calls us to do. We are in our flesh, our communal body—the Body of Christ...one with the fullness of Divinity, the Holy Trinity, as we dream."

The Master knows that this is what the young friar should hear, but also that he cannot hear, not grasp the fullness of what is actually being revealed. "The Seed"—as this meeting is called among the Brooders—is always a rough planting. But Alfred's silent acceptance, his innocent vulnerability, confirms the rightness of the timing. The Master discerns that despite the bewilderment that The Seed evokes—and young Friar Alfred is certainly clearly bewildered!—this young friar's eyes yet glow: glitter with idealism and dance exuberantly. Of greater Masterly concern is that Alfred appears to be the only novice worthy to be taken to the next level at this time. In truth, Alfred is a six months ahead of the formal testing schedule, but as the

confessor knew so does The Master understand that the timing is His, *Theirs*. "Thy will be done."

All said, The Master does not wait for questions or comments. A set of practical matters must be attended to. When The Seed concludes, the young monk must be instantly separated from his brothers. Alfred can no longer stay at the novitiate. As Alfred genuflects and kisses the Master's hand, he is directed, "Friar Eldon has packed your things. Go right away to the garage. You leave—*God be praised!*—you're already gone!"

## **CHAPTER 2: Brooders**

Just half-way towards his Investiture's anniversary, Friar Alfred leaves the novitiate. Enroute he's told where—that within a long day's travel he'll arrive in Rome. It's early January and Friar Eldon gives him a long black overcoat to throw over his robes, but not just to keep him warm. Since Alfred's never travelled in public dressed as a monk, it never dawned on him how odd the Brooder habit looks to strangers. Over the years he's gotten used to it as his parish was a frequent Sunday stop-over for preachers and those recruiting future Brooders. In contrast to the more clerically stylish robes of other monastic Orders, the Brooder habit is a rag. It is almost threadbare, and if it has a color it approaches that of a rotting cloth—some hue of muddy gray going towards mildewed mottle. Nevertheless it has the most distinctive or at least intriguing religious emblem, one that is, of note, secretively sewn inside the Brooder cowl. That, and it is stitched in a clumsy manner, looking as if a suture that can barely hold itself to the cloth. No mark or trace can be seen from outside, and Brooders are accustomed to not showing the emblem unless requested during a moment of shared blessing. Alfred himself first saw it at the Investiture of a relative who was entering upon his own monastic journey, his beloved pal and cousin, Jared. On that day, as part of a special blessing for newly invested novices, a Brooder monk let Jared, amidst his family, expose the emblem as they prayed together at the sunrise of his monastic journey.

Upon first glance the emblem does not draw attention. It simply looks like the number eight. Although its colors are striking—a thick black pitchblende bottom circle that links to a thinner brilliant red-almost-scarlet upper loop—the stitching is kindergarten art. Upon close examination it is quite difficult to discern whether it is an eight or just two circles abutting or even a snake. The latter image arises since there are tufts of threads that could be taken for a head or ears or even teeth...possibly the fiery breath of a dragon! All this being so, Brooders, Alfred now knows, travel looking as inconspicuous as possible. Friar Eldon advises him to tuck his cowl under the long coat's collar. Chuckling to himself, he softly urges, "Put these on." Alfred misses the delight in the old monk's eyes. Dark glasses? A French beret? However, his mirth reveals all, "Just tell anyone who asks, you're a beatnik!"

*Of course!* Friar Eldon's past is gossipy scandal within holy walls.

"Cool, daddio!" Alfred whispers as he steps out of the car, snapping his fingers once, twice. Friar Eldon's eyes light up! *Ha*. "The former lives of monks!" is the untold story of his gleeful peepers. Then, just before Alfred turns to enter the airport—unwrapped but definitely a gifted gesture—Friar Eldon, arm outstretched, waves a paperback book, inviting Alfred to take it. Alfred nods and accepts the gift, pausing but a moment to read its title, "On the road." In a moment unlike any he's ever before shared with a fellow Brooder, Alfred smiles so broadly that the old monk can count the number of his teeth.

*Cool, daddio!* loops and echoes throughout Alfred's mind during the jet-flight. Another novice, Friar Murton, who as did Eldon had what is called a "delayed vocation," meaning a monk not only not young but truly worldly, had regaled Alfred and others with his and Eldon's

escapades as beatniks, one in San Francisco, the other, Greenwich Village. So, Alfred had heard about Jack Kerouac and this book, and at this moment he is amused by its apt symbology. For he himself is—*Finally!*—"On the Brooder Road." Definitely, he looks forward to reading this secular tale, but later.

*Cool, daddio!* It serves as a comforting mantra, one that fittingly anchors this moment in his memory. For all is "Cool, man!" as he recalls Murton snapping it off. Cool that he is a monk. Cool that he is on this special leg of his journey to...to where? "*On God's Road*, of course!" he shouts inwardly. If what The Master hinted at when he spoke of dreaming is even half of what Alfred intuits it might be, so the days ahead will be so unlike the novitiate year of negative discipline that he is actually beset by goosebump shivers of childish excitement.

As the jet glides above turbulence, escapes a continent, slips across the ocean Alfred fades slowly into a deepening slumber. For the moment, the negative discipline's evocation of feeling dreadful—of unworthiness—even of a haunting forlornness is somewhat forgotten.

*Somewhat.*

Alfred awakens jerkily to the jolt of a hard landing. He's momentarily bewildered, a bit confused by the bodies and the noise, a tad perplex by his own disguise. He adjusts his sunglasses and beret, smooths out his overcoat, yawns and by habit offers silent praise to God, *Benedicamus Domine. Deo gratias!*

Within minutes the craft stops at a jetway. Passenger chatter rises and swells like monastery bells tolling. Amid all this the stewardess garbles something over the PA about falling luggage. Alfred stands, the deplaning line is long with lunging stops-and-goes and out from the echoing passenger chatter it's clear that they've landed in London. Without engaging anyone, not even stopping to ask the stewardess for directions—*Ha. Where am I to go?*—he's standing in the waiting area looking for a Men's Room. Just as he's about to enter the restroom, he's slowed by a hand alighting upon his shoulder. It's a firm but gentle, friendly hold. A bit startled, Alfred semi-halts and quickly pivots. The eyes of the stranger say, *Alfred?* He nods *Yes*. Then a half-sentence, "Can I at least ..." is cut off by, "Quickly."

Without luggage Alfred simply goes from one plane to board another. Nothing more is spoken by the similarly disguised Brooder escort who nods goodbye as he leaves Alfred at a ticket counter. Once airborne Alfred takes out the paperback and starts reading. He consumes Kerouac's odyssey by the time the plane smoothly lands in Rome. *Murton was like Moriarity! What a life!* Yet, Murton told him, "Nobody loves me. Hell,"—Alfred was more than mildly shocked when Murton didn't even bless himself when he cursed—"nobody likes me but God!" Alfred wonders if Murton might have actually met Kerouac and the real Dean Moriarity. *What characters!* In light of his own unworldliness, Alfred couldn't determine what the novel really meant to say. He thrusts it into the overcoat's deep front pocket and mentally promises himself to read it more thoroughly later. *Cool, daddio!*

As before, once off the plane and after just stepping into the airport reception area, he is approached by what is clearly to him, but not to others, another Brooder. Alfred readily senses a strong bond with this approaching stranger. Within a shared smile of greeting and several voiceless nods, Alfred is swiftly guided outside and into an idling car. With nothing but a "Salve frater!"—yet one floating on a waft of warmth and eager welcome—he is driven directly to the Brooder's monastic theologate, right in the center of Vatican City.

Unlike the novitiate's spartan decor, Alfred's room is Old World elegant. Dark ancient woods, possibly antique furniture but not fragile or filigreed, rather the sturdy, somewhat bulky furnishings created for big men, not tall but full-bodied. He envisions armored knights of the

realm lounging about in the ponderous chairs set before the horse-sized fireplace. All around—his bed, the couch, the thick curtains that are almost tarps, the medieval or at least Renaissance tapestries on the wall—all bespeak of a radical change in what he's known to this moment as the austere life of a Brooder.

As if to mark this radical switcheroo in spades, that night he's treated like a celebrity at a Welcome Party that rivals any festivity he's experienced to date. From what he's read and heard about from the likes of Friar Murton, it's almost like a college beer bust. *Beer!* "Have one!" is offered as a red-faced friar clinks two bottles together. "German. The best!" All around names are popped off at him. Most are lost in the resounding musical thump of a very, very non-religious revelry. "It ain't Gregorian chant!" is whooped. Brooder monks sing and dance in languages and gyrations unknown to the still novice monk.

Beer. Wine. Cheeses. Thick meaty steaks! This plus a "Salve frater!" iced welcoming cake. He even gets a brief intro—more like a coach's locker-room pep talk!—by the Prior, in which he does not fail to mention Alfred's love of basketball. "Almost as much as he likes to read ancient texts!"

*Eugene. Klaus. Fernando. Bonaventure.* It's a list he knows he's forgetting as he hears their names, but fine fellows, true brothers, all with whom he looks forward to sharing the common life.

Before this week-of-weeks ends Alfred is called to profess Simple Vows—which is the step taken as the Novitiate year ends; here six months early for him. This is a three year commitment to continue to live in Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. This call he joyfully answers, and with renewed enthusiasm publicly proclaims his vows. So it is that just a week after hearing about "dreaming"—*Whoosh!*—Alfred joins with other Brooder monks—he notes, of varied ages—who are already studying at the Order's theologate.

Although no longer a novice, Alfred is green and the ranking newbie Friar. Every day something bordering on the incredulous happens. On day one, he quickly discovers that the Brooder theologate is not only secluded but that it is also a monastic cloister. *Hmmm.* He won't be walking around Rome as if a tourist at anytime now or in the near or far future, that's for sure! Then he's told that the monastery, from the outside, resembles a decaying Renaissance mansion. He hears, "It's Brunelleschi. A bit more Gothic than I like." This is said with a snobbish tone that Alfred will come to hear quite a bit too often from certain of his Italian brothers. At this time, his Roman and Vatican architectural knowledge is embarrassingly limited to recalling pictures in textbooks. What he does understand is that the theologate is a lot like the Brooder habit—more than a bit unpretentious. So he is not surprised to hear that the cloister is shielded by a peculiar array of extremely narrow and winding Medieval streets, with its main entrance down a sinuous, rutted cobblestone alleyway. This labyrinthine barrier effectively throws off not only the meandering tourists but also the dogged interests of other snooping monks and clerics with whom the Brooders wish not to mingle, at least when in Rome.

As spice to the stew, the first rumor—among so many that he will hear during his initial months—is about a secret tunnel connecting the monastery to the Vatican, even, it is whispered, to the papal chambers! Yet no one can offer a scintilla of evidence to confirm that such either exists or if it does exist that it is passable. Strangest—but in keeping with everything unusual that has happened since his final novitiate confession (*Just last week!*)—is that he always attends classes at the Gregorianum and other Catholic institutes in a room secluded from view by other students where he and other Brooder theologians listen and take notes. The *piece de resistance*,

amusing but also tedious, is that all his scholarly work is required to be by hand and delivered and received via Friar Origen, the theologate's ostensible mailman.

As bizarre as the sequence of events might appear to an outsider—and bizarre almost tip-toes into Alfred's conscious thinking—everything simply feels right to him. If asked he would say, "I feel good!" It is not lost on him that feeling good is an odd feeling in light of how he was agonizingly bellyaching while at the novitiate.

Curiously, but as The Master planned, the ascetic path has conditioned his body to step across the bridge to Brooder dreaming. All the suffering and surrendering of flesh actually has prepared him and in a sense makes it easy for him to accept that his body is not his own, rather that it is theirs. As an ascetic he separated from his body, even at times—so it becomes clearer to him each day away from the novitiate—from mental and emotional sanity. Truly there is something nurturing, comforting, and warmly pleasurable about being welcomed into the fuller communal body of his non-ascetic fellow Brooders.

As things unfold during the following several years, Alfred continues to spiritually grow much as a physical child does—slowly, in stages, with predictable achievements and failures. Yet as with the growing toddler he is unaware of the depth and character of his changes because they occur in short spurts, often without comment from others, and as a result of the communal discipline that feeds the soul in ways unknown and unsensed by the conscious mind. Scarce would he have had the language to speak about it if he could, for all that he becomes is in response to the wordless knowledge transmitted through practice and ritual. Unaware of and inexperienced in worldly wisdom, Alfred gives no critical thought to what the secular world would describe as the peculiar and exotic, admittedly alien, world of the monk. More, he had no referent for evaluating the peculiar practice and rituals of The Brooding Ones. He simply—painstakingly and scrupulously—became one, a Brooder .

For the Brooders, as community, they dream and so reality is. *Yes, they*. Theirs is intentionally a practice of collective dreaming. This grounds their special discipline. It marks their peculiar spirituality. Discipline, yes, but as Alfred has never quite grasp the nuances of the word. He soon finds the *via negativa* astoundingly easier to trod than that of the *via positiva*—the "positive way." Truly, Brooder preparation was incredibly painful—steeling the body to feel its full range of negative emotions. He still bears the scars and aches of that leg of his journey.

*Via positiva*. He is challenged to master how to discipline his film of fantastic flesh so as to dream. He rapidly learns how to inventory all the pains he had felt and then plunge into their companion emotions of pleasure. It was his "to feast from a menu of the most fantastic sensations." *Ah*, he finally grasps why he had been called to flagellate, to starve, to pitch into sensate excess. It was simple—so that the life he had lived, the life now dead, would be fertile dung and fecund seed for his fuller life as a dreaming Brooder.

Alfred learned that only as he defined and accepted himself as Luke-corpse could he rise as Alfred-newborn. Birthing this newborn demanded an exacting and depthless search for himself, for the deepest sensual knowing of his flesh. This became the task that occupied most of his day and a great part of the extended night—for monks needed what illusion of sleep? Each night then Alfred would bring his sense of self, his individuality, his isolatedness and offer it upon the common altar erected by the prayers and songs of his fellow monks.

Through chant and incense, with all eyes as one, spectral, rising high upon the toiling flame of the God-hungry sanctuary candle, they focus all their individualities—focus through a breathing of their names, not a chant, just the exhalation of their sound. He breathes "Alfred" slowly paced as the other monk's breathe their names and the sanctuary starts to swirl with these

nominal sounds, hypnotically pitches as all names echo to and fro and create a common wave of invocation. Thus arises their common name, their common breath, all their individualities yielded as they near the entrance of dream. There all is received by the Abbot. His, the role to center, draw all to himself: the chanting, the hypnotic breathing, all becoming one in sound, smell, and sight. It is then that he steals their eyes, closes them: all are blind-eyed. He snatches their breathing and forms the enchanting name, "Jesu, Jesu, Jesu." So does he labor to decant them, draws the distilled essence of their disparate selves and pours them all as one into the dream. Dreaming, not sleeping, as the disciples slept as Jesus on the mount was being Transfigured. As Jesus among the disciples, Resurrected. As Jesus on Golgotha's Cross being born anew. As communal dreamers they birth the fuller Mystical Body.

This Brooder communal dreaming is the consciousness that sustains the fleshy unconscious, and despite the dictionary's contrary definitions of the words, Alfred quickly grasps, as he dreamed his first monkish dream, that indeed he had only then taken on the robe of true consciousness as he left the flesh of the unconscious. Verily, as a Brooder he now fully realizes their experience of the flesh as eggshell, as a fragile and temporary container. It is to be disciplined not simply to be denied, not simply to be tortured in pain. In truth, the Brooders give secondary honor to the soteriological Tradition that speaks of Jesus' dying as Satisfaction or Ransom. In sharp contrast, they are faithful to a more ancient mystical Tradition, one their communal dreaming confirms and affirms each night. It is the Tradition witnessed to by the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, the belief that the Body of Christ was a dream to be dreamed collectively since only then would the transformation occur—would and could the Holy Communion be truly effected and the Real Presence manifested.

As such, like brooding hens they sit upon their eggshell bodies, squat and long for its cracking, its disintegration, its piercing and shattering. They brood as the Father had brooded to bring forth creation:

When God began creating the heavens and the earth, the  
Earth was a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of  
God brooding over the dark vapors.

And they brood as Father had brooded as he waited three hours for His Son to die.  
That afternoon, the whole Earth was covered with  
darkness for three hours, from noon until three o'clock.

And they brood as Jesus had brooded in the Tomb.  
After three days I will come back to life again.

The Life He gave, so they taught, was Communal Life, not individual life. Not even the Common Life. No, they knew that He spoke to them in groups and gatherings to Call them to become the mystical *ekklesia*. As such the Brooder tradition teaches that the spiritual life is the Communal Life—that flesh is merely the fantastic creation of individual perception whereas Bodily flesh is the majestically fantastic creation of communal dreaming.

Nightly, they so dream, so commune—break-through to One Body, making manifest the Real Presence of the Body of Christ.

Of truth, for the Brooders, monastic dreaming is the journey. It is the time when time actually is. All that is clock-time and day hours or even evening markings, these are but preparations. For brooding dreaming is the time and place between the cracks. It is the

supernatural but as that which does not replace the natural, not destroy it, no, rather fulfills it, is wrapped around it. Dreaming is where the universe is held together, where the landscape of the soul abuts the landscape of the bodies of the quadrillions of those who have already lived and died, and in dying live again through the dreaming. It is, however, a dreaming where only brooding monks dare tread, as they dare right now.

*Awake!* The monk's brooding dream is their actual labor. It is the task they seek and which they set about doing, that is, sustaining the world. *What?* first broke across Alfred's mind when he was so instructed. *Sustaining the world?* Yes, sustain the New Life made real through Jesus' life, not just his death. A life that affirms that the least among us is worthy of God's love. A life that drank wine at Cana. That rejoiced when the Prodigal Son returned. That celebrates the peacemakers and the poor in spirit. A Life that is robustly celebratory. This was their world to sustain.

Much like the spider, so the Brooders draw threads unsighted by shaded eyes. They are spectral weavers at the edge of light. These cenobitic dreamworkers, as they lay upon their straw-matted beds, are truly transubstantiated, transformed into a new body and a new soul, are each day, each night new wine into new wineskins, and so each a creator of the Body.

To sustain the Body, Alfred learns, each monk weaves a part of the Biblical Story. Each dreams a Chapter of that sacred story with its thorny plots and historical escapades, its befuddling dramas and comedies. Through their dreaming the Holy Story is re-created each and every dream-time. And while the human race dreams around what is designated the clock—that which is but a humorous fragment of the Cartesian fugue but nevertheless is how profane dreamtime is demarcated—so is the Brooders' dreaming continual. The monks labor, as it were, all day and all night: Matins through Compline through Matins.

Of particular note concerning Luke, now Alfred, is that in light of his vigorous youth, his athletic prowess and spiritual vitality, his dreams, his Silence, his work—*Ora et Labora*—was to brood upon the two Creation accounts. As there are steps on the journey of the spiritual discipline which all seekers follow, so too are there prescribed and assigned steps on the dreaming of the fledgling Brooders. For Alfred his life's work, then, his journey was to dream Genesis's stories of origin.

For months, each night, Alfred isolates himself in his cell, reads ancient Script, shouts and screams to hear the echoes of his heart. These are among the most challenging stories to dream. They required pondering where the god-force was before anything was created, which meant that he had to face the vast emptiness that was before anything he knew as reality was conjured. So he had to tread along the line between hollowing Chaos and divine Order.

Most troubling was the simple first lines of Chapter 1. They read, "When God began creating the heavens and the Earth, the Earth was a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of God brooding over the dark vapors."

This was a translation close to the Brooders' communal heart. In some biblical versions the sentence reads somewhat casual, almost matter-of-fact. In the venerable King James version it reads, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Nothing very disturbing in these lines.

But when it is all about shapeless and chaotic and brooding and dark vapors...well this is where the Brooders got their inspiration name. For them, these opening lines define the world, and insofar as they translate it so differently, so lies their difference from other Orders.

Upon first confronting "brooding over the dark vapors" young Alfred isn't too put off or disturbed. He takes comfort in the quickly following acts of creation...all of which end with "behold, it was very good."

*Ah*, the majesty of "creation from nothingness" (*creatio ex nihilo*)! Alfred revels in the birth of each new species. He splashes around in the ocean belly of the forming Earth. Soaring through the air...digging his toes into the mud....all is exhilaration of the new, of the love expressed through creating life, itself.

The smell of the air—Alfred practices smelling the air, taking each breath, each inhale, allowing all the molecules to rush into him, savoring them, images of wind eternal, of millions breathing, taking him on wings back to the First Breath, the unifying exhale of the Lord, Yahweh. Then even the most foul odors—the balancing decay of bursting life; such he inhales and celebrates for its fecundity.

Oh, the frolicking which dreaming is! The sheer joy of creating! The thrill within the thighs as he strides across the Earth, strides so fast and with such thunder that he flies, spanning mountains and hilltops he is the companion of the eagle and with it swoops down to splash in the water, the pearled water, clear yet alive with opaque beings, those whom he has named, those who are because he is dreaming. It is them that live because he is this Story, this creating presence.

For months, each night is this joy. Hardly does he pause when "male and female He created them" walk upon the new formed Earth because in this Holy Story all is a celebration such that life on Earth, human existence, everything is paradisaical... "God saw that it was good."

*But then*, the move into dreaming the second story. That of the origins set in the Garden of Eden. Here what was celebratory in the first account, took him to places of great challenge. Not that he was not prepared, no, the *via negativa* had prepared him. Just that he simply didn't like it. His dreaming seemed too much of a nightmare...and so confusion and turmoil.

The shapeless and chaotic and brooding and dark vapors...filtered through the Garden story, *whoa!*...He dreams now of Yahweh in His fierce breathing, drawing the howling from His own emptiness, the "dark vapors" within, a Void which is not a source for joyful creations: of animals, plants, companioned humans...but of an unbounded emptiness. Here—in stark contrast to his prior positive experiences of "Creation out of nothing!"—his knees weaken, bones clatter, and teeth nervously grind and grind.

During this very first night in the Garden of Eden story he shudders, feels the howling yearning which are within these dark vapors, so deeply yearning, so sucking the marrow from his bones. Alfred hears the howling, it rides upon a tornado wind rushing forward towards ever deeper, depthless, darkly brilliant Nothingness.

"AIIIIfffreeeeddd!" *Ah*, the dark vapors swirl, he is within the Void...*Grasped by Yahweh!* Yanked out of chaos as a handful of dirt ripped apart from the Earth, cupped in godly hands and fiercely breathed into and given a body: *human*...he feeling within himself all that is majestically powerful and endowed with the savage right of dominion as he now is Adam walking throughout the Garden giving names to the beasts....but not as their companion, rather as their Master.

Alfred awakens; *troubled*.

It is Brooder practice to rise from dreaming and go immediately to the Chapel, there to be with other brothers or if alone to kneel in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament...that sacred host which is the Bread of Life—Jesus incarnate still on Earth in time and space.



But upon waking...it is mid-morning, still dark, possibly 3 or 4 a.m., for he has no clock...Alfred does not follow procedure; he steps outside into the early morning air.

He needs to breathe. Inhale the fragrance of the moon's breath as he does when dreaming Creation as "good."

He needs to look upon all that is—animals, plants, humans—and feel them as part of his fantastic ribbon of flesh.

He needs especially to observe them—he and she, they who are companions walking about; themselves finding life as "good."

He has to stop dreaming...*dominion*.

Alfred confesses, "I went outside. I couldn't, couldn't...*breathe*."

"What are you afraid of?" Stern tone.

"Afraid? I don't think I was afraid, just felt, um, suffocated."

There is a long pause, almost reaching uncomfortable.

"Go back. Go back, right now...I don't care what else you are supposed to do this day, but you must, right now, immediately go back and pick up the dreaming. Then bring it to *us*."

*Go back!*

Alfred is now Adam. Dreaming Adam. He reels, senses that his breathing has stopped, is near death's door... *Lie down!* It is a godly command. *Sleep, so as to dream. Dream so as to live.*

When waking within the dream it is Adam who yawns and stretches...looks about and finds himself *not alone*. He is stymied more than fearful. Stymied is a feeling that stops his mind from working as so often happens when in communion with the Father. He is a blank slate upon which the Father writes. At such times it is He who teaches him language, how to use words to pleasure himself as the words give him mastery over all that is on Earth.

*Alone, my child. You are no longer alone. I have given you a companion.*

It is then that she appears. One much like him, two legged, long hair, hands and a smile...yet he senses so unlike him.

*From your rib....*

He walks over and touches her. She lowers her eyes and bends her head, and in another moment looks up at him...he is enchanted by her eyes.

He is unfamiliar with but awed by all that follows, as she is sheer magic as she raises her arms and he floats into them, she purses her lips, lies down, he reclines next to her, ever falling into her eyes, deeper and deeper, she gasps, *Oh!...Kapow!* he is in a violent frenzy wild upon her body, pawing her, twisting her arms, kneeling apart her legs and...amazed at how his body feels, at the rise to hardness of his water organ, so he penetrates her, is feverish, sweating, groaning and whooping, totally losing any sense of her, overwhelmed by a sensation so...so unknown, *weird....*Adam wants her back, back inside him; he wants to consume her and make her rib, again.

"Arrrggggh!" his back arches and he falls down, unaware of what he has expelled from within his own body.

Alfred wakes, bolts off his bed, races to the Chapel. Many brothers are there in deep dreaming. He goes to his appointed place...can hardly breathe...but obeys his confessor's command.

"She!" The word soars through the communal body, afloat on a stream of "ssssss!"...some hissed, others in sing song.

As never before experienced by him, Alfred hears a rumbling of words from the other brothers. Until this moment, dreaming had rarely been broken by a singular word and certainly

not by a jumble of sounds...all of which now form a roiling rapids of near incomprehensible words, yet altogether convey a strong emotion—dreadful fear.

"Demon goddess!" Clearly, the Abbot's voice resounds; overwhelms. All other sounds ebb towards the Silence.

*Demon goddess...* Alfred slumbers back into quiet communal dreaming; comforted.

As Luke and especially as Friar Alfred, he never trembled as others did when they confronted chastity—which for most was their main spiritual opponent. For this reason alone it was easy for him to first Brood upon Adam and Eve because the celebration of male and female in the "good" story of origin caused him, upon first contact, to miss the nightmare in the Garden.

Although he had been constantly told throughout seminary years that "She—demon goddess"—was his main spiritual tempter, he had not experienced it like the others. True, he tortured his flesh, slipped tight rubber-bands around his testicles, stood long enough in cold showers to shiver and gasp...but there had always been something else.

*Chastity*—oh, how much he had heard it offended during his seminary years! Tales and legends abounded. Still now pillow muffled howls in the night ringing throughout the cloister further attest to Chastity's demons. "Pick up his Cross and follow..." fully explained why these She-devil tempters were alive and well here in Rome. Alfred finds comfort in this Scriptural adage, it helps interpret the weekly groans of his fellow novices at *Culpa*: that time and practice of communal, public confession. *Ah*, pure Chastity, such a monkish Cross!

Chastity—more taught about and prayed over than Poverty and Obedience. As such, at evening prayers, *Compline* of the Divine Office, all prayed and were warned each night:

"Fratres: Sóbrii estóte et vigiláte: quia adversáriuS vester diábolus tamquam leo rugiens círcuit, quærens quem dévoret: cui resístite fortes in fide. Tu autem, Dómine, miserere nobis."

"Brethren. Be sober, be watchful, for your adversary the devil, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. Now on us, O Lord, have mercy."

The roaring lion—no one doubted—was She...*lioness!*

Nightly, now as he Broods, Alfred knows to anticipate, assume, accept that "she" will be present—hiding out, waiting in ambush—here as everywhere, when awake and dreaming.

Yet for him, temptation was never primarily by Her. *Oh, if only Chastity!* he often lamented. Truly the Brooder's special Discipline, through its positive solicitation of every sense, has, as had the Tradition's negative solicitation, unleashed demon legions of manly desire within him and here among his brothers. For of the Seven Capital Sins none was more Capital than sexual desire. Its demons are carved in capital letters in friarly consciousness: Lust—and its varied Sins of the Flesh: Covetousness, Lewdness, Lasciviousness, Pederasty, Salaciousness, Impure Thoughts, even, Sensuality. From these, he was not exempt.

In truth, the Novice Master had spied and the Prior quickly confirmed that Alfred was temperamentally born to Brood upon and so keep alive the joyful manifestation of Yahweh's mysterious ways.

Each had noticed and in time shared many a conversation about Alfred's weaknesses, each noting what Alfred knew about himself that Chastity was not his main temptation. They knew from confessional sharings—not directly breaking the code of secrecy among confessors, but through indirect and not too disguised comments—knew that for him women, females...girls, were but friends and companions.

It was this innocence—possibly *stupidity wrapped with ignorance*, but that was not at issue—this innocence is why he was judge fit to Brood upon the Garden.

Brooding upon the Garden was an especially important dream assignment. Truly, the Brooders were here to dream and so keep alive The Fall. Sustain it so that dreaming Jesus would come again, as He does each day as Sacrifice at Holy Mass, come again and Save all.

Save Alfred and all humans from the clutches of the devil...known clearly as she-devil, as Eve. For wasn't the main dream of the Garden a dream where women were only created to be a companion to man? A lesser creature, not an equal. She, not a goddess or a Divine Parent, rather a derivative being, carved from out Adam's body...his lowly rib.

They needed someone innocent enough to dream Adam's dream...and not be seduced by her devilish words...be clueless enough to utter, "The woman made me do it!"

The Brooders needed a dreamer strong enough to purge from his body, mind, and soul the allure of women in its every subtle form. One who could dream the Garden where She was not, who could live without women, without a goddess, without any aspect of the feminine.

One who could walk both the *via negativa* and the *via positiva*...and not get lost!

*Luke-now-Alfred was their man!*

But all did not go as the Brooders anticipated. After his first night Brooding on the Garden, Alfred senses that he is being stalked by a presence strange, alien, oddly manifesting itself with a queer perversity. As such scarce does he know how to pray or what Saint to beseech for intercession. *What is it? Which demon? Her?* But there are no answers because he does not yet know how to properly and accurately form the question. Or just how to ask the Prior for spiritual guidance. No, young Friar Alfred is left only with the joyless terror that manifests itself through shuddering.

*Something else* was roaming the Garden seeking to devour him....it made him tremble, terribly.

*What—or Who—was it?*

*Shuddering.*

"God, Almighty Father, help me!" Uttered as he is kneeling in Adoration before the Monstrance—golden vessel that holds the purified wafer of God-Himself—utters but finds no solace. *Shudders.* ...He senses that *It* is not a what but definitely a who; *who?*

Like a flash flood in the parched desert, he is suddenly overwhelmed by and submerged within an embrace of intimate touch. Immersed...*suffocating*, yet also feeling tenderly caressed and sweetly kissed...Alfred is absolutely sensually engrossed....he is totally blitzed, never before touched intimately, never before feeling fabulous in his film of flesh.

He is dreaming, once more the dream of Adam in the Garden with Eve...as with Adam's first erotic discovery of Eve so is Alfred suddenly stunned by a harsh shift in the touch...still intimate but not tender nor sweet...it is upon him—violent frenzy wild upon his body, pawing him, twisting his arms, kneeling apart his legs...it seeks to consume him!

*It lusts...for me!*

He shudders, non-stop.

*Shuddering.* He feels *It* as if a huge hand probing harshly and systematically, inevitably making its way, air molecule by sound-wave of his silent surrender, towards, through, around, and within him. Is there any doubt? That *Its* intent is to lustily savor him?

Alfred fights the thoughts, the sensations—confused by his mingled sense of fear and pleasured enjoyment. He struggles to contain himself, hold it at bay by yielding, surrendering, "Touch me dear God! I am your servant!" But is it God or a demi-god? A demon? What type of holy or unholy presence? "Thy will be done, not mine!"—cast forth as incantation, as a

solicitation for rescue. But he just shudders and shudders as It pleasures itself and so satiates Alfred himself.

Together they are delirious in a sensual embrace that defies description as love or intimacy. All the impassioned friar can do is shudder, mightily shudder.

Near fainting, still at Adoration, he slips back into dreaming. Back in the Garden, he knows that it is Yahweh who is walking about, scenting his trail. He hears His cooing call, "Alfred, Alfred, my beloved!" Alfred hides but finds no safety. Heavy breathing rushes like spirit-fire all over his body and Alfred glows. His flesh is a candle of Yahweh's craving desire to create—a mate, a companion, to enflesh Her in him and so become His beloved...through Adam as His beloved so was Eve, through Alfred as His beloved so will be...?

Alfred/Adam lies down in deep sleep...dreaming.

*Yes! Yes!...*Snapping awake to his own litany of ecstatic words and panting breaths...ever shuddering, Alfred is in flight, racing, zooming out of the chapel, fleeing his brother dreamers. His voice is soundlessly afire with holy ejaculations and sacred profanations for and against powers angelic and demonic. But flee as he may, all is in vain, as he endlessly shudders and shudders and shudders.

Back in his cell, prostrate on the floor, ripped naked of robe and friarly attire, he is unaware of his own ejaculate, of the dripping juice that bedews his whole body left by lick of sacral tongue, sweat of sublime desire.

He shudders, exhausted, full body on the cold stone floor, not feeling cold nor hot, just sodden. Overwrought, within a sigh he dies to the light and seeps into a dreamless unconsciousness.

Uncounted hours later, he awakens to the remembered condemnation, "He who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of god."

Condemned is how he dreadfully feels. For what could he possibly confess? Say for certain that he was ever actually touched? Show a mark? Even the slightest of scars? How to name the presence—holy or demonic? His mind could not even get around the thought, *This is God? Yahweh?... This is Jesus?*

Is this what he is supposed to find here in the Garden's seeming serenity? Is his nightly Dreaming to now be one of sacral lust? *Is this it?* Both holy and unholy—a craving desire to touch, invade, pleasure Itself, and his response of shuddering? Does it really matter who It is?

Q: *What must I do?*

He answers himself...

A: *Ah, this answer is clear. Isn't it, dear friar?*

Despite his conscious efforts and unsullied fervor and ardor in pursuing the adoring life, this inexplicable, queerly perverse sacral lust—which he accepts that he only senses and understands as shuddering—convinces him feel that, in heart and soul, he is rightly judged *Unworthy!*

Cruelly, worthy only to be repelled and repulsed. He hears and feels as such, so he reasons, because he is himself essentially repelling and repulsive.

Indicted and judged by his own shuddering, he hands down the verdict—"Unworthy to dream as the Brooders dream!"

Shuddering finally undoes the young Friar Alfred.

*Luke!*

So it is that as summer ends, after several especially long, Brooder disciplined months of nightly Dreaming where Alfred found that he had no Traditional language with which to speak

about this shuddering and no Scriptural language with which to indict himself so that once indicted he could plead "Guilty!" and so throw himself prone before the feet of his brothers at *Culpa*...petition for forgiveness, receive the comfort of absolution...here, so, so weary and worn down, truly broken in mind, heart and spirit—clutched by savage depths of bafflement and confusion—Alfred yields, surrenders, submits to his wretchedness, unworthiness, his failing: "No one who sets his hand to the plough and then keeps looking back is fit...."

*He looks back!*

Had he not heard the Call? He did hear, so he believes. But it must have been a call, not capital, not holy, rather a call to something, somewhere else. *Where?* What does it matter? He has submitted his flesh to all the most fabulous excesses of purgation and rapture, the quench of pain and the joy of ecstatic creation, so by all objective standards of Brooder discipline he should be prepared. But God—and his mind can only think and his heart believe that it is the Merciful God—has reached out and through whatever mystery of his own Will touched him. Touched and made him feel repulsed. It is his to accept that all *Friar Alfred* can do is shudder!

*...not "fit for the kingdom of God."*

*Thy will be done, not mine!*

"I must leave." Whispered. Stated. Not prayed, because it is his surrender to failure. Desperate and forlorn, he utters one final plea, offers himself one last hope. He kneels down and becomes the humble centurion. "Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof, say but the word and my soul shall be healed!"

Hearing no reply, all that he is to know, so he believes, is that for some mysterious reason he is unworthy to submit to the touch: God's intimate touch.

*A: You are unfit.*

When the distraught friar nervously discloses his decision to the Prior, he is gently received. The Prior is understanding, consoling. He speaks about the rigors of the Discipline. He counsels him to wait another year, delay his ordination. To take some time out, "in the world," study at a secular institution like Yale Divinity, or set forth to travel the world, visit other cultures and other non-Western monasteries. Compassionate, the Prior is almost affectionate. Youthful friars are always stressing out. But more than that, he has come to specially value Alfred. In him, he sees great promise. Despite his own inner warnings, he found himself taking a particularly *personal* interest in this young monk's labors. That is why he elected to guide him through a series of special readings that went deeply into the history of the Brooder's discipline. Although, at the start, he knew that he was taking a great risk, he boldly opened the secret and esoteric, mystical treasures of Brooder tradition to Alfred. He showed him ancient documents, ones that have intoxicated even the most pure and humble of them all. These the Prior now assesses must have taken Alfred to mystical levels of meditation and awareness much too rich for his callow soul. In this light, from this peculiarly passionate young monk, he welcomes this moment of self-doubt, of abasement, of submission. Such is natural, expected. Even a sign of holiness.

"Confess, my son. Confess to me, now."

"I...I can't."

He is ashamed. He is shamed. Dumb-tongued.

This resistance, not just humble self-denigration, soon worries the Prior. As a seasoned confessor, he pushes and queries deeply, probing as to what is behind his inability to name the demon. Why can't he describe the shuddering? Is he lying about his own perverseness?

An answer comes, to the Prior's reckoning, as a message from the Holy Spirit because all at once Alfred's soul appears transparent to him. *Pitiful!* He senses the weakness, the coward's surrender, the putrid stench of the gutless quitter...that if not purged will foul all in the Common Life. So, all at once—*Flash!*—Alfred is set-upon, grilled with a line of questions that jolt him. Shock not by their content and scantily veiled fury but by their irrelevancy.

*Was he the only one to sense the touching?* For he Prior asks, "Is there a woman?" ("Yes, yes, Friar Ignatius' sister in the Visiting Room!") But when answered in the negative leads to some fine-tuning.

"Is there a special friendship?" which makes Alfred uncontrollably snicker. *A fag?* It's a near snort strangled by his fear of upsetting the Prior. He must remain respectful.

"Me?" is all he says, as if that is all that need be said, as if saying, "Don't you know me at all?" Whereas in actuality his simple reply confirms the Prior's worst suspicion concerning the character of Alfred's self-discipline. It is clear and evident that the young friar has tasked himself into self-absorption: an absorption of degree flirting with the idiosyncratic, the obsessed. It is an absorption that has felled many Brooders of legend. It is an introspective brooding, but of that peculiar spiritual tunneling which can trap, snare, enter a soul.

Alas, clearly, *He has met the serpent in the Garden...*She has bewitched him!

Ironically, Alfred's answer reveals only what it seeks to conceal. The Prior, himself, wrongly concludes by this foolish "me" answer-question that this young monk remains unaware of the gangs of devilish incubi and succubi who stalk at night and who revel, carouse in their heinous and monstrous delights and howl, screeching echoes off monastic flagstone.

After several other "Is there?" and "Do you?" questions, the only one which approaches Alfred's true struggle is, "Do you touch yourself?" Alfred knows that the Prior is asking about masturbation, but as it is spoken it comes to him so quite differently, as "Do you touch yourself as IT touches you?" *Oh*, for an instant, at once joyful, almost bursting into giggling and a happy *yahoo!* at finding someone who understands, almost for an instant he believes that the Prior understands, but, no, his eyes drills into Alfred's...condemning, *Guilty!*

"No, Father," is all the soulfully disappointed Friar can utter. Again, "No."

Eve? Onan? Not a sodomite? All is such confusion, so unexpected. About this young friar he has said often, "If ever there was a Brooder, this one. If ever called to the altar, this one." Truly, he felt that Alfred was born to the cloth. When Alfred had entered the Novitiate, the Prior was celebrant at the Investiture and his intuition that day about him was soon confirmed as it was quickly reported within weeks of his arrival in Rome that he took to the Brooder's discipline much as a young duckling takes to water. So where has he gone wrong? Not Alfred, but himself. For he is a Shepherd losing a lamb. What went awry? *What did I miss?*

These are questions of the Prior's personal crucifixion. Verily, lessons in merciless humility. But this moment is not about him, so he bows to God, "Later, my Lord!" As to the young friar—*Is it the Holy Spirit who suddenly but slowly pivots the Prior?*—the Prior gestures towards the crucifix that stands to the side of his desk, he genuflects, then kneels, drops his chin into upraised hands and begins to pray, praying loudly, words of an offering, a gift acknowledged but simply as to its overwhelming mystery, "Father, into thy hands, I commend this spirit."

In the morning, on his Investiture anniversary of August 15, 1966, Friar Alfred, O.S.O., leaves the Common Life, sheds his coarse, drab religious habit, returns his name and becomes Luke again...walks away from the touch.

He is led by the Prior himself, unhurriedly, through a subterranean passage. They have evidently left the Brooder cloister and were in some adjoining building—*Why?* Not a time for questions or answers. Not too long and they mount a flight of stairs and confront a monastic gate...it opens onto an alleyway that, unknown to Alfred, is dedicated solely for such an occasion—it is a sacral sphincter, a massive, rounded iron slab of gigantic reach that is fabulously tooled with cherubic and ecstatic Paradisiacal imagery on the inside and...as Luke is soon to learn...hideous, loathsome depictions of doomed sufferings in Hell on the outside—an exit that stands solely and ever as only exit, never an entrance.

As Alfred pauses momentarily to reach for the handle and take a conscious step through this gateway, the Prior lunges in front of him, grasp, grunts and yanks it open...*Flash!*...a worldly, moldy light strikes Alfred and for a moment he is stunned, sucked back a step, held in suspension...as instantly, roughly exhaled, nay, *blown!* with distaste, expectorated: spit and expelled out.

With each step-upwards, out of the sewage reeking alleyway, shudders scurry and flee from his being. In just minutes, around a corner, sunlight comes as to warm him, but Luke draws no heat, only shudders more deeply with each step until with one violent, one jerky snap—like a cat-o'nine-tails scourging and clawing the air—with one momentous gut screaming shudder of deafening silence Luke, not Alfred of The Brooding Ones, is forever peeled and cast forth...given the ole "Heave ho!"

As Luke swings his bag into the overhead rack and swivels into the bus' backseat, he feels terribly alone, not forsaken, not rejected, but more tellingly, just empty.

*It shudders.*

### **CHAPTER 3: Luke, Not Alfred**

"Luke," he heard it chorused a thousand times and more. It was sound fleeing the waving tassels of corn, rows and rows, and then running from the mouths of cows, all in time to the switching of their tails. "L...u...k...e" as drawn out by the suck of a city tunnel. Angelic voices? *Who's calling?*

"Llllloooooookkkkkee!" His name was all he had.

What else but a name in his emptiness? For it was this name that he once forsook to enter on the treacherous and harrowing monastic road to the Parousia, to that End of Time where all would be manifest. *Luke, now no longer. Rise, Friar Alfred!* Yet, as Luke he had known what to do, how to act, where to go, but now as Luke-once-Alfred?

*On the road...*or at least the bus, he muses, turns instantly somber: emptiness. What he doesn't know is that this emptiness is a "fare-thee-well gift" from his Brooder brothers. He couldn't know, had not even a hint of how he was still connected with them since he had not been seasoned enough to have Brooded when a friar had forsaken their communal dreaming...dreamed a dark sinister dream with his brothers as they Brooded on the admonishment, "He who looks back..."

Fatefully, Alfred had not been there to dream communal hatred, fear, disdain...and deliver holy justice, assign spiritual penance—to inflict this Brooder sense of bottomless emptiness upon a brother. Not there to howl and grind communal teeth, gnash and call The Father's wrath upon the faithless brother—*Quitter!* Truly, he has not risen on Archangel wings to curse such a one, so how could he have judged this emptiness but as his own?

*Emptiness.* His fellow passengers are but cardboard figurines, moved about by a set of invisible levers. He sees them but then he doesn't. Smells them, but then doesn't. No, it is emptiness that he rolls around in. Emptiness which he bangs up against as the bus lunges around

a curve too fast. Emptiness which stands with him, sits with him, eats with him at the several stops on the way, and it is emptiness which lies down beside him this night.

In bed, Luke is soon over-taken by an experience nothing in all his years of seeking to break-through could have prepared him for. But shouldn't he have known? Smart as he is? That the natural world would never be the same again, because once he became part of the supernatural communal dreaming brotherhood, so he would always be. Did he really miss the fundamental Brooder "fact" that, while one could "look back," he could never exit! That once a communal dreamer that there was no other mode of existence possible. That the Brooders would always have him, even during his absence, possess him through this shared emptiness. This curse tethers him to them, forever. He may have surrendered his name, Alfred...but they would never do likewise.

*Foolish youth!* How could he have expected to leave the land of monkish dreams unblemished, unburdened, as if he owed not a return of the admission fee for the looking-back, his abandonment of the plough? Did not the Brooders have the right, the duty, to protect their dreaming?

*Justice:* Tonight, they curse him, inflict their emptiness as craving upon him and chain him down, misdirect him, focus him upon the image of one *shuddering for* him, set him...dreaming not Yahweh but about this otherness, this beside-him. It seeks to obsess him, frenzy him, then they set him loose, lusting into Genesis' "dark vapors."

The Brooders' curse sets in. While once Luke found himself languishing amidst Yahweh's days of "It is good!" creation, feeling himself pleased, deeply inhaling the fragrances, allowing flowers and bugs, bees and floating pollen to be within and without...all so pleasuring as he savored his breath, knowing himself in this breathing as "all is one"—he and they, it and it...then the craving, the lusting for him.

Asleep, dreaming in the Garden It comes upon the fullness of his cock, a thick engorgement as if a beast rising with a hungry growl, it comes and he perceives it as the ladder to heaven, as that from within him that must reach out and attach to the sky, pull that sky to Earth... he rolls upon the ground raising clouds of thick dust.

Within this swirl of dust his hands tear at his flesh, scratch, then poke and rip strips of flesh, he is driven like a maniac...compelled, incensed, lunatic, desperate so he turns to Luna, gazes up at the moon there high and takes it, sharp disk of cool-fire light, and with its edge of mournfulness slices through his rib-cage...splattering blood upon his hands, gushing but still blue as it spits and squirms down his probing forearm, this arm now almost elbow deep inside his chest

...then he pulls out, levers his right arm and rips a middle left rib, tears it, twists and grinds it free from its cartilage, all without a howl, does this with eyes that are fire, riotous flames burning out the synapses in his brain, wild-eyed and manic, the commingling of all that is within him with all that is without, he taggers backwards, does not fall, lifts this rib and with it he waves it arcing across the air to draw forth the symphony of emptiness, works the air like a magician conjuring rabbits, hoists and flails the rib as if slicing through the sky, yet not intent just to cut up the world around him, no, he crushes the rib before him, pulverizes it with one grunting press of his hands, crumbles it into the cup of his palms and then rubbing them together breathes the heat of his desire, the cold of his own chaotic emptiness, and with a shudder lets it lie upon him, rest upon his pubic area, swarm around his still frenzied cock

...then the shudder that *shudders for* sets upon him—Luke is dying, choking, strangling, strangled by desire, so fierce, unfamiliar, as incomprehensible as Mortal Sin, *Oh!*...there is no



word upon his tongue to describe it yet *it is lust* sucking, licking, biting, savoring, tearing, gobbling, slobbering—craving, every part of himself: mind, soul, flesh, all craves

...then the Brooders, now dreaming Luke-not-Alfred in this dream they take him to another level, one he had not progressed to, which had awaited him upon Final Vows, a level they know will haunt him forever... Luke is shrouded within the "dark vapors" and out from it begins to congeal a presence or presences, forms, and as they appear he howls, lets loose his desires, he craves, wants it all, them all...it is the desire for blood come again, and it bleeds for him, torrents of blood, these now rising upon his suck and he finds himself at the feet of a unfamiliar human form, this now rising out of the dark vapors...it is so like him then not, yet he knows it is him, yet it is not...an image more than a word comes to him—it has come from within him to be without, on the outside of, him.

The image of it as him draws a sound from his heart, "Woooo....man." It is a sound spit up from his innards, unwound from around his heart; it jumps out of his mouth.

This sound is word is incantation is enticement is enchantment—*Her* he voices inwardly.

*Her*: a form which is emptying itself for him, bleeding for him, and her blood rains upon him from her breasts, feeds him from her cunny, and he swells ever so larger and she bends towards him, her face now girlish, youthful, smiling, and her blood warm, satiating, but as she closes in upon his face it is not a kiss but a hag's tooth which strikes at him and he falls backwards in horror, falls and falls, yet she is flight quickly upon him, Harpy and Fury, he descending, she swooping under him and catching him in her arms, she now Mother cuddling him, nestling him to her breasts, once again she feeds him but her milk is not blood, no, snake tongues lash about him, snare his head, wrap around his eyes, shoot tendrils up his nose and he is lost in the dark vapors, enveloped by it...as quickly, a shade of light emerges...the dark vapors take tangible human form, it is another woman, forming like smoke rising, a quivering presence, and for a moment he is stunned for she has no face but yet a hundred faces: beautiful and ugly, girlish and old, there the witchy Hag but then the guileless Maid, a thousand eyes and lips...all lust for him, One Eye, Her Eyes, "Dark Vapor Eyes," eyes which as One Eye look at him, not through him, not beyond, but with a visual touch, this evokes a howl at the border of his emptiness...he shudders; oh, Eyes which he cannot stand, he reacts to each, to all: he cocks them, lets loose every repressed desire of every year of every Disciplined preparation, cocks them and yet hungers for them, lusts for them—bloodlust ... but it is all too much, too much new wine for Luke's old wineskin, so the monks refine their punishment, allow him to dream the dark vapors only as he has known *Her*: as Holy Mary, Holy Mother of God, Holy Virgin. Yes, a womanly form which had emptied itself to be filled by God—Mary at the Annunciation, *Her* as vessel.

But miss not the cruelty of their curse...for Luke is to dream Ceation but never come to know its final Ending—*The Return of Her*.

The Brooders relish the communal laugh of the divinely just!

Luke-no-longer-Alfred, even if not fated to forget this dream as he dreams tonight, he would not have known whether to judge it a blessing or a curse but it is a curse always upon him, whether dreaming or in the flesh, a curse present, sealing him to them, the Brooders dreaming, ever present as a stain upon his flesh, that of a spider's line of dew left as mark, blemish, spectral tattoo atop his left eyelid, this a talisman of their emptiness which will always be his, this which will keep him blind-eyed concerning *Her*.

So, this night, a night at a HoJo, a bus-stop on the way home to Hastings, Minnesota, here, in a bed slept in by a swarm of dreamless dreamers, here Luke lays down, not Alfred, here Luke rests thickly in his flesh, dreamlessly dreaming—so he will recall.

## CHAPTER 4: Adam's Knowing

For once Luke was glad that the bus ride home was long, very, very long—from Staten Island to St. Paul, Minnesota, cross-country, it could have been a million miles and he would have welcomed the journey, for all he wanted to do was do nothing, well, not nothing, just not what he had been doing, wanted to not be Alfred, wanted to think about Luke, get a bead on all this. In truth he didn't quite grasp all that had happened and he felt a dread about all that would happen. It was the emptiness, again, the dark hole at his center, thirsty. What happened last night—the monk's dream—had happened as Alfred, The Brooder and so he has now forgotten all but the most superficial chronology...he was slowly transforming into his just being a surface person, like a water spider skimming along the film of life, no memory of Her, no awareness of his discontent, just riding the Greyhound, naturally.

"Look, don't go and git yarself scalped!" Killian had teased. An East Coaster's notion of Minnesota—on the Frontier, Hastings, port on the Mighty Mississippi...in the East Coast vision of the Wild West, although it was the fall of 1966, still saw Cowboys and Indians anywhere west of Philadelphia ...Friar Killian, nee Fred Williams, his really only true friend, seminary that is, not a crazy, but he kept Luke from being too crazy, his point guard, great shot off the pick, short, a mite but a scrappy rebounder, staying behind to finish the Novitiate year, joked about his journey West...but his sad, disappointed eyes said it all, "You knew you'd have to do this, someday." Killian had always wondered what kept Luke on the inside since he was so extroverted, so much an outside in the world type guy. But, "God wills it!" means the journey is never straight ahead.

"Someday." Any day right now should have done it, when? Thirteen years ago at his First Communion right when Grandmother Nugent had said, "Luke, God has chosen you to be a priest!" He didn't even know what the priesthood really was, so he began to pay attention at Mass. He knew who priests were, their black cassocks, their being the Bosses around school and church, their being talked about just about every meal but little else. Bosses: "Father Pikowitz said..." and "Let's ask Father Frederick about...."

Priests had always been part of his family, at least his family as it had been back East. With his father's transfer three years ago things had begun to shift. Minnesota was not the East Coast. Catholics were still Irish and Germans but not Irish as his Grandmother was. Not what he came to learn were his "Jansenist" roots. "Jansenists"—Father Hubert had rolled the word with an Irish brogue, and it was hard to discern whether he was bemoaning them or enthroning them. "Jansenists—the Rigorous Ones." As he spoke Alfred knew why as Luke he had entered the Strict Observance. Father Hubert's "History of Theology" lectures detailed, with elaborate comparison to and exploration of the most gory footnotes and exotica of the Acts of the Martyrs—much fact, more legend, most fabulous—the kinship between the Jansenists and America's own New England Puritans, both insular, hating the body, filled with doom, always talking about death, no, Death, another capital letter word. Yes, Grandmother again, how often did he hear at each Baptism her funereal benediction: "Bless God that He has given you a child to weep at your grave!" Ah, how Alfred has come to know why his world was singularly capitalized: Death, Communion, Marriage, Confirmation, God Is Love...on and on, nothing but every thought and act of the greatest consequence. "Your soul hangs in the balance!"

When he had figured out that the priests were not married to the nuns, although both wore black and worked together, that they did not live with or eat together, and without shock accepted the early adolescent observation that they did not date and dance, he simply assumed them to be from the same family, a very large family: many cousins, uncles and aunts, brothers

and sisters—what he came to learn sociologists call an extended family, quite larger than his nine but something more like the Italian ghetto which bordered his backyard in Bayonne, where it appeared to his young mind that the women always dressed in black, that every adult male was "Uncle" and every older woman "Auntie," along with hordes of youngsters being cousins or cousins of cousins.

Then as a knowledge of sex arose, mostly from each year's deeper exploration of what constitutes a Mortal Sin, he came to understand their blackness. For there was no blacker sin than a sexual one. And the "Good Fathers" and the "Good Sisters" dressed in black to remind us of sex's murderous reach, its depravity, how it rotted the soul, blinded mankind (mostly guys!) to the consequences of sexual sin. So, Purity entered Luke's mind, heart and soul, and purity equated to being called Good, and that is the part he liked. Luke liked the positive feelings associated with Good. So he dealt with sex or Sex like a "good boy." He repressed it, sublimated it, ignored it. It was just one obstacle on his way to feeling good. Not that he was a feel-good hedonist, just that his make-up was that of the optimist, the one who smiles without cause, who is caught entranced on his way to school by bumblebees buzzing around a bush. Luke always enjoyed life and that is possibly why his Grandmother at her Jansenistic best set him on the Way of the Cross, *Via Crucis*—simply because she couldn't abide happiness! "Smiling is the sign of an idiot, a drunkard," then she'd bless herself, "or one of God's Little Angels." Luke cringes as he hears the dour syllables of her "Little Angels."

When in the minor seminary Luke actually did not think much about what it meant to be "a priest, forever..." It just seemed what everyone around him was doing, and he fell into the routine, the prayers, the study hours, Latin and Greek, a smattering of Hebrew. He received no broad perspective nor did any of his teachers think one necessary to provide upon the role he was aspiring to. No, if anything, during a time of cataclysm, rather than warnings to seek safe shelter and flee the premises, many rise to say, "Stay put. This too will pass." Truly, how many times had he heard that phrased as, "The Church is forever. Saints and Sinners come and go. The Church perdures." Only when in the Novitiate—only ironically when he had selected the Strict Observance—did he begin to hear warnings. Here among the Silent Ones, the meditative ones, great thought was being given to the perils of the time, to the "Signs of the Times," to the alleged subversive influence of Satan within the Church: Holy, Roman, Catholic. Clearly, the 1960s were a most tumultuous time, Vatican Council Two and the enigmatic Pope John XXIII had opened "windows"—a doctrinal de-fenestrations to let in fresh theological airs, yet the slightest of drafts whirled and swirled, blew like hurricane winds, mere whispers of fresh ideas clanged like the cold-iron tolling at a medieval execution. Pope John's counsel to read "the signs of the times" loosed the unquiet souls chained and sealed in the sacred catacombs of the condemned—the Church's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* ("Library of Forbidden Books"). From out of these tombs of alien thought and belief arose (*Escape!*) long entombed heretics who harbored forbidden secrets, suppressed exegeses, and theological interpretations that had not yielded to rack and torture. A sign of the times was that all these once condemned insights were now loosed and came screeching like terrified refugees rushing madly, not knowing where the border begins or ends, just heedlessly rushing towards a light so long denied—towards *John's windows* which as borders had been hermetically sealed for centuries...out hissed the fetid air of Lazarus' tomb which had long been kept sealed with the Silence and Sufferings of Dreaming monks...so, Luke, now Alfred came to hear not only about the Past but the Present and it was troubling news.

"The Gospel warns us about such times as these are now. There are signs. Read the Book of Revelations. My sons, search the Gospels for they are always the Good News. It is up to your

generation to fight not just the infidels: the Protestants, the Jews, the Mohammedans, no, yours is a cosmic fight, one against the Lies of Science, the Unbelief of the atheists, and most fearfully, against the Enemy Within." The Master had said that, time and again, and Alfred knew he would never forget, as Luke is remembering right now.

Maybe that is why he couldn't figure out what a priest was to be in this present Age. The Age of...of what? Vatican Council Two had seethed and raged during the early part of the decade, and Luke had spent two life-threatening summers in Rome rafting the rippling effects of its theological tsunami waves, tidal waves which wiped out whole styles of thinking, vast areas of Tradition, chastened the Thomists, swallowed the Latin ritual, revamped all the Pomp and Ceremony—"All the good music!" so his Dad had lamented the loss of Gregorian chant—and left what? Maybe that was it: there is nothing left, everything has to be built from scratch, *but that can't be*. Yet Luke knew that that is where it all had begun, climaxed, an epiphany: the shuddering that is, upon one miasmatic summer day at the insular papal university, the revered and ancient Gregorianum, it was there he had first heard about "The People of God," a strange phrasing, one argued on the tongues of Cardinal Ottovani and Yves Congar, echoed by Kung and Schillebeeckx.

"The People of God"—he heard it, discussed it, read the "Constitution on the Church," plumbed the theological commentaries, smelled the acrid odors of debate, harsh words which sliced the monastic calm, words which did not rise in dreaming, but then he began to feel it: a cloak, heavy upon his shoulders, a small cap resting over his eyes at night, rising as if throwing off a shroud, the phrase hung like a veil over what he saw and touched as if it must be parted for him to truly see, to peek and break-through. It broke into his dreams but was communally suppressed by the Discipline. Only The Master knew it was but a matter of time, for him, for them all.

Kneeling before the Monstrance in vigil, there in the chapel, there among the statues, the Stations of the Cross, his thoughts flutter as the dawning light flickers through the crown of stained glass windows crested above the altar, he now feeling the constricting privacy of monastic life, the seclusion, the engulfing stifling interiority, all this rising within his soul as a feeling of "not enough!"...anxiety.

Yes, "The People of God" called forth what was not there, the public, the exterior, the history of the historyless, the nameless, the mob, the souls which till now were "over there" on the other side of the Communion rail but whom now he begins to feel must "come over here," and a swift flash of dreaming sets upon him: not Adam alone, not Adam with God but Adam with Eve outside The Gate...he could scarce contain the shuddering, this time almost convulsive, a freaky weirdness of claustrophobia.

How could he be a priest to "The People of God"? When he had entered the seminary, when he had taken his Simple Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, when he had pledged himself to the Brooders, all had been through submission to the Order, the Ordination, the Ordering within a Tradition, the blessed Hierarchy, in allegiance to the Abbot, in fealty to the Pope—all who made Christ present here on Earth. But if, as the Council had declared, the Church is The People of God, led by the Spirit of the Lord... How could he find the People? Who were they? What type of priest did they want? *Need?*

It was in searching for the meaning of this phrase, this re-definition...no, a re-formation much more radical, traumatizing, upending than a Luther or Calvin or Zwingli had ever intended, this a true Re-revolution, a Re-Willing...during this time Alfred did kneel and meditate, sit and ponder, sleep and search his dreams, and call out from within his shuddering.

Shuddered and so knew he was alone, empty. His best buddy, Friar Killian, even he did not understand. No, Fred-now-Killian had the more customary young monk's wrestling with the absent woman, not a specific woman, no name, but that fantasy, more real because none was there, wrestling with shame because he couldn't speak to Mary about her, about his yearning because he didn't know what it was a yearning for, virgin as he was, as most of the young monks were, and those who weren't certainly never talked about it or "it" or "It." No, Fred thought Alfred was just "doing it too much" (not intending a double entendre).

What was Alfred doing too much of? What his Jansenistic forbearers had always done: *fiercely living*. Maybe it was their Celtic roots, fiery, a people hanging off a precipice at Ocean's edge, dangling perilously—and relishing it! His forbearers were intense, created a world in which there were only Saints and Sinners, where normalcy, average or even-temperateness were considered weaknesses of being. Ironically, upon looking at the Saints and Sinners an outsider would be hard pressed to discern a clear difference, for each was marked by excess. And it was excess which was valued, admired, held up as the standard...either hard-drinking drunks or self-flagellating monks, choose your image, and Luke had chosen.

So when the shuddering peaked, Alfred wasn't afraid, actually relieved, for he had been worried for several months after returning from the Eternal City about the boredom which had come to nag him, pursue him, then sneak within, settle around and cling to him. He was disturbed that the longer he would kneel in Adoration the closer he came to being suffocated by boredom. For slowly, over time, the smells, the sights, the sounds of the chapel paled into the ordinary, the common, the plebeian, as if just another room. Truly, he knows that the slide into boredom had begun the moment he heard "The People of God" ... kneeling in a room which was for the Supernatural, the Presence of God, the Host Incarnate, the Dwelling of the Holy Spirit, a place maintained by the monks, a place made holy by the actions of the priests, The Mass...but now, *The People of God...where?*

Presaging the curse of last night's dream—a curse which he as Luke has forgotten but which lives as a hiding fugitive within him—is his memory of the theme of The Master's final sermon—Alfred's final—and he hears it now again as if spoken solely for his benefit: "A serpent who is Woman!" The serpent as the natural world, the woman as the natural world, both not murdered by The Father, no, used, transformed, raised, she to be called "Mother of God" but not as woman, not as serpent but as Virgin, supernatural...and The Master had called them to live as Adam had lived *before* Eve, to dream not Adam's dream, but The Father's dream for Adam—to live solely with Him, singularity, all male.

"A SERPENT WHO IS WOMAN!" The truth clicked in—the monastery, indeed the whole priestly Church was a den without a serpent. Woman was not here, forbidden, he was inside a Cloister: even nuns had to have special permission, and then they were still severely constrained. It was a simple question but one whose simplicity confounded him: "How can there be People unless there are men and women?" The altar rail now seemed a useless demarcation, like lines on ancient maps designating countries no longer in existence. And the priesthood: Could it not be super-natural? Not something above or separate but...but what? Alfred did not know, could only feel the question and he shuddered.

The bus stops. Wisconsin, already. Eats. Sits alone at the counter. Looks about him. People. *The People?* Chattering. Smiling. Eyes dancing. These Saints and Sinners? Or just people? As one of them he returns to the bus.

Yes, in preparation for his speaking with The Master about his decision Alfred had fasted for seven days, moved beyond pain, beyond fainting, he was strong, young and strong, bullish, so the telltale shuddering in the chapel, the touch which will always be just around him, this carried by their emptiness, that of his repulsion, so it had not been shuddering simply from excess: from lack of food, yes, he had whipped himself, kept faithful to his routine of flagellation and immersion in the cold, threw his nakedness like a blanket of thorns around his flesh... no, when he shuddered that day he knew that he had broken-through, no, face it, confess it! He had been broken-through. *It* had come at him, he like the frail Host, easily broken, demolished, cracked and broken...wasn't that it? Sadly, "No," simply calls to him: no, all that The Brooders had taught him was break-through as touching the Face of God, Kissing the Stigmata on Jesus' Feet, being allowed into the Presence...but, "No," it must be that God is so angry, Why? Because of looking back? Or having put my hand to the wrong plough?

Shuddering: all that he had sought? What he had come to know were only questions: What does it mean to be priest? Mean, Servant of Servants? Or is that not prideful humility? What does it mean to break-through? Lead The People, whack thorn-bushes, cut pathways? Does it mean being with The People, among them, struggling with them, being them. Was this it? *Being them* — the phrase more than the thought, the thought more than feeling, the feeling more than his being.

Alfred knew that the hand which reached out to him wanted his being, wanted to feel him, inside and out, wanted his flesh so that it could suck out his soul, only knew, Luke now recalls, relives the moment, only knew that he had finally come to face a certain Death, feel the touch of Death...all that was about him, around him, all this Tradition, now Death gasping for Life through him, and he weeps, Luke weeps for Alfred, and Alfred weeps for Luke.

But what could he possibly do but weep? He the repulsive one, he the quitter, he the monk dreamer now without dreams, a creator of The Story without a story, one now set out upon an enigmatic path, but as before, not of his choosing, one burdened, one dragging a barren shell, yet, one who has dreamed as Adam dreamed...now to know as Adam knows.

## **PART TWO: MANLY DESIRE**

### **CHAPTER 5: The First Day Out**

The first day out, "out" for it was like coming out of a deep cave, not necessarily dark, indeed remembered with all its glitter of blood and diadems, but out, a new day, one which he realizes right off is somehow connected, somehow possibly just another turn on the same twisting and disappearing road, but he wasn't all that convinced, no, he remembers how he had left it—"Home": Hastings, Minnesota, departed—with a sense of leaving peril, and now he stands there again, in the mid-November chill, not thinking much about anything but himself in this dying year 1966, now at the entrance of sunlight, and the peril waits, faithfully, for him, this he knows, just a footstep away...and he steps.

Luke could sense the peril in the eyes of all, the everywhere eyes, even smell it, for he feels something tickling up his nose as if he has snorted a crazed mosquito, but whatever, he finds it best to ignore it all, suppress it, yes, suppression and repression: years of the Discipline, and so he thrusts himself forward, with effort lifts his foot as if plucking it from gooey mud, lifts with strength for he is familiar with enough of what is holding onto him: the frenzied forces which had surrounded him, had come to him at night and tied him by ancient howlings to the bedpost: aged, gnarled, knotty, contorted: all twisted faces of monks, monks whose souls

infested the walls, pillows and blankets of the Common Life, souls whose faces flushed with an ember's glow as in their memory Alfred had flagellated, torn at his flesh, ravaged his limbs with savage nips and bites, scratches and bone-grindings, their curious hunger, their feral and delirious hunger, hunger for the film of fantastic flesh—so that they too could come to the dream, yet these the souls, these the monks who could never transcend the moment of pain, got lost in the pain, were heartbeat and cannibal passion for the agony, these now pull at him, not wanting him to disembark, not lose the banquet he had become for them, these were the monks Alfred had not become: who lived only in the ruins of nighttime, among the monastic stones, all who savored the flesh of the shaded time, shunning moonbeams, rather lurking in their shadows, these now frantic as he lifts...long fingers of deeply embowled longings clutch at him in the guise of gravity as if stone weights of wildly flung intergalactic forces were all that were acting upon him, but he knows, knew their dreams, and in moving upward, knee now raised almost in a high kick, he buckles loose from their exasperations, their doomed cries, and moves towards the car.

It is his Dad driving. He in the backseat, alone. Did he have to ask why Dad said, "Sit there," as he pointed to the backseat? A case could be made for his legs. Short ones on his Dad, long johns on his. He could have made a case for the heater, for in this cold, the damnable Dantean cold of Minnesota's brooding winter—yet but the warm anticipatory breath of the frigid January and February of any newborn year—he could have said, "But the heater, Dad, it'll take an hour to get back here," but he doesn't. Luke knows what this means to his Dad. He remembers fondly his fatherly jostling, "Now, boys, squeeze the Friar up here," for he wanted to be close, yes, his Dad liked to tap Luke's knee now and then, not for any specific reason it ever seemed, just reaching over as if shifting the old Ford, this being now the automatic Buick, as if his knee were part of the necessary matter to touch for the car to proceed, and this was especially so whenever the family visited the seminary, then it was always, "Squeeze the Friar," for no matter how many inches per year Luke sprouted above his older brothers, Dad said, "Squeeze," and the others, glad for the roomier backseat, shoved, crammed their "little brother," bulk and all, knee to chin, stuffed him in, between them it was a gag—"Let the little children come unto Me!" Amen. But Luke knew: Dad's tapping was the touch on relic bones. But not today—"out" is the backseat.

There were many sufferings of cold to which this backseat moment connected him. And they were sufferings linked to his Dad. For it was the Call to find ways to enhance the suffering, to add to it like his mother's doilies added to the fading glory of the living room's end-tables, those battered but highly polished memories of others, called heirlooms, but for him, like himself, more statements of all that could not be said, should not be remembered, but here he was, and the cold, now truly cold, all that he hated about the North Country, now slipping under his feet and sneaking up his pants, "Jesus!"—a reflex, and he is there, it is now Staten Island with its own cold, more wet, and he with a theft of towels, slyly slipped up under his corpulent robe and caught at his inner belt, these now he has placed and in kneeling feels Jesus bend forward and he wipes His brow, for they stuff out the warmth seeping—warmth which he knows to be but the subtle devilish incubi slithering in under the clearing between door-frame and the floor—these he now blocks out, wipes out as if feverish beads of bloody sweat and turns towards the window, East to the darkling Ocean, there to fling open and submit himself to the late March winds, these now his companions of Lent, these come at him, thievish, chthonic waves eager for the lie of his warmth, his great lie as he knows: that his heart is beating for Jesus, that he is willing to shed his blood, they come and suck, in one unnerving moment of suck, all the heat, and he is there, whether he likes it or not, for he knows there is no going back, there, and with

each strip of his clothing, each peel of animal protection, each shedding of the threads of cotton and wool, with each strip he knows that he is still lying, for it is his flesh that he fears to yield, and his father's voice, that voice which surrounds his first memory of words, coming again so many times later in different places and times, but always coming with the same pleading, "Thy Will Be Done!"...and he knows what his father desired, that all "this": this world, this dirt, this matter, this illusion called time, that it all be peeled back so that true living could rise, and rise triumphantly, for we live in a dead world, "dead world," the phrase— and the cold—"We await the Resurrection!"—he knew as he now strips and reaches to the wind to put it on, put it on in its manifold aspects, its flowery styles, reach and slip on its gown of moonlight, thrusting his chest towards the frost-laced moon, allowing it to stitch itself in patterns of puncturing pain, and then the briefs of ice, these he weaves from the shaded spaces, those which promise pain unseen, and to his cock he welcomes the blade of ice, for it is such a night, one where as quickly as he wets his private parts small crystals of ice appear, oh, he has waited for this night, sought it by obeisance on other nights, offering himself as promise of pain for the universe, and so now he is rewarded, for it is in the below zeros and too cold for calculating wind-chill, this he knows is his night, the evening with his Dad, that man now present in voice's memory, "Thy Will Be Done!"...and it is the numbness which brings tears to his eyes, dry tears, swollen eyes, chafed lips, yes, a numbness which sends him chattering and shivering, but this he does not fear, rather understands it as the touch, that Fatherly touch of God Himself, He who knows His Son's love through His numbness on the Cross, so it is now, the ache of fingertips, the blueness of bloodless skin, and the stitching pain: oh, the bonding pain, the adoring pain, this night linked to the Resurrection he shares with father and Father...Luke is startled as suddenly the air slackens its chilled grip and caresses him with a whisper of the heater's dusty warmth.

This is the peril. He could see it signed from heaven, tailing a single prop plane: "This Is The Peril!" Truly, the message of the dusty warmth, the celestial communicator slotted beneath the radio, Voice under voice, but he knew, hears it as he was trained to hear the in-between, the true messages sent by God but heard only by the few, the Elect, these being, only as history has validated, the monks, those dedicated to hear, who know that hearing has to be deafened for hearing to be true...and as the warmth slips up Luke does not have to ask his Dad, yes, he knows that his father knows, knows that this was the last hour, the Final Moment, that with the warmth so would his son yield to the peril, but all he could say was unsaid in his voiceless, *Thy Will Be Done!*

As the car warms, so they begin to talk: chit-chat, family stuff—remarks about distracting things like sports, presidential politics, the weather, lots about the weather, but Luke knew that these were not the topics and words being truly spoken, truly heard, no, it was all that wasn't being said which this was all about: the net not hiding the light from the sun but yet the floating prison of the clueless fish. Yes, it had been but an instant, but Luke knew it had come, come sharply, although it was an instant lived only by his Dad. This man who had been there at that other instant—that moment when the flesh had cloaked him and slipped him out from the shaded womb of his mother, my wife, and he then was moved by the moment, so stunned that he knew why Peter had not been the first to the Tomb, knew that this cloak of flesh was the betrayal, that this son was come not to save but be redeemed, and so the Tomb, that last illusion of flesh, flesh in the stones, and why did Peter rush when Magdalene had called? Was it to see what he did not know, or was it simply to confirm for her what he had known, that which Jesus had delivered, that all flesh, all that was caped in the motherly flesh, that of mothers and Mother Earth, all this was the betrayal? For what was truly alive was beyond death, on the other side, not on this



side...but he had received him as his wife held him up, "Charlie, you have another son!" He was stunned then by the joy in her, in how the betrayal was hidden from her eyes, and he received him as he had received them all, bundles of life to be Redeemed...and so it had come to pass, that this son once more was born but this time by his own choice, born in betrayal, having turned his back—"Why?" This his wife knew was his every word upon hearing about Alfred's decision, and that only "Thy Will Be Done!" stitched in artful swirl and color and hung as her embroidered gift to him, this which alone spoke, long and sonorous for days and months, this was the only sound in the house, the sound which carried their moments together and which she knew was all that kept them together, for it was more their wedding vow than the troth of his personal love, no, it was what was truly said, "Love your wife like Jesus loves the Church"...and she submitted herself to his acts of redemption, his submissions to tasks of flesh which burned, soldered them together in fierce instances, ones which for him were abandonments into pains so fierce, pains which betrayed him in their pleasures but for which he suffered long nights on his knees...so it had passed between them, "Consummatum est!" He looks at Luke, his dead son, dead like himself, and sighs deeply knowing that now he will have to share with him the most treacherous secrets of betrayal, those of his heart, no, those of his flesh: the insidious betrayal of his own inner longings, talk to him, not today, not this moment, but at the time, a time he could foresee, as he had spent with his other sons, the time of revealing, of explaining Revelation from this side of the altar, as a man among women.

It was a time and a moment of fathering which this day he shuffles off to sometime in the future. This babe, now truly born again, he had to take in his arms and leave somewhere under as much security as possible, for he knows that he is a lamb among wolves—how little does he know about the wolves Luke has been among!—but in his eyes, fatherly eyes, the sight of St. Benedict's Towers brings comfort, and he seems himself the dutiful father, offering his son to the care of the teaching monks, the venerable Benedictines, offering as he had offered him these years past as oblation for the silent monks, The Brooders...but all this, the flurry of images of his son the monk and now these monks, all wash away as they pull into the parking lot by the chapel, and he need not have said it but he does, "Let's go in and pray," and both do, each knowing that God's Will is being done.

## **CHAPTER 6: The Lessening Decision**

When he enrolled at The Towers Luke had no clear notion of what he wanted to do with his life. From birth he had been chosen and his path defined by that act of grandmotherly Irish who, counting the sons and numbering him three, said, "This one is for God." And all knew that she meant that he was their ticket to heaven. For it was folk wisdom among them that a son or daughter dedicated to God as priestly Father, religious Brother or Sister meant that heaven was theirs. They rejoiced that this newborn one was and would be their innocence unblemished. So grandmother named him, "*Luke*. For he is the carrier of the message of Light for us."

For Luke, then, there had been no vocation but that of priest. His childhood through grade school was normal. He played with girls as well as boys: all this accepted as part of his normalcy. For the selection to the priesthood did not mean that he was to be unmanly or, greatest of horrors, a "soft" boy, no, his selection meant that he was to face a choice, have that choice thrust at him as challenge, the choice to not live with women. If the choice was to be authentic, they knew but never explained that Luke would have to suffer the pangs of youthful ardor, the agony of adolescent temptation, and the terror of departing the warm world of the maternal and the wifely. So it was that when he came home in third grade smitten by Susan, and when he learned to dance and strode proudly with the flowering Janet, and when he counted his first

slight whiskers and lathered up—"Got to shave!"— for his eighth grade graduation, all of these only strengthened his family's conviction that Luke was the one. They knew but never stated that if he were to make the choice that it had to be one through which he ripped his heart out, turned away from all that he could have, and then offered it, laid it on the altar as true and genuine sacrifice.

Luke did face the progressive agonies they so fearlessly and mutely planned for him. He found himself, from his earliest recollections, in love with some girl. He enjoyed the world of giddy girls and motherly ladies but it was not the perverse relish of temptation. Rather he pleased in the comfort of women. He liked the way they looked and was fascinated by their difference: yes, it was a look of beauty they brought to him. One of his earliest notes to Susan had been about how she was so like the rosebud all set to burst forth. With Janet he had spent hours listening to the things that interested her: cooking with her mother, baby-sitting noisy and rambunctious nieces and nephews, and asking him if he liked her hair long down or in a ponytail or rolled up in a bun. "Ponytail." Always he says ponytail, not knowing why but always wanting to watch it swing as he twirls her on the dance floor.

So when the time came, when the visiting Director of Vocations, Friar Ethelbert, finished his recruiting sermon with the question, "Which of you boys will be coming to the Mount next year?" the challenge for Luke was not Saint Paul's thorn in his flesh but rather whether he would surrender the beauty and the comfort. Still, being only months near fourteen, he had no way of fashioning the challenge in simple or clear words or thoughts. Rather it came in images: black cloth and somber faces, long lines of obedient youths singing without sweet melody, racks of beds made in harsh sameness, smells: of incense and expiring candles, clouds of sacrificed beeswax whose aroma permeated the wood of the pew, marinated it, and then the silence, almost measurable, as when walking down the corridor all alone he finds he cannot hear his footsteps, as if the seminary walls were sucking in all sounds, snatched them as they had begun to rise to tonality, stole them, stashed them away—it is so silent that he tries to stop breathing. Images, smells, soundlessness: all which struck him on his pre-decision visits to the minor seminary. Snapshots which brought no comfort to his inner sense, no laughter to his lips and no pleasure to his eyes.

Once at The Mount, these high school years of priestly study flared-up and whirled away like a calendar on fire. Months curled into ashes and the semesters passed with the quickness of confessional absolution, "Say three Hail Marys, four Our Fathers and do three Stations of the Cross. *Te absolvo.*"

Only in his senior year was he challenged to face the choice as his family had desired: the choice sealing their salvation. Curiously, the challenge did not come from within, rather from without—again through the questions of a visiting Friar, this time The Master of Novices, he who never appeared but hooded, eyes rimmed by a face carved by stern shadows, no lips, just a bit of tooth now and then, a hood which was full, pointed towards heaven, transporting a voice which came at Luke from all sides, inside and outside, upside and downside.

The Master was there to sift the wheat from the chaff, to cull the grains of gold from the dross, nay, from the mire of Fool's Gold. During the spring's Senior Retreat the earnest young seminarians heard, "You young men will be asked within the next two weeks to make a decision for Christ. Yes, a decision *for* Christ. And if you make this decision, what are you deciding against?" The juxtaposition was not uncommon rhetoric: "A decision for Christ means a decision against Satan"—routine and bland preaching. But then it was said again, no, not said, it was slammed down, landed upon him and the others like the proverbial ton of bricks, what came

forth from The Master was more than thunderstorm, it was murder. Truly, murder. That's all Luke could hold in his mind, that one word, *murder*. He felt that The Master was going to murder him, his voice matched by his right fist slamming down, a full armed, reach-back-and-slam-with-all-your-might ramming of his fist through, yes Luke thought for sure that it was going through the wood of the pulpit, he could already see the splinters flying, but all that came was a jolting thud as the priest's arm bounced upward and a thousand smithereens of his now obliterated watch flew about: each part, fragile and innocent as it was, landed with a thud, the attention The Master had throttled from his listeners was so taut with silence that the watch's fragments were heard by all: tingles sounding like chimes fluttering, glass bouncing with a basso screech...it was all just murderous.

What was happening? Luke didn't know whether The Master had hurt himself or was truly about to bolt from the pulpit and run amok. Only Luke's curiosity matched his intense fear, each nailing him to the pew. Then, with the vigor of a patriot defending the homeland: "Satan, who as you know came as a serpent," and with a most tortured intensity came the first sledgehammer of hatred that Luke had ever truly witnessed, "A SERPENT WHO IS WOMAN!"

The Master's words snatch all breath from Luke's lungs, fly towards him with furious speed, soar and slash across his stomach, renegade winds which cut and dissect: slice, pain following sluicing pain, dissect and rend him down through his tensed thighs. "Women, my young Friars to be, who listened to the serpent and then tempted Adam." The Master screws them to their seats, "Do you know this serpent?!"...Whole minutes clang onto the floor like bell clappers falling from the chapel's belfry. No one moves. No one forms a thought. Luke cannot not feel except from his eyes, and what he feels is cold darkness. For from The Master's mouth words rip and gush forth, words which ice him to the bone and blind, siphoning his attention into one singular stare, a stare The Master gathers eyeball by eyeball. "YES!" he bellows, "You do know HER!" and chants, "You know HER!" YOU know HER!" "YOU KNOW HER!" Craftily, with a deft gaze The Master draws the venom hidden, cached from birth within each of their souls, "For I have heard your confessions...your confessions, and I know...*I know*."

Luke hears these memories and knows that such had been part of his decision, why he had left, but coming now, Why now? Possibly this Preparatory Retreat: this one week he has bargained away from the Benedictines, inveighed and got them to permit him to attend, now at a distance, now as a layman but so to have a week before school in silent Retreat. Here Mass has ended, the priest and altar-boys have departed, the altar candles are snuffed, and it is he in the encroaching darkness, lights being turned out, only the sanctuary light left—but then darkness always brings out Her, Mary, the rack of votive candles, Why? Why did so many candles burn before her? Her on the Sidelines, Out of Bounds, Cheerleader, Smiling Mom, proudly telling all who want to hear, "That's my son!"

She has stirred him, this one of her minor feast-days, here today where the prayers are about her, scripture regarding her, the priest with Her special blue ribbons on his chasuble, and a few poorly sung songs about her: Mother, Virgin, Blessed...it all comes back, *Because it has all never left?* Here at Mass is he ever anywhere but where he has always been? A boy with his Dad searching the semi-darkness of the cavern called Church: from Saint Vincent's in Bayonne to the Mount to the Novitiate to the theologate to here—but isn't here also there? Oh, Luke wants to stop, puts hands to his ears and presses them into absolute deafness, he doesn't want to hear because he knows that he doesn't know how to answer. Now, at this time, here at The Towers he has to begin to make new decisions, different decisions: lesser, ones like his brothers and sisters have made: Doctor? Lawyer? Teacher?...just a decision: then be a Good Man, layman, father and

daddy, naturally he wants relief, but kneeling here he feels the Blood...it is all too fascinating, he too weak to resist, She comes, They come: he does not want to shudder...rises and hurries away from the altar, away from the Lust...just away, and out into the January air, the air of a new year, 1967, the first year he thinks of as an empty year, one that he has no idea about its outcome, not knowing what path to follow, a year just there...and so he walks over to the Quad, finds the Office of the Registrar, asks for and fills out the forms, comes to the blank space for "Major" and "Minor"...and it is not that difficult, they will grant him junior status if he continues in Philosophy, so he does, and scribbles in Anthropology as a minor. "Done," is all he says to himself, it has been decided, the lessening has begun.

## **CHAPTER 7: The Towers**

Luke wanted to kneel in the snow, find that spot he had found before, back in a space and a time which seems less real to him now, but why? The Towers were as much seminary in form as the Novitiate had been. Here a thousand men, Minnesota breaths falling upon their wintry chests, hungry men, eyes afire, flamed with desire, some to know, some to just be, but he has seen it, tracked their footsteps, thousands trudging up and down the pathways, these men in search of something, a something most didn't know by name, and sent here to search by others also unclear about the search. Yet this was not the same desire, not the same flame, yet, it was also a manly desire.

Yes, Luke has found a phrase, "manly desire." This is what he sees in their eyes, possibly clearer here than back there? But even his dreams are now not like dreams were, or so he thinks. "Manly desire," he said that to one guy during a coffee-mug recess, said it in respect to the topic for their common philosophy class, and the fellow looked angrily at him as if he had cursed him or rather cursed his mother and sisters, for he stood up and said, "What?!" Said it with an uncomprehending knowing, as if he had just cursed him in Greek...and then the guy had moved, almost sprinted away.

Luke was left with a solitary amusement, for what could he have expected from the guy? Even if he had not been in philosophy class Luke would have been taken for a comic straight man, for in the Tradition only thoughts counted, not emotions, and the word *desire*, he knew it was what did the trick, a word associated only with sin in the Catholic mind, and so translating to manly sin, manly being almost a word of intimacy, for they were only to talk about being manly, not act it out, and desire drew out the action, placed the image: a man desiring, yearning, mouth open wide, wolf howling, late Northern Lights night and buck naked against all of his base emotions, and if not that, then "Sweet Boy!"—one with the downcast glance, an act of submission, enticing: the desire of the manly, the crudest and most craven of sins: all this, so he knew, just from the slapdash of two words—*manly desire*.

Nevertheless, Luke knew that this was it, that all around him was manly desire, but a desire which could be "Okay," considered the right thing to want to possess, actually was a way to God, desiring to be a good man, father, provider, husband, worker, lover, natural as the desire of Saint Joseph, Mary's spouse, Jesus' stepfather, a desire bordering on Desire but not ecstasy, not rapture, collared by Duty...he could see it in how the campus had been laid out, all trails leading to the Church, all trails away from other things and towards Him. So clearly does he sense it, it linking him back to the seminary, he spies the same shadows, the same voids in the moon-rays, yes, The Towers had been built by the same architects, those who knew the journey of the manly soul...but it was desire in lower-case letters, not capitals—a difference of kind or of degree? A desire for holiness but not Holiness?

Now here Luke desires, yes, it is capital: Desires, now for the snow. It is an almost restful desire, oddly so once he realized that he could be here as he was there, yes, a calmness came upon him, the first calming moment since his Dad had dropped him off. Dropped like mail in a chute. He had taken him to the Dean of Students, sat him down outside as he talked inside, heard the murmurs, a laugh: "You're a good man, Charlie!"...and then Dad came, "You're in," shook my hand, and left.

But it wasn't a leaving like at the seminary, no, there Dad never really ever left, no, he was carried by Luke as token upon his chest, a small scapular, a tear of cloth with a paper image of Mary, glued, Mary exposing her heart, not bleeding but exposed, and when he touched it he touched his Dad. Here, this time his father had left. The handshake and the blurt, "Good luck," were without exclamation, without a hand upon the shoulder, nary a hug, so what?...but everything: his shoulder, his chest, their link through Her, for Dad wore one too, somewhat larger, and he prayed his daily Office, his set of ritual prayers in faithfulness to his commitment to the lay Third Order of Carmelite, yes, everyday: in sickness or health, "The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary" in celestial unisonance with all members, living and dead, of "The Third Secular Order of Our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Teresa of Jesus", yes, he just upped and left...watching him Luke feels that he is watching himself go, exit, leave, and when he turned to find his way, take the chit from the Dean with his dorm name and number, so he felt empty, this his only comfort.

Because he had never thought of life except as a priest, Luke had had no clear idea about what to do. Jobs and careers had always been things his brothers or sisters talked about. Oddly, now life was as if by default—at the best, all that he could do was become a scholar, this he had been trained to do, but a secular scholar?...How could he continue to study sacred scripture? That wasn't a job, it was a vocation. What to do? Vatican Council Two had loosened the traditional strictures against "lay theologians," but even if he sought that, what would he become? He would be condemned to the footnote, be consigned to dusting off words, polishing pericopes, clarifying their meanings, re-tooling old metaphysical arguments—No! It would be like becoming a mortician after having spent one's whole life delivering babies day in and day out...What can he do to hear the cry of life?...Resigned, doomed, it is off into the land of philosophy, that secular wisdom, one the Catholics see only as profane, not the end.

Philosophy, that which he comes to hate, as if going to bat but no one throws a ball, just standing at the plate, this is all he sees, all mind-wanderings and word-splitting and carving out of profane capital letter words: Truth, Democracy, Free Will, Fairness...what he hungers for, but he knows it not as a hunger, is the flesh, nay, the Flesh, Body. It is all in his mind's eye: flesh, that of the Cross, torn and bleeding, that of his own film of fantastic flesh, cold and aching at bone. He cannot stand to sit amidst the secular chatterers! No, he wants to stand up and scream, but what would he scream? And after screaming what would he tell them? So he doesn't, no, he sits, does sit amidst the chatterers, is called upon to chat and does chat. Oh, his knees jitter up and down, his pencil raps and taps the yellow pad, his tongue like a boa twists around his throat, choking, calling for him to surrender his heart "or else!"

*The snow.* Manly desire. "Here," and a magazine soars over his roommate's bed, reaches a zenith and then plunges, slapping the edge of his, and plops onto the floor. It is the guy, that guy: Jim, the only other philosophy student he knows who has also been in the seminary: in and out, that's how he laughs it, "In and Out. No blessing with the Holy Water!"—all announced and pronounced in tandem with various vulgarities of sign: pointing to his mouth, then pushing fingers upside his cracked ass as he bends forward, mocking obeisance, rising again but with a

self-delighted smirk, drawing with his fingers that which came most imaginarily from his asshole...and he waves it about, intoning, "IN!...and...OUT!"

Luke cannot, and guiltily acknowledges does not, stop his laughter, there was something unlatching about it, well, yes, "unlatching"—the word catches him as Jim is sighted, sees him unlatch, as if he were a sneaky kid at the cookie jar, no, the rascally altar-boy who steals the box of unconsecrated wafers and hides them from Sister Johanna! "Yeah?" Is his grunted response, both are still. Jim smiles. "Manly desire," he says, as if delivering a library book.

If Luke's hands had trembled the first time Janet Tremblay laid her head upon his left shoulder, cheek arrest his heart, hands quivering with a slight unknowing, as if forgetting how to lock back together again—how to clasp the shovel's handle or do the so many common tasks—just there, a moment, he never forgets how his hands looked, strangers, long absent cousins, but within the reviving Rock 'n Roll beat carrying her true name, "Earth Angel, Earth Angel!"...they were back together, upon her back, one above her waist, the other holding her hand, no, not holding, cradling, treasuring, and he feels as if he is cupping her, all of her, there, within his hand, this the way to hold a girl, to station oneself at those points from which she can never leave, never again abandon...now they tremble, but not upon touching, no, they tremble with expectation, not an invitation, fascination and condemnation, they tremble as if watching a withered hand reach up from under the bed and begin to walk slowly towards you, you knowing that your hands are the first thing it will reach...and it is the cover which is enough: *Playboy*. Luke waits to hear, but he is alone, waits to hear The Master's warning...but he is alone, *alone*.

*In the snow*. Manly desire. He could see it in their foot-tracks. As if he had been raised as a soul hunter, one to discern the seventeen kinds of Eskimo snow and the consequent seventeen violations of Purity, stacks and stacks of snow about him, mounds, eighteen inches so far this winter, and he knows that it is not within The Towers, those looming guardians stout aside the belly of the Church, no, he knows that it is in the shadows they cast, there that the way to the shade begins, to the difference. This he knows, is drawn back to again, that talisman he carries in him, laced across his eyelid, it flutters, its rockets out like a harpoon from a cannon...yet, falls short—His dreams, the monk's dreams, have left him.

So all he knows to do, knows like a man stranded in a foreign country unfamiliar with the language knows, is to kneel, submit, he kneels and makes the beggar's gesture, knows now like the mute knows, he who speaks poetry read only by the blind, yes, all he had to do was look at her, nameless her, smiling and innocent, but not beautiful, no, he could not find the beauty, though she was gorgeous, and it made him laugh to see her as a bunny, big ears and a cotton tail, and he knew it wasn't Janet or Stephanie or Martha or any he so loved, but there, playing, *Playmate*...Was he to fall through the cover like Alice down the rabbit's hole and romp with her in Playland? A question only his hardening cock left unanswered, for it rose like himself playing at the beach, swimming under water and then rocketing up to scare his sisters, it rose and came at him like a nail being driven upward from under the bed, it rose and almost carries him upward as his trousers tent and he can feel the gasp of his *fons*, and it is not as if he had not seen it, no, it had come at unexpected times and as betrayer of his dreams, sinfully true, but he had always, with the press of his Will, the inner thrust of his stalwart desire to be Pure, just willed it down, scoured and scorched from his mind any images that were tags and remnants or flags to its presence, but not now, no, it comes and he knows that he has to let it out, out, but for what? *Why?*

Jim had gone. His roomie was somewhere else. It probably was dinner time. *Why?* is all that punctuated this time, defined this space. He looks at it. Thick and large, his hands shake, he

is afraid to move, afraid that the first beat of "Earth Angel" will doom him to the devil's dance, so he simply stares, dares not to look back at her, has forgotten her, has pushed her off the bed and plopped her on the floor, it is what he sees now, Jim's laughter, *manly desire!*

As great as the heat was: as searing as it frizzled the air about, for all had become fire: the room, walls aflame, his sheets rippling and smoke billowing from the pillows, all incendiary and he now himself a candle and flame is his cock, it burns and he is being consumed, offered as a votary candle, someone's pledge for a blessing bestowed, so great was this heat, but as great as it was so he knew it was but a reminder of the snow.

Deep into a snow-bank he moves his body, wiggles it, face pressing against caked stone, his heat, heat of breathing, heat of expiring desire, all this melting a place, like impressing a wax seal, there his body, bare-chested and shoe-less, kneeling, no nailed into the bank, and his cock, it now no longer a spike, no longer a blade, long, sharp with cutting edge, no his blood is being spilled as it is absent, not present. There is no blood of his ancestors, no blood of his children unborn spewed about, no, it is all the absence, and this he knows is manly desire.

"ABSENCE," is what he titled his finals' paper. And he wrote about the male as creator, as being faced with Nothingness and from within that Nothingness finding God and by sharing that Nothingness making God his Father, "a curious act of absurd creation," the prof had scribbled with a florid red pen, anger, but Luke was undeterred, for he knew that he knew more in his forgetting than he could place upon this paper and that he was right, "Man created God?" a question underlined three times? *Stupid prof.* Luke knew what The Towers were all about, two stakes in the ground between which was Nothing.

Manly desire.

## **CHAPTER 8: Jim**

"Ya know, Jennings, you're one sick Mick." The way he said it. Was it sarcasm, an indictment, a doctor's analysis or just a probe, a stick up his ass? With Jim it was always hard to know for he had that way of speaking which lacked, well, What was it? A something, a tone or inflection, what the hell? Jim drives Luke crazy. "You gotta listen to him, real close." And then Luke would say to the hearer, "No, I mean real close. Like it's never what you think you hear." So, "Sick. Is it sick or me being a Mick that's sick?" Jim smiles; cat's whiskers.

And then he'd get going, but only upon a beer, that's how he phrased it, "Get me upon a beer," and Jim would expound, a kiss of the Blarney Stone in him too, but more dramatic, with a flair, words punched out followed by fists or a jump up and a stomp on the ground for emphasis, and when the bottle was there, as it so often was, it was a baton, and the maestro made music, though at times it was atonal and often dissipated into the scratching of glass against the wall, Jim liked to use beer bottles like erasers on a wall.

*Beer*, that was the topic. "Sick. Sick. Luke you're sick, and do you know where the cure is?" The bottle like a thermometer he waves in front of Luke's mouth. "Open and let the liquid of the gods cure you of all your ills," waving, swaying himself with the bottle, waiting, patiently waiting, like a surgeon about to make first cut with the scalpel, and Luke opens and Jim pours, does so expertly, with a mere parachute of liquid, enough to give him a taste of it all. Caught in the moment Luke pools the beer in his mouth, does not swallow, closes lips as a dam and then waits. *Beer*, his father had served a few, at summer barbecues but not to him, his was for the sacred wine, the liquid of the vine which drew the blood from Mother Earth, him for the consecrated imbibing, but now it began to stir his tongue. "Strange," and so he swallows a bit, then a gulp and it was gone. "Good," Jim pronounces as if handing down a judicial verdict, "Your first beer. Now, you'll get well."

Luke hated it. It was bitter. Not nasty, but not enjoyable, not like some sugary sweet pop or a tart Canada Dry, no, it was different. He had drunk it, just a mouthful, then grabbed some chips to chase away the taste. Jim had gone into the kitchen, now he returns with a bottle just for Luke.

The bottle. Luke looks at the bottle. Dark, chocolately, not opaque but thick and sweating, as if struggling for air, hard beads of sweat, and he feels the grasp coming from it, at first just a cloaking like a handhold, not his hand but it holding his, and then the cold becomes a grip and it reaches within him and finds his thirst. "It's not Sweet Sixteen, Man. You can suck this one." And then he laughs, a half-throated laugh, one that doesn't want to leave, just remain self-satisfied. "Sweet Sixteen"—Jim's word for any girl, no matter the age, calls them all "Sweet Sixteen." Until now they hadn't talked too much about them, not along the sex line, so the word "suck" throws Luke, it doesn't fit with what he knows about Jim, but then what does he know?

This is Jim's apartment. Somehow he finagled a way to be off-campus his Junior year, something to do with his claim to being an Existentialist philosopher. "Told 'em I needed reflective space. Said—told those sheepish fools," another phrase, here the key one for the monks and all priests, "told them that if they couldn't give me a cell inside, than I damn well needed my own hermitage." A swig of beer, a wall scratched with screaming glass, "They bought it! Damn sheepish fools."

*So why am I here?* Luke wonders, quietly, quietly settling into an obese, tattered recliner, one of two, twins, "Big Mamas," Jim says, "Mama Cass and Mama Ass." Luke couldn't remember which was embracing him now, no matter, Jim was the only other philosophy major that he talked with outside of class, all the others were seminarians, preparing for the theologate, some for the local diocese, others for the Benedictines, whose initials Jim preferred to rearrange and call *S.O.B.*'s. Yet, it wasn't like he and Jim had just gotten along. If that wasn't the ticket, he'd never be here. Jim had sniggered at his "Manly Desire" paper, snarled at his getting up every morning and going to Mass... "Haven't figured it out yet, eh, Jennings?" Jim who ranted about the irrelevancy of Thomism and championed thinkers unwelcomed in the cloistered halls: Sartre, Camus, Nietzsche, and who said that "The great novelists have more to say than all the damn caterwauling philosophers. Look at Dostoyevsky. Kafka. Hesse." Then he throw in a few Luke was yet to know, "Par Lakervist. Nikos Kazantzakis." Oh, he'd go on about this Kazantzakis guy and someone called "Zorba" but the monk professors would cut him short, cite a papal encyclical or two, and all would be sliced and served by a steely silence.

So, when Jim asked him over after the last game of the football season—The Towers having made the league finals this year—he came because he had nothing else to do and curiosity, well, ya know *just curious*. Why Jim wanted him here was yet a minor mystery. "Drink up, goddamn it." The words were angry, the t and d's a bit sloppy, almost ses. Unbeknownst to Luke who had never been around drinkers, Jim was over the front stoop into deep drunk.

What he hears next, then, is a sermon, but one preached by a man with marbles in his mouth. However, the intensity of it all is what carries the clarity. "See, my boy, son, shouldn't I call you son me being the High Priest and all," laughs, swings the bottle, sprinkles its last clinging drops, once to his right, then left, again right and left as if the celebrant at High Mass blessing the faithful with the aspergillum: "You've the sickness, son, I mean it, Man, you were locked up in a loony bin and didn't know it, didn't know how they inoculated you with the poisons, that's the crime, a smart asshole like you and you didn't even know," long pause, reflective, "so what I need to know," light-bulb flashing, "is *why* you left!" And with that exclamation he is up and over at him, standing, almost falling into Luke's lap, eyes eager like a



dog for a bone, "Man, tell me, why'd you leave?"... Luke isn't up for this so he puts his bottle down, steadies it by Big Mama Cass' foot (never called his, Big Mama Ass), makes a small move, quarter-rising and hand about to push Jim away so that he can get up: "No no no no no no no!" is beer breathed all over him, and falling backwards: "No. No. NO! Goddamn it. TELL ME!"

There was nothing between them, nothing for either to grab onto. Jim was looking for firewood, and Luke was seeking an exit. With a flourish Jim leans over and snags Luke's bottle, lifts it high above his head and intones, "Heal my brother Luke. Close his wounds so that he can speak. Unshackle his soul, free him!" Luke, if nothing else, is entranced. Jim is really a screwy guy and Luke can't but laugh, so he does, laughs and grabs the bottle, swigs the final drops and without thinking, merely reaction emulating the leader, waves his long-arm now bottle-armed, waves with an imitative flourish and scratches the side-wall with its tip, Jim springs up, moving like a teacher with corrective intent, printed to show his pupil how to properly thrust the bottle, side-ways and moving downward with a southwesterly motion, round and up back to its start, then two-strokes, could it be but a cross?...and with a casual flip the bottle resides back on Luke's lap. Jim steps to room center and bows.

Adulation justly received, Jim sets about re-fashioning the room, setting things for a new mood, a deeper adventure, he stacks a pile of records, White Rabbit, Joe Cocker, Moody Blues, kicking it off with Dylan's "Everybody's gotta get stoned." Dylan's whining helping him turn down the lights, strike a match or two, the room now victim of the candle, amusement parlor of shadows, the cloak of a nestling darkness, of a hidden warmth.

"The god Oden," long pauses between sounds, frying, then sometimes a feverish rush of words, boiling, "The god Oden made beer. Or was it Woden? Maybe not. Could've been a woman." Pauses, short, "Woe-man," but doesn't wait for Luke's confirmation. "No. No. Never. See," and they are six bottles past his first gulp, six bottles by his side and his gut aching, his bladder having been relived more than six times, and chips and pretzel fragments scattered upon the rug as if a harbinger of a fuller storm to come, six bottles and Luke is feeling his head in a different way, as if it's no longer round but long, longish, like it is taller than before, he even had looked into the mirror on his last pee, looked and measured across his face with his fingers to make sure the proportions were correct, but he swore it was longer. "See," Jim postures pedantically, "See, beer is man's substitute for breast milk," and he laughs so hard that this time his scratching along the wall is done with such force that the bottle shatters, "Ooops! Broke a boob!" Luke is rollicking with him, the coffee table gets kicked and books and magazines litter around them, but it is the laughing which bonds them, "What the fuck do ya mean boob?" Luke says, not even chiding himself for saying "fuck," not hearing himself say it, just feeling the word and its power. "Boob, Man, don't you see. Look at this bottle," and Jim holds it close in front of his own eyes, stares at it like he's never seen it before, "I mean old Freud would've made this into some kinda bloated penis boat, ya know what I mean? Sure ya do. But like everything else, he was really a horse's ass," and they both break up at that, again not from some insight into the oddity of its juxtaposition but because they could hear the horse fart, Luke's seventh and Jim had dropped off the scoreboard," and this is really a boob. See the spout," he fingers the hole, "it's a nipple, this is the aure...aure," swallows the word, savors the image, "shit, the dark stuff...and the neck's what sucking does to a boob"—he sucks a long hard one, finishing with an exaggerated curly tongued lick and suck replete with a self-conscious pause for acclaim from the audience. "Golden liquid. Gold. That which the alchemists sought for. Brew. They found it in the brew," laughs naughtily, "Fucking Freud would say it's piss, Man, can you dig that? Queer bait." He

holds the bottle upward resting it upon his palm, stares a moment and then looks at Luke with a look part glare, part lechery, part giddiness, "Man, behold the Golden Calf!"

Luke is totally baffled, more than a bit lost upon the river of his rising drunkenness, more hyper than he has ever been, not knowing now about his subtle allergic reaction to hops—addictive curse of his Celtic forbearers—and Jim rings in his conclusion, his summary, his triumph of wisdom by taking two bottles and flinging them across the room, they bounce, one twirls to safety, the other smashes into unseen shards, neither moves: stoned guardians on an elsewhere place. "Boobs. Its Sweet Sixteen's boobs. That's what it's all about, Man." Said in his own Jim way, said so that Luke would think it was his own conclusion of "Manly Desire." Long, long pause, "Man, ain't that just what it is?!"

Luke couldn't make it to the eighth, Jim was beyond needing a bottle, just savoring his own breath was enough to keep him tanked, but he got around to it again, as if he had laid a clever trap, "Man, why'd you leave?"...Luke lets the question mark hug the wall, for him it is a spin of "Eroica" and a big flop into Big Mama Cass, and by so doing telling Jim to drop his own Ass, and so he does, they nap.

Jim awakes as he so often does after "bowling with bottles" with a slight jolt, as if someone were running an electric current up his back, a jolt followed by a quick survey of his body parts, to make sure none had run off, and when he came to his head he was prepared for the howling echo from the bottom of the well, but none came, so he knew that he had just dropped off, nodded. But where was it coming from? That unusual sound, something like the slap of waves at ocean's edge, and then he remembers: Luke...Luke's crying, not a bawling, not whimpering, but crying. Jim sits up and forward, leans towards the big guy, realizing—something obvious but lost by other distractions—that Luke's "One big motherfucker, six five or something and a rack of hardness. Shit, didn't know they lifted weights in that piss hole of sacred depravity"...but at this moment it is not the size of his body but the leaking of his soul. And he remembers: The Question.

"Luke," Jim floats a whisper, feeling a bit embarrassed, "Luke, Man, what's happening?" With that the crying stops, a large claw drags Luke's face and a shadow rises where Luke is supposed to be, something absorbing into Huge as it rises out of Big Mama and sits on her lip, shadow, Jim realizes that it is already twilight, all is shadowed, confessional, only the floating debris of daylight brings him bits and pieces of Luke's face, but it was his voice not his face he wants.

"Yeah, I'm okay." Then Luke sits back down, plop onto Big Mama Ass, not thinking the name, just moving towards comfort, hiding The One Who Is Near, and without prompting he begins, slowly, as if laying bricks, not intentionally but as if following a design, an explanation he has many times before constructed. "I couldn't break-through. I mean, ya know, you know what I mean, right? I did it all. The praying. The penances. The submissions. The dragging myself around the Stations of the Cross until my knees swelled with calluses. I left my body, tears and bits of my flesh, blood. I just left it all. I called out to the Night. I took in the cold. I fasted. And fasted. I ran and I worked. I prayed and I prayed...but I couldn't break through."

Jim was not sure just what the hell Luke was really saying because for him the seminary had been all about breaking-out, not through. It had been a hell not unlike working in his Dad's paper mill during the summer. Monotony. Idiot routines. Serving a machine. In the sem, it was the Discipline. It was all too terribly boring. It had never touched his flesh. He had avoided doing what Luke says and hints that he did, only knew a few who did just a couple of the things Luke's confessing, all sickos with martyr complexes, Creepy Kids, dark eyelashes..."Jesus

motherfucking Christ," is all Jim can mutter, spit into his own mind, what to think? This Luke's different, has weird but curious energy, *Kosmic vibes*, *Man!* Yeah, Jim knows that this Luke is someone he wants to know, not saying it, but sensing he's "In some kinda deep shit, Man!"...Luke's words were making Jim's walls bleed.

"So I had to face it. Either...I had done it all. Done it right. That I was, had become what THEY Wanted...and that it wasn't...enough... or that I had...had... failed." Stops. Picks up a bottle, empty, and taps with it, "Not failed as if never to find, not that, like I'd have to leave and find another way. So, I don't know. Don't know why I left. Just maybe I got through and just found myself here. Maybe all that I found there was that I was to find another way to break-through? What'ja think?"

"Look, Man, why don't you come and share the pad?"

All that Luke knew was that it wasn't here, not yet, but he had come to like this guy Jim. "I'll think about it, Man. Maybe in the fall." And as bees just stop and head back towards the hive, so it was time, Luke pops-on a nearby light, both know that the mess is not an issue.

Jim drives Luke back to the dorm.

## **CHAPTER 9: Weeds**

Weather in the North Country has its moments of wisdom. Wisdom as in great truths, those things humans know they need to learn about but which they know they never will, so they cage them in Capitals: pets and inmates. Although Luke had studied the great abstractions of Life, Truth, Liberty, Freedom and the Catholic portfolio of Grace, Salvation, Redemption and Forgiveness, he was not attuned to the weather that he himself was. So when the early thaw came—bursting with a rowdy brashness not normally its pace, came like fiery spitballs slobbering down the cheek of the sky, fiery globs dotting the frozen ground with instant mush pools, fireballs which sizzled, racing towards instant expiration, and yet eternal as their heat paroled seeds which sprang and shot from their incarceration of winter, parolees who scrambled this way and that, caught any scattering breeze regardless of direction, without plan, seeds running, fleeing so fast that the fury of the gardener could not be contained—Luke was not ready for the weeds.

What was it about beer? It was all he could think about. In class, out, up first thing in the morning, just before dinner. *Beer*. Yet it was not to be his. Not as he desired, no, it became his as a craving. Craving only because until a Senior and off-campus he was still disciplined by campus rules, rules which said "dry." The whole stupid county was dry. It was rumored that the Benedictines kept stills in the hills, and this was believable. Luke remembers, now that it is of interest to him, the cornucopian liquor cabinet in the priest's rec room. Back then he had never given it the merest of thought, now he wonders why he was so stupid. Anyway, Jim's place is just out of county—Did he plan it that way? "Stupid. Do ducks live in water?" Jim didn't need a reflective place, he needed wetlands! Luke wanted to fly with him.

Luke had turned twenty-one just as he exited the theologate—his date of incarnation being a sharing of the great conjunction of festivities commemorating the Lord's Transfiguration and Lady Hiroshima's "Big Boy," each with its imagery and scriptural text, "a bright cloud overshadowed them, and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying....," atomic mushrooms and all, spiced by Fatherly words of approval, "...in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Gonna be twenty-two this coming August 6th, yet the fear of his parents and of his grandparents and theirs and thereon back in time—that fear of great drunkards never having faced their fears, this his patrimony, his matrimony—this fear had kept him from pilfering even a sip of beer or innocently sampling other adolescently tempting spirits during the summers past,

fear of the grandmotherly condemnation, "Idiots. Drunkards!"—remembering "Little Angels"—that this time he would be *Drunkard!*

Although he was sobered by this fear, Spring has become but one ceaseless homage to the Boob, as now he and Jim joke about it, "Let's BOOB!" But even then it has only been on weekends, the campus being ten miles from Jim and the town of Little Falls. Ten miles and only Seniors could have cars. Ten miles where the girls were—a growing interest of Luke's—but it was the ten miles to The Lair that he measured. Only on weekends could he leave campus without arranging for parental approval. It was only now that Luke began to feel the Discipline as Jim hated it.

Out on the floor the Sweet Sixteens dance, and the dancing gets hotter as the night wears on, hot because The Lair is like an ice fishing shack, almost airtight to rein in every ripple of heat during winter and screwed ever more airtight to prevent the escape of air-conditioned breezes in the Spring, like today. Hot and sweaty, and a beer was always called for, was the union card each flashed, young men and young women, there not so much for the dance nor the drinking but for the excuse. Few stated it that way and although Luke harbored the thought he had never explored it. *Excuse*: to find an explanation for doing something forbidden, and for them it was to be together. Young savages around the campfire. Ancient young savages around eternal campfires. All times and all ages looking for an excuse, a way to slip away from parents and control and delve into the unknown which was themselves, their passions, an excuse to become a torch, burn brightly, attract moths who would die for a kiss of your lips...be weeds.

Luke's drinking cycle was as orderly and disciplined as he never realized it was. Friday had its "Who can get ripped first!" bravado. Saturday was an all day blow-out, but one of exploration: sipping brandy, nursing a Jack Daniels, sampling ales and stouts — "Ah, Guinness!"—beer and football, beer and basketball, beer and Bowling for Dollars! Sunday was for repentance and forgiveness. For no matter how soused he got Luke always made it in time for a hurried pre-Mass confession and the taking of Holy Communion. He didn't stop to think about drinking as a sin: laughed at the thought, a twisted Jansenist chortle, seeing himself actually saved by this waywardness, what Luke termed his "indulgence" as a shield against greater sin. He reasoned, where indeed would his unnamed urges take him if he had not the bottle? Yet despite this sculpted intellectual justification, Luke felt that he wasn't supposed to get drunk, so his actual confession revolved around a more esoteric point, namely, sins of omission. He was sure that there were things he thought—thought more than did, and "dirty thoughts" and all had been drilled into him since he could stand-up, hold his mitey pecker and pee—so he confessed "dirty thoughts." He just knew that when plastered that he had to be thinking them.

Sins of Omission: blanketed by his blackouts, snuggling into a veiled recess his visits to the paper brothel. Only when blitzed did he have the courage—the will of the spirits—to confront "Sweet Sixteen." Not that he even had the conscious courage to prepare. He never personally bought a *Playboy*, never even asked other guys for it, this he could never do, no, he just "borrowed" one for a while. Got to know who had them, tried not to tell himself what he was planning, that he was casing the joint, knew when guys went to class, had dates, and knew who kept stacks of old ones, not stealing this month's or even the one just past, for they were still being used, icons stowed under the mattressed altars, so he took months past, even years, for him it didn't matter, he had no fear of time travel.

For the record, during the whole of the Spring semester of '67 Luke never dances, just drinks. Imbibes and wends homeward, back to his dorm, grateful that his roomie lived nearby and went home every weekend, "My girl wants to see me." Some Sweet Sixteen who was

actually Sweet Sixteen. So the place was his: door shut, lights dim, the curtain pulled back for moon-rays and then Her—the girl next door, that innocent face so gorgeous, not beautiful to him, not like Janet and...but such Puppy Love names were now less remembered these days, so at times he would call Her *beautiful*, yet mostly *gorgeous* she was, for gorgeous was not comfortable like beautiful, rather it was graspable, something you wanted to reach out and have, hold in your hand, their bodies were gorgeous, incredible Boobs, liquid breasts, he saw them jiggle on the page, jiggle against chests white like powdered snow, just the first falling, gentle, the type you want to hold in your hand, your flat palm, hold and not press, not round into a snowball, no, you just held it, let it lay there, let it lay upon you, stared at it...saw it as transformational, it was so pure it was almost water, and so you breathed upon it, sipped to inhale its snowiness, feel the prick of its coolness on your face, then you lick...these Boobs he wants to lick, and he does, licks them in his fantasy, sees himself buck naked with them and licking them, licking boundless breasts, then wilding down to creamy bellies, kissing knee caps, stroking their princess ankles, then back to their lips, sweet brushes across their eyes, and then ...

Beer rarely made him pass out, mostly he pissed it out about as fast as he downed it. But if he was tired to start with, the beer made it hard to get up no matter how many centerfolds he petted. Eventually—*Presto!*—he'd defuse his many heated fantasies of their squealing, screaming submission and his thud-fucking domination. Yet it was all so brief, more a spit than spurt, it was at these times that he hated beer, found himself betrayed and imprisoned, not free, yes, hated because he'd actually had to think about it, have to for a set of disturbing moments face the fact that he wanted to jerk off, craved, that he was there to masturbate no matter how long it took, these moments were his somber ones, ones that in confession he totally forgot but which hovered over him and so he swore deeply to the priest that there were "serious sins of omission." Yet in a way which confused and disturbed him, the priestly response was always the same, not a penance fitting, not the cold, not the snow, just "Three Our Fathers and make an extra Station. *Te absolvo.*" Fuck! all reduced to just words: whispered, so no one hears! Words which did not punish for the pleasure of his looks which fucked them, his wildings which fucked them, his blackouts which fucked them, "Fucked!" What prayers of penance could match that prayer of sin?!

On other days he got as hard as could be just by picking up the magazine. So hard-packed that he had to hurry his pants off for fear that his cock would get bit by the zipper. There was no need for creams or lubricants, all he had to do was stroke himself a few times and he would fly out through his muzzle, truly explode with all the velocity that this word contains, rise up and pulsate like an ack-ack gun, for him it seemed like hours, hours of coming, so totally unexpected, always unexpected, because he had hidden, no, not hidden rather smashed, stomped, squeezed all these years, all these aeons, thoughts of women...oh, he had no recollection of his monk's dream, no recall of his participation in the degradation, the hunting down of the frightened women, all Eve's daughters, chased across the landscape of Tradition's memory and fleeing into the horror of the Scriptural dream, because for them they had no woman's dream, no Eve's dream, it had never been, only Adam was told to lay down and when he slept the Father tore out his rib, no, this gorgeous rib did not dream, it was only pain, and as the monks dreamed so they were in pain, a pain only to be relieved by crushing women back into dust, crush them and re-create them as rib, heal the Father by pulverizing women.

Betrayer of the monk's dream, *jerk-off-Luke* was now an accomplice of the women. This is what his father knew, did not tell him, possibly could not speak even to his own self, but knew through intuition that his and now Luke's lot was to be betrayer—they the Judases. Here Luke

now is obeisant before the Siren, Her Eyes, of she who is old ugly crone behind the illusion of this slick beauty, a beauty forged from out the mist of "dark vapor eyes," forged into manacles, a slave collar, Siren: she who cannot be but companion, not she as image of God, no, she only as image of man, the male, and the price of companionship was to dwell within the illusionary world of women, a world of gorgeous desire, gorging, of mimicking—mocking?—creation through child bearing...no matter how many children are born can there ever be sufficient numbers to pay retribution for drawing Adam's attention away from his godly task? His role as the Father's son? Now with woman, Luke is distracted. She who wants his companionship. She who will pay for this companionship by whoring the flesh.

"Whores," in the back of his mind he knows that this is what they must be, should be, would be what he'd call them if he met any. Wouldn't he? But his desire, what to say about himself? Was he whoring when he makes them do what he wants in his mind? Was he...but he couldn't think that way, no, he overcame his hatred for them, let it only come later, after his wake-up in the morning, then blaming this guy Hefner and all the assholes who made these magazines, praying that this perversity would stop, crying to God, "Dear Father, I am weak. I am a sinner. I am not worthy." In such a troubled frame so he would trudge over to Confession, early morning, Father Casper, O.S.B., waiting there as he has waited for years, he knowing about Her, waiting for his sons to come to him.

In time Luke came to truly believe his sin a perverse blessing. "If I have these desires, and if I didn't masturbate, would I try to seduce a woman?" So he began to forgive himself before he went for absolution. He would argue that this was all temporary, just something before he found himself a wife, maybe a couple of years. This he says in his better moments. But when deeply into his brew he was into the dreams of the betrayers, here, pointing his cock at her and commanding, "Here bitch suck this!" and jabbing the glossy paper with the cloying tip of his dick, he'd have them lick him and kneel before him and stroke him, have them dance and strip just for him, have them lie down and slowly drop their panties, but what? What would that look like?

Here the tease: no pussy, no cunt, no hole as the gateway to hell. Oh, the slyness of these Beauties, these gorgeous babes, how they keep themselves hidden while fully exposed, this The Brooders' curse: he only to know Her darkly, vaporized, and then he watches himself, feels himself rising...in his mind thunder rolls across the prairie and wild boys are running about, screaming, cursing, chasing women, but not to kill them, not to tie them to the stake and get high on the fumes of their burning flesh, no, not to smash in their heads nor steal the children from their wombs, none of that, rather to stake them to eat them like steak, to capture them, wrestle with them but not hurt them, not bruise their downy selves, only to lavish manly desire upon them, to be like bees among the flowers, slowly tapping all the sweetness, touching and kissing, licking and probing, and then at the right moment plunging in, risking it all, seeing oneself being deflated like a gigantic balloon, expiring within her as she is filled up, creamed, totally stuffed with semen, mounds of semen, ocean waves, surging lakes of come, this is what he is giving her, and it seems like hours, mad, dervish, whirling and insane hours, hours where his head twirls around on his neck and he is looking at his ass, hours where fire destroys the world, hours of total warrior intensity, of having run with her out of the Garden of Eden and into...he then falls back upon his pillow, sweat all over him, cock aching but he does not register this fact, raw at its edges, using hand and sock and bed sheet, and it is the emptiness which hits him, a new twist on the emptiness, for he knows that he has created it, that from what has left his cock so is how the emptiness is created, and a chill comes across him, the paper dollies draw no attention, he is

already hating them, muttering curses at their shamelessness, at their stupidity, "Imagine. Taking your clothes off before a photographer and then having everyone in the world see you. Some dumb broads!" *Emptiness*. But no shuddering.

Without beer so the coming summer would almost be pure. Almost. In foggy waking moments he'd relive a nameless encounter, find a sloppy pleasure, curse himself, hate Her.

So he leaves The Towers and returns home to Hastings, home: safe, haven, anchor. Green grass of neat lawns, small town, hearing the corn grow. Although beer and masturbation were not what this summer would turn upon, it would pivot. Luke would turn, in his own curious way, his a spinning balance to the Summer of Love erupting in San Francisco, gyroscopic. Luke not going out there on purpose because he barely read the daily newspaper to know it in detail. Yet, what was happening in Golden Gate Park was happening within him, in his psyche, that elusive part of the ever malleable Self. So he is a vortex of the mind: gobbling, consuming, raging through words, words and stories, true to his training still trying to squeeze out a meaning, a map, a heart from thin paper...and it is Steinbeck which pick-axes and rends the first boulder: two images— Rose O'Sharon at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, her teat being something that boob had never meant to Luke, could never have been imagined as until now, now the image in his mind, and the rock in *To A God Unknown*...the primal rock, there, even in Hastings, farmland, the soil...it came alive: The Rock inside himself...then it was "GULP!" as he seared through D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller, footnoted back to Rabelais, foraged among Freud and his Moses and Totems, found a majesty in The Tower of Jung, "Certainly not what they teach at The Towers!"...in his mind wrestling with Altizer's "God is Dead" dialectic, thundering, oh, Norman O. Brown delivered him, connected him to the Evolutionary vision of Teilhard de Chardin's "Divine Milieu"—a thin sliver, everyone needs a thin sliver to hold onto, even if Ariadne's Thread!...yes, and the music: it wired him, Did he need to walk in Golden Gate Park? Weren't the vibes all that was needed? Crank into the same music: Sargeant Pepper and The Walrus, go berserk with The Doors, find meaning in Baez, Collins, Dylan: a trinity, a triptych...then Janis: if nothing else, Janis: the feeling of *blues*, and here he makes the transition, the paper books and all the words, not discarded but as just frills...Janis' feeling and Steinbeck's images... WEEDS...that's all they would have been described as by...by his Dad, The Master, Yahweh Himself!?...and something moves, not needing drugs, not needing to chase the White Rabbit, no, something more: the Beatles speaks to him in Revolution

You better free your mind instead  
and made a connection in Helter Skelter  
Tell me tell me tell me come on tell me the answer  
You may be a lover but you ain't no dancer

Luke loved it because he couldn't explain it! Rather only to *just* imagine it, see it, and he felt like Janis, Janis, the weed...but not every minute and hour could he sustain it, no, he probed and ripped and tore at *The Documents of Vatican Two*, shredded every thought and hope in every piece of Teilhard de Chardin he had ever gathered...but it was the feeling which would sustain him, changed him, the music...being weed.

All that he knew, now this his coming Senior year, was that he would never be without beer again, and that Gorgeous was as stupid as their paper smiles, so he wants to meet a real woman, touch her flesh, Her, he uses the word *lust*, and finds it a sin acceptable.

## **CHAPTER 10: Lust**

*Lust*. He had known the word but only as word. A capitalized word. Just one of the seven Capital Sins. Lust which was villain in "Covet thy neighbor's wife" and the Call to Perfection—

to not lust even with thine eyes. *Lust*. It had never crossed his lips driven by his first-person, never an "I lust," but now it was as if it could only be his "I", that it defined I.

"I lust." He practices the words in the mirror, speaks them between strokes, dips his pinkie finger into the blood, the drops, precious drops which fell, victims of his dull-witted razor.

Luke was savoring the word. It gave him a perspective on his drinking, this lusting for The Boob. He could see it driving him, could not see it as having driven him. No, his past was not lust, not as he saw it, felt it. No, only forward, only into the future, only with a woman, she who was the gateway slammed shut on the past, only in betrayal. So the word fills him. He enjoys it, looking at a Sweet Sixteen, "I lust for you," calmly, quietly said, feeling the fire as searing, as thoroughly penetrating.

But then all tilts back to the other side of lust, and it is Luke before the statute of Madonna with Child—this a sixteenth century worm holed fantasy of some demented German. Priest? Lay person? Who could have carved it? Kneeling at this side altar Luke knows that only the worms lust for Her. They burrow into this his most revered adoration image. She there, at a side altar as befitting her subordinated position. She not goddess but Co-Mediatrix. What a tortured word! For the first time he finds it leaving his mouth like spitting thorns, slivers of flesh and dots of blood. "Jesus," he swears, "ain't no lust here."

Then, with the paper madonnas—these without child at breast. These who like Her were always on a side altar. Not the Sweet Sixteens one wanted to marry. Fuck, sure. Not marry. Not having to live forever with their thousand-eyed fucks, knowing them like toilet seats. Shit! No lust, here. This he could sense, for it was all trickery, not satiation. In time his discharge weakened. It took him longer to whack and sack. Hurt more. Got him to douse himself with hand-creams and gobs of vaseline if he had forgotten. Christ, all was going downhill as these abortive jack-offs became as dick-shriveling as She was. Neither the wooden nor the paper Madonna could touch him. *Damn!* He had to touch himself—he did not lust for himself—he knew he was on the hunt, elsewhere. It was time to lust for another.

This all came to him in his private world. It was not shared dialogue. Luke did not bullshit with the guys. He kept to himself, made some friends, but aside from his jocking around in the gym his talk was all intellectual, all philosophy and theology. Few at The Towers took to philosophy and theology, for them The Faith was a given, like George Washington on the dollar bill so was God The Father the currency of their spirit. No one questioned the value of paper money. Likewise no one questioned the authority of God. No one except Jim. He was the campus renegade, in the minds of some, a heretic. The guy who skipped more classes than the Dean of Students could count, to sit and bullshit with the boys, everywhere, at just about any moment. "Saint Jim," was how some taunted him, knowing how much he hated the pomposity of it all. In too many ways Jim was just an amusement. Most of the guys at The Towers were sons of the rural landscape: farmers, small town bankers, regional distributors for out of state companies. Among them the monks did not promote philosophy as a major, but the times were changing. Jim was, so some of his monkish peers opined, a harbinger of storms rising on the horizon.

As private as Luke kept his sex life, so Jim wrote with public script, even taking to post and staple letters and editorials the student paper refused to print. Jim wanted to know everyone's thoughts. "Do you really think that Mary was a Virgin?" For the times, such a seemingly honest question bordered on sacrilege, not for the assent or the dissent but for the feeling it evoked in the hearer. It said, "Did someone fuck Mary?" "Does God, the Father have a penis?"



For Jim derivative questions tapped into the deeply subterranean river of Lust. "Did God the Father lust after Mary?" If they thought about these things, then they'd have to think about their lust. But not as just sins, that was okay. They could deal with sin. But as something sacred, meaning if God fucked, then shouldn't everyone fuck? "Shouldn't fucking be what we do instead of Communion?" JESUS CHRIST ALMIGHTY SAINTS PRESERVE US HOLY MOTHER OF GOD INTERVENE!

"If God didn't marry Mary, then why should we marry? Shouldn't we freely fuck in *imitatio Dei*? Isn't this what grace is all about?" Needless to say, when Jim talked with the studs, the punks and holy-than-thous all drank, heavily.

*Manly Desire?*

Although Luke had hung around with Jim all during last Spring, was a quiet fly on the wall, for all practical purposes his other classmates, when they did comment about him, just considered him a future returnee to the monastery, a "Holy Joe." Yeah, he was a regular guy, drank his fill, but it was noticed that he didn't dance. It was clear to them that females were not of interest. Most, then, were genuinely surprised when Luke showed up for Senior Registration. A bit more curious was their take that not only had Jim befriended Luke but both were sharing an off-campus pad. Some saw a connection. Luke had a passion which was manifest during argument. His oratorical skills drew admiring nods from classmates and raucous laughter from bar mates. "Man, when you get him going about God and the Incarnation and all that!"

Yet no one fronted him, no one queer baited him, because he was just too damn big. He was one of the tallest and most muscular guys on campus, others saw him work-out: admired his physique. Last Spring the football coach had approached him, but Luke begged off, "Studies, sir. My Dad wants me to be a scholar, not a jock." And the coach had bought it, interpreted it as Luke's being too much the altar-boy, the elephant afraid of the mouse, he knew about his seminary background—The Towers was a cozy campus. But just as the semester was ending bits of stories had begun to circulate about his high school years in the sem, rumors down the monks' grapevine, but attention was only paid when this hyper coach back East at Iona bent the ear of the newly arrived basketball coach, "Just heard Jennings got out. Did he play this year? Are you playing him next year? Is it okay if I talk with him? Where's he going this summer?" Because Luke's minor seminary, The Mount, had been lost in the urban woods of New York City's tiniest borough, it took awhile for the local North Country papers to figure out who they were calling about, and since The Towers' coach was just opening his first season no one knew what Luke's story really was, or whether to believe the adjective "legendary" so casually hurled about.

But that was all it took, as if that first call was the finger pulled out of the dike...calls Luke didn't return this past summer, quickly hung-up on, calls and letters which he conspired with his Mom to hide from his Dad, she not asking too much the where and the why, just wanting to avoid what she herself knew was the inevitable clash...calls which on weekends his mother was primed to answer, this being her normal habit now turned as tight as a primal instinct. So his father was kept in the dark, completely, letters Luke left unopened, deep-sixed, offers he never read about—a peril he cared not to confront.

When the editor/reporter/owner from the *Little Falls Gazette* caught up to him walking across the leaf-blown campus, Luke felt that he had to say something, snuff out the votive candles. "Yeah. That's me. Great stuff, eh? But it's in the past, Man. Can't you let it be?" He didn't want to play to the altar-boy image again, didn't want to tell them the truth, "My Old Man doesn't like sports," actually, a pretty good lie, because his Dad did like some sports, was as faithful to Notre Dame football as to Sunday Mass, and he liked college wrestling, though he

never went to any matches nor took Luke, yet, he had wrestled—"Third string, but I gave it my all!" for Notre Dame himself, Rockne era stuff. So, it was "modern sports," as he called it that he didn't like, sports which became a year-round obsession, forcing the athlete to be a student second, not first, so anything other than Studies was misdirection, a waste of time, absorption in one's own fleshly talents... Luke laughs, his sin of commission, keeping his Dad in Original Ignorance—Dad would barely know what to tell the reporters, if they had stopped and asked him.

Again, the private side, the lust connection. For Luke had been what the basketball sought: the hands to cradle it, the wrists to flick it with graceful twirl, the broad shoulders squared to the board, and the eyes which watched it hit, "Nothing but net!"... mutual respect and admiration.

Luke and the ball: *B-ball*, bouncing, rhythmically messaging his love of grace and the beauty of the arced shot. During grade school he had been a shrimp-boat, but his fearless intensity, his bloodied enthusiasm, these made him the coach's favorite. For his parents and family his athleticism was but another sign of the high quality of the sacrifice he was about to make to God. However, when he entered the seminary, and grew fifteen inches in fifteen months, little thought was given to his skills other than a friar's admonition, "To thank God, young man, for that great hook shot!"

Only when The Mount began to beat ranking area varsities for whom they were always pre-season fodder, only then was he unmasked.

The odd space that accounted for The Mount's gym was always rafter to rafter, and since the seminarians could not afford to travel, rival coaches had to submit to the torment of "The Tub." *The Tub* was just that, a sunken, 15 foot-below-topside excavation which doubled as the seminary's assembly room. Why it had been built like that even the old monks couldn't remember. However, it led to many curious plays, and banged heads against the cliff-like walls...but in *The Tub* Luke was alpha Sea Lion. Starting with his sophomore year the legend built, much like playground lore, the word about him traveled upon disbelief, "You can't figure it, guys. This priest, this kid, I mean he's a Bill Russell and The Couze rolled into one." And he was, sort of. What he lacked was their desire to win. Luke didn't care about winning, never had, appeared that he never would. What he liked was playing the game.

Luke always wanted the ball. To feel it, have it feel him, nestle into his hands, nestle there with the confidence that he would create something beautiful, and so he did... a turn to the right, a faked dip of the shoulder and a whirl, an up and up and across the key whirl, floating, backwards, six-foot three back then, floating and the ball is released, and it flows upward, like water regally spouting, a line of grace, and it is not the fact that he will score, no, no one questions that, most don't start to count until he hits thirty points, then they'd watch the play and count the kisses, thirty-five, forty, one night seventy points, but it was all in the touch and the artistry, they just felt good watching him, are lifted with him, happy as he is happy...though he didn't care about winning, The Mount won shamelessly, cared not, just wanted to play.

As no one at The Towers knew about this Luke, so how could they know about his lust?

During his novitiate year, as Friar Alfred, Luke had turned his athleticism to the service of his asceticism, this was his crossing-over, his dedication to breaking-through, the formation of his own discipline within the greater Discipline. Curiously, it was the time he first felt driven to win, no, not driven, *Called*, he could feel the need from the other side, the beauty, the playing, yes, but called to Victory, to Vanquish Her enemies.

He caught sight of his enjoyment on the hardwood as something to be given over to God. So he dedicated it to Mary. Swore before Her that he would not play the game for the game's sake anymore, yes, he would shoot for her, go out regularly each Tuesday and Thursday night, be on "the hardwood" to perform for her. And so, if they had been close enough, the other novices would have heard him shout, "Mary, watch this hook!" and "Jennings bombs from thirty-five for the Lady he loves!" But the novice class was small, and only Friar Killian could be occasionally cajoled to use the rusting, rain-sagged B-ball bucket out behind the barn, no, his basketball performances were all dedicated, "For Her Eyes Only" devotions.

And so it is fitting as things fit in the Grand Scheme that Luke came first to incarnate, "I lust," while on the basketball court late one weekday night. The basketball coach, just two months into the job, was an interim replacement. He itched to evaluate his talent and so had called an unofficial meeting of last year's remainders: a 10 and 8 team expected this year to be about the same. It was just the first week in October—still football season at the football-crazed Towers—and so few on campus noticed the gathering which under NCAA rules had to be more a pick-up game than a pre-season outing. Luke watched; he was unevenly impressed. At evening's end Luke was sure that the coach didn't know much more than what Luke, himself, had surmised, that the team would need some new blood to make it all bake and boil. Yes, the coach knew that without something else—someone?—it would be a run-of-the-mill team. Would he go this night to the chapel and pray? Implore heaven, as good Catholic coaches are trained to do, for some miracle? Would such miracle light shine upon this lurking Back East legend just sitting there, Luke: spectator in the stands? Not now, not tonight. The scrimmage is over, the team and coaches leave, only Luke dallies.

Cued and as choreographed the janitor immediately arrives and begins to sweep the court. Five dollars buys Luke thirty-minutes. As he laces his sneakers he begins to shudder. Very imperceptibly, even to himself. Then a flush, like the flood which overtakes him with the one beer over the line. He stands and is pushed backwards, falls awkwardly into the empty bleachers, fireflies flash before him, mercury silver points of light, and he finds himself heavily breathing, sweat rising on his forehead and hands... "Did I pass out?" He can't figure what's just happened. A disorientation righted by the janitor's yell, "Fifteen minutes."

The feel... and he knows, again, not at the thinking level, not analyzing, not forming propositions for the True or the False, no, feeling, the ball, down deep he knows it is him, himself, just like the feel of the bottle, The Boob, now he feels it, himself, and as he takes his first unsteady dribble towards the basket he sees Her, Her in pain, Pieta, with the slain Son across her lap, eyes downcast, eyes cast heavenward, everywhere, all at once...and he faults backwards, holds his dribble, does not shoot...at the foul line is Her, Sweet Sixteen, a Botticelli imitation, bare-chested and draped in a swirl of downy snow...and he dribbles, but backwards, back towards the half-court line, and then halts...the floor, the lines, the definition, the game, the rules, all Disciplines... and he knows, full knowledge, clear bannered words, messages of crystal import, that they are the past, all them, Her and her, Madonna and madonna... "What have Jim's questions wrought?" ...and he knows he wants, desires...as wet as his body is, soaked in jersey, soggy in pants, sweaty in socks, hair wet as a swamp, he there, Luke and Alfred, Alfred and Luke, the cold snow and the hot glossy paper, both just mediums, both now he knows just boundaries...and it comes, he comes, rising up, the walls burst into fire, the air is sucked dry of oxygen, the floor heaves and cracks under groaning quakes, he alone, yes, alone, but not empty, not yet filled, but not empty, just something else, something the talisman of the monk's dream is catalyst to, but this he knows not, knows only the feeling...Luke wants to play. Luke wants to

perform. Luke wants to pop the net. Luke desires *TO WIN!*...just for himself, the sheer act of winning, *Warrior*...Luke dribbles twice, huge steps, fakes left, moves right, soars high, six-foot-five ground zero going towards the heavens and from inside the cloud he releases his missive, for it is a message, one sent, one shot outward and then downward, one which slips through the net, nary a wrinkle, nary a motion...*Luke lusts!*

## **CHAPTER 10: Rian**

Luke knew who caught the perfect swish. It was, "See the girl with the red dress on. She can do the thang all night long!" The girl—herself a perfect swish, the sound he hears when she dances, yes, he knows her name, *Rian*. From his first beer at The Lair he had heard stories about her, many more than could fill the simple word, reputation. For Rian was a fire-starter. Boys just look at her and flip berserk, as if their clothes are on fire. They hotfoot-stomp and back-slap, clap their hands, whistle and commit their souls to things in groups they wouldn't, couldn't do in person. Few walked up to her to ask her to sit down to share a beer. Oh, they'd dance with her. But when the song or two was over, they'd shy away, recede like low tide. Whereas Luke knows her only as his inner self burning, his outward composure was monastery stolid. When she walked by, she'd wink and he'd instantly be naked. To cloak himself here he laughs at seminary memories of white butts clowning in the common shower, like then he does everything he can to clothe himself with mail armor, not see or touch.

Rian froze him, totally faked him out, left him watching as she played her game. He could never take her eye to eye, he never asked her to dance, not her, so no one, all that Spring semester, no, he didn't ask anyone to dance—simply didn't see them. But he knew, somewhere inside himself, that somehow someday he and she would. For the now he just photographs her and files her away, protects himself with silence, a version of the Silence of The Discipline, not caring if it is misunderstood, not protecting himself with the words of steel, harsh and biting words which the guys use to insulate themselves from her fire, "Bitch! Ain't she a hot bitch!" Words which shot molten embers of Manly Desire, but words which died upon their fallow breaths—false fire because they had no passionate shot to match her intensity. "Look at those tits, Momma Me-a! Ain't she built like a brick shithouse!" Hot and intense they spit and stammer, oh, how they try to convince each other that these sham epitaphs are words pounded out on the anvil of manliness...but they failed the test of cold water—words which when plunged into bold action did not sizzle and steam up the room. Rather they are words of distancing. The more they posture and spout macho benedictions, the less able were they to move. Luke saw that she froze them as she did him, just differently. Her movements enticed but instantly stung him into immobility, he a corpse among corpses. No one moves to really touch her, hold her hard and close, kiss her cheeks. Nothing. No cock comes closer than a long stone's throw of, "Damn, I'd like to screw that hot bitch!"

"Now!" He is there and strengthening himself with this temporal mantra. "Now!" He is looking for her, but it is she who finds him. Taps him on his shoulder. He turns. Someone, something is screwing with the props, for when he sees her she is tiny, so tiny that he dizzies from the height, is disjointed. He feels her twist his back and snap his wrists, bend him about, it must be her. Now she the giant and he the ant, slipping backwards out of the scene, a scene which he was as superficially into as any of his brothers, there standing with a piss-beer and a cigarette burning his eyes, so badly does he smoke that all he says to her is cough and tear, yeah, there watching her, but then she him. It was an instant, but it was all that had never been, for he feels as if he is nowhere, only in her look, her eyes upward at him. Before he says a single

intelligible word, she smiles, slides-by and is jitter-bugging on the dance floor... "The bird, the bird, the bird is the word!"

Luke had always wondered what the Madonna felt gazing down upon her worshippers. Madonna of stone or wormed wood, hearing implorations for assistance, requests for intercession, and yearnings to be faithful. Did she descend into the base material and transform the ear into hearing? Was she drawn, tempted by his coming ever so faithfully every Wednesday night, to lean forward and comfort him? But this thought only disjoins him more, and it teases him with fire, the fire of shuddering memory, for never had the Madonna come to comfort, only to touch. As he looks at Rian, watches her with the eyes of the penile throng, so he knows that she is being touched, not comforted.

Disjointed. In her he sees himself. Saw the touch come at her. And he wants to dash across the room, grab her arm and pull her away from the impending touch. But he hesitates. Drops his glass of beer. "Hey, stupid, watch what you're doing!" ...all he could do, mustering all his strength, was push himself, alone, out of the bar into the parking lot.

It is there in that lot: pock-marked broken asphalt with axle shattering pot-holes, that lust in all its meaning comes to him. He leans against a car, not noticing its color or year or the layers of dirt now smearing his trousers, no, he leans using it as if an extra leg, for he is almost overcome by the gravity of his lust. Rian is falling all about and through him. Her eyes fly into his. Her thighs lock with his. The flash of her Rock 'n Roll dips and twirls bounce off his heart and tear strips of flesh from his chest all the way down to his cock. Though a hundred yards and several stone-feet of wall away, she is careening through his every sense. Sweat pours from his body, more sweat than a ten mile run on this swamp-like Indian Summer day could provoke. There by the car, leaning, almost a singular drop of sweat...he choked on the air, prayed and prayed to wake up, staggered two steps and fell to the ground.

Within minutes Jim had Luke dark and covered in his own windowless cellar bedroom. "Man, are you gonna puke?" He asks this ten times if he asked it once. "Man, it's a rule. My rule: Don't puke in the pad!" Jim was pissed, almost whining. Luke hears him like a bluster of flies. "Man, it's a rule. Don't puke in the goddam fucking pad!" Luke could not answer. Jim went at him like a confessor. "Man, how many goddam beers did you drink, motherfucker? You passed out, goddam, Luke. You're lucky I was leaving too. Man, if you're gonna live here, ya gotta learn to handle your booze." It was the last admonition and the first echo heard upon waking. But in between the completion of the sentence, Luke dreamed in the land of sodden lust—Eve's Dream.

### **CHAPTER 11: Eve's Dream**

He found her standing under an immense oak tree, the kind which makes you pause and wonder whether it is rooted in the earth or whether the earth is held together by its clutch. As it held the air, the question formed itself again. It or the sky—whose embrace? Who's the cause of whom? But such questions came at him more as image than thought, for all that was him: his eyes, muscles, bones and the movement of his heart, was focused upon her. Indeed his heart beat as the wind blew and the leaves of the monstrous canopy swayed ever so gently and at its center she was there, as if the heart of the oak, a bit off center and swaying with the playful breezes, yet was it she or they which swayed, they swaying because she swayed? Again, image not thought as he himself was coming towards her or was it she towards him? There was no concern about this, just the emotion, he sensing the drawing, her power, her allure.

She motioned for him to sit down beside her under the tree. The sun was bright with a clarity that almost cracked the sky. What they saw far and near was life being lived as if they themselves were there. Far off were the oceans and they shared an enjoyment of the graceful

frolicking of fishes of all kind. "A ballet, visualizing rhythms and harmonics which we humans cannot hear. Such wondrous madness!" He eagerly nods, relishing the sound of her voice, seeing her as a wondrously caped mermaid, chestnut hair all afloat, thousands of living creatures nesting within her floating mane, as if in response, "I see you, dear heart, as a lanky, languishing octopus," she giggles, "long arms all about, arms which embrace the ocean, arms which twirl creatures large and small in exotic dances, you with an eye which is an eye that sees all, and in seeing, loves all." His arms wrap around her, draw her near, and they kiss.

But this is dreaming and Luke has drunk more of the profane liquor than his body can soak, so those monks, Abbots of Dreams, snicker and sneer at this most childish of dreams, "The Lady by the Tree— what poppycock!"...another door opened, another trap door drops.

There by the tree is she, but shackled. The tree, gnarled and fiercely sucking the air, chained to the earth, tree which holds her, is her captor, under this tree she is suffocating, for it is her breath which it sucks, she a root to greater sources, this the tree knows, and in knowing exercises her, mercilessly.

He hears her pain, not grunts and groans for she can no longer breathe, no, her wishes and dreams, these he hears, these are her pain. It is her wish to be wed to the sky and so, once again, give birth to daughters of the ocean. It is her dream to fly above the earth and feed the plants from her breasts, to heal the broken wing and kiss the dew at night which succors the living shade. And these dreams and wishes he feels, they are not his pains but they call to him, and so he spurs his steed and gallops towards her.

There is little left in the day but aging twilight. He sets upon the tree with broad-sword and axe but finds that as one bough is severed, as one swatch is chopped from the base, so others instantly appear, not just one but multitudes in their places, as if hidden armies were responding to the signal to close ambush. There is no choice, it is not the tree which he must slay, no, freeing her is not by axe and sword. But she cannot understand why he has ceased his attack. "Dear Sir, warrior most kind, help me from this most terrible bondage!" Ah, it is from between these words that he hears her true message, from out of her pauses comes the code which his King has trained him to decipher, trained him well. It is her freedom in exchange for his capture. It is for him to be chained to this tree, not her, no rescue, dastardly Substitution.

"Trickery," his mind addresses the thought, "She knows naught but trickery."

Then before an action flees his will, she is transformed by the draping shade and the rising moonlight, she now cameo in a moon-ray, she now fully naked, naked still chained, but free for motion, swaying motion, inviting, calling, "Dear Sir, warrior most kind, my favors are yours forever in time." Can he steel himself, what armament to reach for? A moment's indecision which ends as his cock knocks him from his steed, a cock which thumps against his britches and mail, thumps and pierces through, she so magical that he is without wonder, just response, and she has a moon-beam undress him, him finding himself exposed, bare and expanding, slowly growing from dead shot to molten stream to hammered sword, finely honed, he is now near her, her legs widen, stars sparkle around her pubis, two bands of moon-rays wrap around them, moving them towards embrace, copulation, she raises her chained arms in soothing invitation, her hips dip and dart with minute movements of adoration, her legs spread a canopy of thighs and her eyes are pleasuring already, offering him herself as celebration...then an owl hoots, several bursts and one long call, it is a call from the Ancient Ones, his masters, a clarion of warning, and from within his discipline, his warrior code, he responds, reacts so quickly that he has penetrated her before she hears the owl, before she shudders, penetrates her not with cock but with sword, for his cock is now sword and he cleaves her in two, each body part writhing yet

chained to the tree and in the pooling of her blood he dips his hands, dips and smears his chest, his face, cups a flow and then splatters it on the tree, which upon this actions raises two thunderous roots, twin giants, children of the mud sun, these come and lay full length down her severed halves, lay and within a blink she is gone, absorbed, ingested, and the owl arrives, the seer of the shade, and alights upon the topmost limb.

Luke jolts awake as if someone has screamed into his ear, "RUN!" His heart is pounding, no sweat, yet terribly dry skin, dry and drawn as if his flesh were stretch liked new canvass across an artist's frame. Dry, his mouth is paper, he cannot swallow, not chew, and only his breathing keeps him alive, he can feel the air channel through his nose, air rushing like emergency ambulances racing to his brain, injecting life saving chemicals, applying brain-to-brain resuscitation on the microscopic level, then the thump, not his heart, all through his eyes, as if he had a thousand eyes and each one quaked with a pain that the next one amplified ten fold, "My God I'm gonna die!" is apparition before him, words in the air, and "Why can't I pray?" *Fear.* From the back of his mind comes the sound of chanting monks, but he cannot make out their song. A creak: "Death?"

"Hey Big Fella you gonna stay in bed all day?"

It was Jim, "JIM!"...his heart beat the word as if the Savior had come, "JIM!"...but all he can do is stare at him.

"Thought you might be needing this" and Jim hands Luke two aspirin and a large glass of water, faucet cool, not cold, but as he swallows Luke swears to ears unseen that this is the sweetest, coolest, most refreshing drink he has ever had...then he crashes back into slumber.

*They* thought it was over, they had no more dreams to program, for after this dream, this baseline drunkard reverie: "Warrior Lust," there was to be nothing deeper, just muscle deadened slumber, snoring and agitated jerkings, reactions to bits and pieces of incomplete stories, like old books on the shelf which fall and when picked up cannot be read because pages, sometimes sections, are missing...casualties of dried out and broken bindings, so this was what was to happen, but they had forgotten the power of their spectral residue: his talisman, that slenderest of links to their world, that frailest of keys, and so as they leave, abandoning him now that he has heard their story of lust—been given the template which he is to apply in courting Rian—now with this their patrimony bequeathed they had left, believing their work done, but the key is turned...*She* had reached at the moment of Her obliteration and touched his left eyelid.

And so he dreams again: this time he cups the pool of her blood but does not offer it to the tree, no, he sips it, swallows all, every drop, licks his hands immaculate, then lies full body between her slain halves and her blood oozing streams which alertly rush all over him, he immersed, not drowning, indeed, he is swimming, boldly stroking and swimming through her blood, blood oceaned around him, blood that he breathes in and out, out and in, blood which is a filter of the light above, light both sun and moon, light which is now bloodied, a light of feeling, not simply seeing.

"Come with me!" And he is beside her, both whole, both of freshly bright bodies, she extending her hand and he places his in hers, she smiles and in this smile he knows that fear is all about them, that it is a smile because of the fear, yet he smiles back, then they move—or is it that the world moves?—and they find a most stunning spot, one that makes each's heart and desire leap, a place where the grass is bonneted by flowers, the sound of birds is melody on the wind, water runs by in a chattering brook, welcoming them, telling them to rest, and so they do, sit down and then gaze upon each other.

"I want you to..." he halts her lips.

"I want you to..." she halts his.

They embrace and kiss. Then move without effort upon each other, she atop his lap, his penis linked within, she enfolded around, comforting, they rest within each other. There is then a conversation of the flesh and the will, not of words and sounds. She cups her breasts and lifts them to his lips, he kisses each one and then speaks to them with his tongue. "How does beauty turn to milk?" And they answer with a beguiling inquiry, "When I drink your milk?"...This is an answer unsatisfying, and so he withdraws from her, the gravity of perplexity, confusion. Her eyes grace his departure.

Within a bemused smile, she lies down, turns on her belly and closes her eyes. He sees the lines of her backside, a flag of flesh unfurling sighs and desires, and he is tempted to draw them, but before he can act they turn to waves, flow up and down and splash together, he wants to dive into this playfulness and so kneels behind her, lifts her cradle and slips inside her. She laughs. It is the laughter of moonlight upon lake water, sounds from sources unseeable in daylight, "Am I the mountain you are to climb?" asked teasingly, coyly. He is not amused, rather he is incensed, something has set him afire with anger, and as he enters her it is now as piercing, and from piercing it becomes fury, and it is a fury which is enraged that she is so silent, smug, he knows that he is thrusting into her with all his might, he hears his own heaves and ho's, but she is there, yes, knees planted firmly, buttocks freely moving with his motions, yet he cannot come, he cannot discharge, his fury passes into obsession and he yanks out his plundering cock and jams it into her bung-hole, piercing, hurtful, never before here, pain both ways, like raw hand jerking his bleeding cock, somehow, in and then in more, it is she opening more than him invading, deep inside, trapped, clamped down by her desire, with each stroke, slow and painful, he feels her tremble, feels a tremor of anger coming back at him, and with each tremor he is delighted, pleased, and he pounds at her, at her like sledgehammer upon rocks, desires to split her, shatter her into a galaxy of stones, pulverize her, yet, she is coming back at him, working her ass so that she is pulling on his cock, squeezing her buttock so that he is being turned like a screw, it is as if she is fucking him, her ass huge bellows sucking and blowing upon his flame, and indeed he is out of control, no thought is given to her, "Is she out of control?" is not asked, just their back and forth and then the screaming, he and her together, sounds now blending, sounds of pain and triumph, sounds of victory and the vanquished: warrior whoops.

They roll apart, yet they are bonded by their common breathing, heaving breaths, seared by pain, then silence, like a snapping twig, their time together cuts into silence, neither can hear the other, no one moves.

When he does raise himself, props up on his left elbow, he has almost forgotten what has just happened, there is no thought, no feeling, no sense of being at all, just an emptiness, fire scorch meeting the cold. His private is so beyond numb that there is only forgetfulness. Soon the mercy of deadening slumber slays them. Eventually, the sun finds them with its first full morning rise, their eyes open and are captured by the simple dualities of daylight. What he sees is what he does not believe. She is there but not as she whom he laid down with. No, she is a most aged woman, crone, an Ancient One. Her body is clothed in morning primrose but he knows, can smell the wrinkles and dryness of her flesh, there is a thirst which she is no longer, a stream which has turned to bedrock, yet, when she looks at him he knows that he is as he was, it is a look, one look, they look not anywhere else, which is froth with his questions without answers. She does not speak but with a turn creates a new scene. It is here that she leaves him, opening another vista, showing him her daughter, a flower just raising its head to capture sunlight.



The daughter is Rian. She turns and he sees her not, for he is still seeing with his manly desire, still the warrior willing himself to come, time and again, keep coming until he has filled her, spermed her throughout, immersed her in his fluids of life, drowns her. So Rian is not seen, innocence camouflages her. All she can do is call to him, "Luke!" and the word in this dream scatters like smoke, and he cannot grasp it. She moves closer, stands tip-toe to his right ear and kisses the waterfall plunge of his neck as she says "Luke!" and he knows that she is there but he cannot see her or feel her or will her to be. It is then that she sits before him and undrapes herself, yields to his dreams, his desire, but he cannot yet sense her, is agitated that he cannot find her, locate her. "But can she be here?" for his cock is sheathed. There is no response to a call.

Is it all dreaming? Those hapless dreams of helplessness? Something within him calls him to wake, it is a wail rising from within him, a call which becomes a chant and it is chant he hears again, "*Dies irae...*," and he can smell the funereal incense, sees himself about the casket draped in black, can feel the eyes of The Master...then she is full canopy of flesh and desire before him, he knows that all he has to do is throw himself freely into the wind and that he will be safe upon her, but fear unlatches this embrace, a fear again which is cadence of the burial chant, "Days of wrath and doom impending..." oh, how often he has heard this death song, and heard its dry-throated rattle, its chortling that *Luke is next*, that Luke is already dying, that Luke is dead! And it is as corpse that he now perceives himself, there just a corpse, and she still wanting him, what perversity of desire! She, he knows, undulating as ocean tide and southern breeze, she there, the daughter of his lover! the daughter of her mother! what sacrilege is this? What is there in woman that she seeks life from the dead bodies of men? And he feels her hand scrape at him, claw and rip and then grip like a vise at his pubis, there squeezing the one and only, the last and final drop from he the corpse, "Days of wrath...!"

Yet, it is now her time to dream, it is Eve's dream—Rian's dream—the dream of women. A dream which Luke will not have entrance to for, well, possibly he will die before it is even possible, for his drinking will blind his insight, slog down his brain, burn troughs of false desire and pervert him, move him away from this moment. It is now only his because he had dreamed the monk's dream, a dream of Adam, not Eve, yet can anyone or force or God or armies of warriors long suppress the longing of the sun and the moon, each for the other? Can the shade be forever denied? Luke was never trained to ask such questions, and so he does not know, cannot even guess at answers, knows only that it is simply that they have always been around, but is not aware that they now have an opening, this contact with Rian, to impress his first blooming mind and spirit with the outline of their story.

He *sees* her. Just like that. Thunderclap. The landing of rain's first drop upon your face. Startling. *There*. The smell of the dirge still lingers, somewhere his ears continue to be pricked by the gloom of *Dies irae*, yet there is now something else. *She* is there.

"How did you get here?" It is a question not only within the dream but about the dream.

"I've always been here?" Not impish, not disdain, more entreaty.

"Why haven't I known?"

"You have?" Simple, straightforward, instant response.

She touches his left eyelid, "Your Story is my Story?"

So quizzical a look, she laughs, does not restrain herself, laughs two handfuls.

"But which part?"

"The obliteration?"

"What?"

"My Story is the silences between your words. Your images build upon my blinding. Your feeling is expressed through my absence."

"I hear you now. See you know. Feel your presence." Statements working towards defiance, yet the up-stretched hands of the beggar.

"Do you?" A pleading question, a flag of hope.

Between them, bordering their words, all that had been contained: attempts to touch, the sharing of a shudder, the embrace of the Dark Vapors, yet, they but brood....

He is stymied. He begins to laugh. Chides himself, "You're just dreaming, again, asshole!"

"Are you dreaming or being dreamt?" Like frigid water in a waking face.

"What? Me being dreamed?" Staggered, but curious: "Which means you're the dreamer?" Slaps himself, "Gotta wake up from this dream!"

"Wake up!" A thousand rocks plundering down the hillside, thudding and thumping and just about to smash his face to smithereens, WAKE UP! GODDAM IT! JESUS MOTHERFUCKING CHRIST MAN WAKE UP IT'S ALMOST FOUR AND YOUR SUPPOSE TO BE IN THE GYM DO YOU WANT TO BLOW YOUR FIRST TRYOUT?

## **CHAPTER 12: Spoken**

It was as if it could not be spoken. Not just that it shouldn't, but that it couldn't be.

His father was like a thickly hewed gate. The image came to him one day some fifteen years earlier when the choir had sung what the translated Latin said was "bulwark." Back then he didn't immediately know what that meant, but he knew it meant his father. It was an image which had the weight of his Dad. Not just the physical caber-hoisting Celtic thickness, not that, not the Notre Dame Yearbook which had the quip "width and wisdom go together" under his photo, no, it was a feel, more the air, yes, the air about his Dad, it had weight. One could not get around his father easily. Not just that his eyes were faster than your feet, and of such eyes that they fixed you with a stare you knew angels used in the battle of The Fall—oh, the eyes! Ever so young, he lived with those eyes, giving, as they do, meaning to the word "omnipresent" which he learned in Catechism. "God is omnipresent." And then the Sister would ask, ask with that dab of relish which was one of her few joys, knowing that by their silence and her answer that they would ever be like her, forever under His eyes. "It means that God is *everywhere*. He sees you even when you think no one sees you!" It had always been clear that Sister had been talking about his Dad, for his weight was that of God's—had he ever doubted that? Maybe that is why it seemed that it couldn't be spoken.

These thoughts he was having about sex, well, they didn't seem able to swing the gate open, no, not even a crack. Maybe years later he would believe that his Dad knew what he was trying to do, but at this time the gate permits not a sliver of light to shine through, no shadows thrown by his illumination.

"... and how do you like being a Senior?" This is where he knew it was going to come out, he had to talk about Rian, here just three weeks into Fall classes and now back home again for his parent's wedding anniversary, back as if the marauding theological and intellectual discussions of the just passed summer were never to end, in agony with his Dad: a summer of the Great Books and the Fathers of the Church, never, no never talking about, hinting about, exposing the Weeds, *home*, again, but now it had to be about her, but where, when? at the close of their customary theological conversation about Mary: she now more discussed as a defender against the rising tide of "Women's Liberation"—"A contradiction in terms, don't you think?" his father would inevitably say...and were these still conversations? Weren't they now debates?

Interrogations? More like Roarings, with a capital R, like fire-logs railing steam and spitting embers at each other. Isn't this what the last year has brought? A year of change, radical shifting: his Departure, his father lamenting "Those newfangled ideas from Vatican Two!"—did he notice Luke's lengthening hair? The look in his eyes? The feeling?...this past summer thirsting for, lusting for beer—but at this point, the fifth coffee pot and Dad slowing down enough to take out his pipe, most often the calabash, and as he stuffs it, neats and lights it, Luke will ask, the transition would come: the Tabernacle once again defended, then and only then those things of the trivial, the time when his Mom or older brothers and sisters would perk up, being the time for them to listen about what they were interested in.

"Ya know I did decide to live off-campus this year?" *Fait-accompli*, make it seem normal, too old to ask for "Daddy's permission"—right! *Right?*

*Tap, tap* with the damper and then a re-light, he draws deeply and seeps back into his recliner. "Well?" goes through Luke's mind, "Well, what do you think about that?" But no words need rush about, just spirals of smoke, slowly exhaled and rising like incense whorls.

"What's that nice boy's name you said you're rooming with?" asks his Mom, she asking as if this matter had already been set in stone, and by the asking letting Dad know her collusion, that Luke had discussed it with her, that as he prepared to return that she had already discussed carpets and bedding and "the things you'll need to cook for yourself", yes, Mom was always there, moving between them, re-arranging a block of thought or a whiff of feeling so that the two could talk about "less lofty things," this her phrase, spoken only to Luke, not to Dad.

"Jim ... Jim Marshall."

"A good student?" Which was all that he was going to ask, this Luke knew. All that he wanted to know, equating as his Dad did good academic habits with good character: meaning for him that one had gotten good grades in theology, for each student at The Towers had to carry four credits a semester of theology, and it by itself could demolish an otherwise good GPA.

"Yeah. I guess so."

Not good enough. This he knew.

"He's from a good family, though?" Mom again, pitching in with her fastballs.

"Yeah, you can bet. Solid family. Dad owns a mill." Would this suffice?

"The House has to have a 3.5. Otherwise it's back to campus." Jesus, he knew this was coming! Last summer they had argued about Perfection, now not a spiritual quest but an intellectual attainment, 4.0—his Dad had remained firm, Luke countered with 3.0, citing school statistics, requirements, but his Dad held firm, but now since he was already there, the politic side of his Dad had come forth, 3.5... Luke was sure his Mom had not breathed a word, but here Dad was responding not reacting, coming at him like he had expected this. As if he knew all that Luke has been doing! *Argh*, had that mad-monk, Father Boniface, circuit rider from The Towers, preacher extraordinaire, scourge of slackards, comforter of those in darkness, never-resting servant of the to-be-converted pagans (here, translate: students)—had he let him know, did he drop a verbal note, tender those looks which conveyed God's unsettling message—had he, after his month's end Sunday Mass, after a "Boniface's Bonfire!"—that "Save the poor souls lost in darkness, blind to Him," that "Give generously to the 4th Collection!" mass, had he then felt obligated to be the grapevine, was he the one keeping Dad primed on all that was happening on campus?...but, Jesus, this is approval, *yes?*

"Three five is more than the Prefect requires!" Spoken with an imploration for mercy, shit, too much out of control, slow down, he's talking as if it's a go, but work him, this is not an execution! "The Prefect said three-zero for the House. That's all they require."

But there it was, the tapping out of the first bowl and the as quick refill, Jesus, he out maneuvered me on this one! "Three five." He says it as he reaches for the *Catholic Messenger*, and Luke knows its over. The deal is done, the terms are his Dad's.

"Yeah, Pops, you busted me on this one!" But he never says that, "Okay, Dad, whatever you say," is what he hears, and in hearing it his Mother walks into the kitchen, his siblings dissolve, and Luke realizes that his father has answered him, told him all he was to tell him about sex. The "everything" meaning Perfection: only Venial Sins allowed!

Later that night when Luke meets Jim up in St. Paul for a quick round of Saturday Night beers, he is uncharacteristically silent. Not that his moodiness and his long almost depressed like fugues of reflection were unknown to Jim, no, it was that Jim knew that Luke had just talked with his Old Man. "'nother beer?" Not even a nod, but Jim knows what he is thinking. To the waitress he says, "Two boilermakers." Luke does not protest. No, he's ready for this, this both Jim and Luke know. And so it's a night which quickens, quickened by the liquid fire, that fire which was not of the sacred quest, not the wine which is blood, but the liquid which is the secular bond, that which Jim and Luke know is their bond, Luke having backed off till now from drinking whiskey but knows that "off-campus" means many things, hard-drinking among them.

"My Old Man," so it begins, starting with a phrase Luke never used before, a phrase Jim chuckles at knowing what it means, seeing the ghostly mirage of Luke's Dad and God The Almighty Father Himself float about, merge and submerge as Luke's talk unfolds, "My Old Man, Jesus, just when I think I know what he's thinking, *Blam!* Damn, he really puts the screws to me," and Jim knows that it's just for him to listen and keep putting logs on the fire. "I mean, Jesus! My Mom and I had this planned, like I was to bring it up casually and she was to support me, and she telling me that he would go on, go on about "the temptations of the flesh," go on, rave on, Jesus, can he rave on." Jim nods another round to the waitress, the music is unheard, even the thump of "THE BIRD, THE BIRD, THE BIRD IS THE WORD," thumps not heard in Luke's domain. "I tell him about the House and he says, *Three-point-five*, damn him! Might as well be Perfection, that's all he says and he knows I know what he means," and as if Jim didn't know, Luke rushes his words: sounds and images flying, "Three-five's just like the coach saying, 'Full court press from the start, no slacking,' Jesus, there'll be no time for anything, no time for Rian, no time for dates and dancing, no time to kick back and do what he knows, shit, Man, he knows, knows what I want to do...do you think this is revenge?" Jim doesn't answer, just hoists a beer with his right as if toasting, and then downs another shot with his left, Luke does likewise.

"Revenge. Do you understand? Revenge for leaving the sem, for not being his Salvation, is that it? Me not doing what he himself didn't do, maybe couldn't do, do you think he couldn't do it, is that it, Jim? I mean are Dads like that, making me do what he couldn't do, 'Put aside the ways of the flesh,' is that it? After a fistful of kids do you think he really saw me as his Salvation? Isn't that just a bit too *fucked?*" a word Jim rarely hears from Luke, knowing now that the logs are not only burnt but the embers railing out at the dust they were becoming, "Me, his Salvation, like Jesus was? I mean this Son shit. Ain't it fucked," and the word is repeated, slobbered at its edges, the whiskey and beer griping him deeply in his entrails, tightening his resolve to be his own man, to be a man. "My own man!" that's what it was all about, "I got to be my own man, don't I?" Not a question but an imploration, an invocation, calling for approval from on high. "Isn't that what's going on? I mean he had his time, we have to have ours, isn't that it?" And then Luke drops off, off in words and movements. Jim sees him become stone, the son who looked back at Sodom turned to stone.

Jim is blitzed and now is taking it all in in slow motion, and there Luke is, stoned, a son not of the flesh but of the Stone, then words flood back, words which are stuffed with tears that never flow, "Rian. God I love her. Yeah, that's all I wanted him to hear, Dad, I met a girl, Rian, and I love her, I wanted him to hear love from me about a woman, not about God, not Jesus or The Crucified One, Jesus he's heard me say that how many times? 'God is Love' and knowing that I love Jesus, and the Father, and the Holy Spirit, but I wanted him to hear me say it, hear her name, Rian...*Rian*, he lofts it fragrantly three times, *Rian*. "All I wanted to say was Rian, Dad, you've got to meet her, and then he would know, and then he would say, Son, let me tell you about women...yeah, I wanted to talk about women, about my future, not my past, but he knew, knew without my saying her name, knew moving off-campus meant that I had a girl, or wanted to have a girl, knew that I was saying that I'm never going back to the sem, that that is past, she's the future. Jesus, Jim, did he have to cut me off like that? *Three-five*. Jesus, Man, he knew that I'd have to agree, knew that you weren't like me, that we'll never get three-five together, my four won't pull your wimpy dick up!...Christ, he knew, that Old Fart," and Jim almost chokes on his upchucking laughter, almost spits what he catches as dribble in his hand, wet hand slapping his thigh, he laughs, but Luke is not here, no, he's somewhere with his Dad, "I wanted to tell him, 'Look it wasn't at all what you thought', yeah tell him that I've lived behind the Tabernacle, lived and breathed with those monks and found them more monkeys than holy men, just a bunch of guys taking a side-trip away from life, could he hear that? Do you think he could hear that? No, he couldn't, I mean, he's a fucking bulwark, that's what he is, and he swings just one way, and it's not my way, I walked my way, I went behind the Holy of Holies, I lived with the men who were God's chosen, I ate with them, I listened to their jokes and their stories, I heard their lies, their fears, I saw them avoid women, yeah, I wanted to say that, 'They don't love God, they're just avoiding women,' but what would it have meant? could I've said it?... Jesus?" and the glasses are emptied, the bartender starts flicking the lights, all the girls had left, he and Jim alone, the music dead, and Luke did not want to move, not from this spot, this spot which was where he was touching her, touching Rian, taking her hand and walking with her down the aisle, walking towards his future, what did he care about his father's approval? "Goddam him," is how it ends, Jim tapping him on his shoulder, no words, just Jim and him, Jim leading, both staggering a bit more than either recognizes, bumping a table-edge here, a stool there: two guys, two guys walking off-the-campus, away from the academic order and The Order, putting steps between them and the Holies of Holies, knowing that if either looks back that they risk turning to pillars of salt.

As was their habit, Luke and his Dad wake at 5:30. Not that Luke was awake, no, only his youthful resolve got him up, well, resolve laced with fear: fear driving him forward, fear enticing him into the future, yes, this fear but also the old fear— Grandmother's Truth: "Little Angels...or Drunkards!" Yes, he must do this, for this was the only bond he truly knew he would ever have with his father, and when in his father's home he must do what is to be done, so they dress, Luke after a long cold shower: slapping cold, very cold, then hot, hot till almost burning, burning so that his eyes begin to tear, then cold, again, dry and dress, Dad's Angel, and meditatively walks the five solemn blocks to St. Anselm's.

Daily Mass and Communion was what his father expected. Set down as the discipline of the Good Man. It was a gesture of submission, a footstep on the pathway towards The Discipline, that which would always set his day right, that's what his father had taught. This Luke wonders if he could ever *not* do. But Mass this day went along in the rote way it often did of late: Luke watching the priest as if he were atop a ship's lookout, high above scanning the horizon and

seeing the diminutive, robed prelate go about his ritual, watch him bless himself, watch him pound his chest three-times, "Mea culpa. Mea culpa. Mea maxima culpa," watch and hear the words cruise around in his mind, foreign words, Latin words: to most worshippers incomprehensible words, words of code, words which Luke knew were meant for him, "Maxima culpa," but words which as he heard them lately pushed him away not towards his father, oh, he watches and he could hear the pain—hear it in the lifting of the chalice, hear it as it pierces his tongue: the wafer melting, words which were there in image and bread and gesture, words not heard but lived, alive words, yet, now distantly evaporating words, words which seem only to linger on the edge of his lips, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive...", words and gestures, high up in his Crow's Nest the words now struggle vainly to reach him: claw half the way but then fall, perish, tired by the ages of time each carries, words which he now no longer shimmies down the mast to capture, no longer reaches out to snare at last gasp, no, he was with his father, but then he wasn't.

"Come with me." And he was two-steps behind his Dad, where now? Did he really need to ask? Shouldn't he have anticipated this? For his father was at the side altar to the Virgin. The statue of the Sacred Heart of Mary, the one where her heart was atop her breast, yeah, Luke knew, not her breast atop her heart, no the obverse...but more of Her mystery, the fulfillment of prophecy, he does, this time, pause in awe at the Sword piercing Her heart, ah, The Monk's Dream...and his father kneels, blesses himself, and even with closed eyes Luke can see through the intent, see him having knelt here before, here the day Luke left for the sem, here with his Dad, knowing that his Dad was dedicating him to Her, asking Her protection, knowing that this was his all, that this was his grand gesture—giving his son to the Virgin Mother, and knowing that She would protect him...and so it was again this day, Luke knowing that this is all his father had to say, could say, that in his mind and heart it was what he should say, that sex was a side-altar, a dedication to the Virgin Mother, his act of asking for a Virgin Daughter-in-Law, yet, as he kneels Luke knows that his father is submitting, accepting that his son was to take "the lesser path," the way of the flesh, take it as he himself had taken it some forty-odd years back, and in kneeling Luke knows that his father loves him, loves him with the resignation he took as the ultimate act, the ultimate sacrifice, resigning himself to having a son different from him as He was from Her, Luke knew that this is all that he could say, say in resignation.

As they walk back home it takes his father four blocks of silence before he frees the question, "What's her name?" "Rian," Luke said, says it reverentially, spoke it as if he had spoken his once new name, "Friar Alfred," at his Investiture, speaks it firmly, letting it loose in celebration but not with emotion, saying it so that his father could hear the name, a name unsullied with lust, one still graced, a name he could hope with, hope that his son had found a woman who could yet birth a grandson who would bring Salvation to them all.

### **CHAPTER 13: The Letter**

Two months. Just before Thanksgiving and he hasn't had a drink, hasn't been back to The Lair, hasn't contacted Rian. He got up from Jim's bed as if he'd been run over by a sixteen wheeler. There were tire tracks all over him, body and soul. He looks at himself in the mirror and for the first time in his life he doesn't recognize himself. He pulls at his ears, they hurt, it was him. He throws water on his face and wets down his hair, he could feel the moisture, watches the rivulets bounce off his cheeks, it was him. But then he knew it wasn't him, no, not Luke Jennings, not Friar Alfred, some other creature, because he feels different, felt badly, hurt, a pain so deep he couldn't locate it, yet he knew it, for it wept, it wept him, he was the tear of this something else, this feeling. He didn't have to say, "I'll quit drinking." He didn't have to say, "I

won't bother with Rian." No, something inside him said, "You're different, babe." And he didn't know what this difference was, worse he couldn't feel the feeling of this difference, just knew that he was new in body and new in touch, sight, smell, knew that he was on the other side of something, just didn't remember the dreams.

No booze. All weekends on campus: self-exile. Back to Daily Mass and Communion. No Sweet Sixteens. Hitting the books and bouncing the ball. Yeah, basketball, the tryouts, he had come at them with a vengeance, not anger and bad attitude, not machismo strutting and running his mouth, no trash from "The LJ" as one guard starting calling him, the point guard, a returning senior starter, the only Negro on the team, actually a Bahamian, the offspring of a Benedictine mission: The Towers had no American coloreds of any sort. "Get it into The LJ, Man!" Blocks, dunks, and top of the key jumpers: Luke was the whole package, and it didn't take long for everyone to realize it. He was out of their league, even if they only measured him on intensity. He played in scrimmage like it was the Final Four, hustling, diving out of bounds, bumping under the boards, setting bodacious picks, and then cavorting in body twisting fall-away jumpers over the center. Luke loved it, loved "The LJ"—and gave them what he himself dubbed "Archangel"—his patented hook, either left or right handed, it went aloft like an eagle launching from its eerie, a swooping motion, the ball just on a perfect glide, and "Swish!" Sound of Archangel wings! At first he had called it "Archangel." That had been okay for the seminary, fitting, appropriate, now it seemed foolish, weak, so he didn't say anything, waited, and then at the second scrimmage it was clear, "Tomahawk!" Yeah, The Towers had originally been Sioux land, an uninvited mission chapel a century ago, and The Towers' teams were called "The Sioux"—when they won they were unabashed braggarts about scalping and massacring, so it fit, "Man, here's my Tomahawk!...with that Luke gave them the image of how he wanted to lead, how he wanted to attack, how he wanted to win—"NO PRISONERS!" He was counting the days till their first game—their first scalping party, his first win.

But there was one final thing to do, one final preparation. He needed Rian on his side, in the stands, rooting for him. Needed his Lady's favor.

"Write something!" The phrase blasts and careens off the many-sides of his skull, comes echoing back from hermit recesses, comes as shout, whisper, a jumble of noise, and so he reaches for his beer. He hadn't even given it a thought, breaking an off-campus rule: no beer in the House, worse, breaking training. Beer. He just woke: 3 a.m., and knew that he needed one, couldn't right now do what he had to do without one. He needed to be swallowed, become part of something, at least as far as his heart was concerned. This wasn't the game, he didn't know the rules, and he needed support, the beer was his team mate.

He permitted it to swallow him, he finds himself sliding down into the foam, enticed by the brew, and as he descends, submerges, so in the opposite thrust does his heart find its emerging, but just one wasn't enough. No, he has sat now for about two hours, several crumpled sheets, balled and neatly dropped into his wastebasket, there to bond with six empties, all these but his frustrations, his false starts. "Dear Rian," but was it Dear or would she take that in another way? Maybe, "Rian, Flower of the Night," but what the hell was a "flower of the night"? Another tip of his last can. He has curled her name, underlined it, wrote it backwards and played it out in dots, as if to connect them would render her picture or by touching them music would float. "Rian, Rian, Rian" the repetitive sound leaps and whirls, slips and jumps all over his inner self, for it was on the inner, not on the outside, there he was cool, remembering Mr. Cool in The Lair—beer in hand, cigarette dangling, slurring to himself, "Sey, hoo thanks I'ma munk naw!" But, shit, he had been anything but cool. "The little bitch"—he stops, "Must be the beer", doesn't

want to call her that—the mite, yeah, the mite, she froze you Big Guy, she stopped The LJ train in its tracks, cold, and the insecurity of his outer self now takes a choke hold on his inner, and it is his innards which are the too wet clay from which nothing seems able to rise moldable.

Her initials, that's it, "RAG," sort of funny and somewhat different, at once showing his knowledge of her, having found out her middle name, "Amy"—Rian Amy Grundwald—what a mouthful! So, he begins, writing quickly as if jotting off a note to a long time acquaintance, but no, he trashes it. Stands and stealthily crawls over to his roomie's bed and with an orangutan arm blindly searches for and finds Jim private stash, yeah, his treasure: bottles, dark and green, some blue—ales, stouts, meads...brews that Jim covets, never shared, "Shit!" Luke cops a beer, "Fuck 'im!" Holding "the church key" he pauses before flipping a cap, how apt it feels, holding the opener and realizing that it is truly for Church, a sacred place, and that its liquid is indeed sacral, golden yet bitter, he likes the more bitter ones, not yet an expert in these exotic brews: ales, meads and stouts, nevertheless, he knows what he likes once he drinks it, and at this moment, he turns the key and enters Church.

"RAG! Everyone's going to tell you that you're beautiful. So I'll tell you that. Everyone's going to say that as you dance your feet are like matchsticks striking fire into the hearts of all the men around. So I'll say that too. You've heard it all. And I can say it all. But I don't want to bore you, so I'll leave that stuff to the others. For me, I want to see you again because of what the others did not, and I believe cannot, see. What is it? Well, let me save that till we get together, okay? Just let me say that I know where your fire comes from, and I know what type of guy you truly desire. I'll call on Wednesday for next Friday at The Lair.

*Luke"*

He finally sent it out on Monday. Actually got Jim to deliver it to the front desk of the sophomore dorm at St. Clare's, their sister school ten deep wooded miles away, a feat Jim could achieve since he had a car and was taking one of the first coed seminars offered on the women's campus: "Vatican Two at work in your community"—"Christ, I told'em I was gonna be a Youth Minister!"...So, the thousand clocks started to tick away and his thousand regrets began to pile as he feels the first pangs of truly having left the monastery, this mere act of writing a letter to her, a she, any woman, it was truly the absolution papers he had supposedly signed in front of the Abbot, that mitred man who probably knew that back then was just a rehearsal for now, knew that for all whom he sent back out against The Peril that it would be but a letter someday, a note from a him to a her which is the real, final absolution.

Yes, by this letter Luke is absolved of all his intentions to find perfection through purity. Now he is on the road through impurity. This even he knew, this he did not argue with, however, he would not allow himself to think of her as impurity, but knew it was what had crippled his hand, had crimped his tongue, that he was voluntarily pulling a curtain on key insights, insights which he would have to cast away into the realm of "mysticism" so that he could get on with his worldly life.

It was this mysticism which was hidden in the letter. It was this mysticism he used ever so craftily to lure her. For she could never know, but as he knew, women always sensed that they lacked something when men were around. Luke knew. He knew the way for her redemption, an easy redemption so he thinks, one just of physical pain, of monthly blood, of faithfulness to one husband, but not for him, no, for him as for all men it was theirs to find a woman to redeem, to bond her to his flesh, reinsert her as rib, and carry her body inside his own.

"Curious," that's how Friar Robert the eminent Thomist had stated it, "Curious, the way of women!" And he had shown, using all the threads offered by Scripture and the ancient texts,



that God had ordained, for it was truly the Ordering of Life, ordained that women focus on the worldly, the earth, so "Mother Earth," and bear children into this Vale of Tears, deliver them into the clutch of Original Sin, and for men to stand-by at the ready, ever vigilant to battle the evils, the demons which were invisible to women. Yes, even as he thinks about Rian he is aware of the demons she carries of which she is unaware. Yes, he hinted at it, used it as a clever ploy, wrote, "I know where your fire comes from. I know...." he is not ashamed at this attempt to snare her with ancient yearning, no, he wants to see if her desires are properly anchored, whether she is girl or woman: a woman knowing not just her body but her longed for place, that place which was inside the man. It was a gamble for he wasn't sure if Rian was more girl than he wanted, meaning just Sweet Sixteen, just the fire, just sex, yes, it was a risk, guarded by his clever questions, but if she was who he thought she was, then this letter properly set the hook.

As for her, Rian took the letter and placed it in front of the Madonna. "Mary, Blessed among women, help me!" This she repeats time and again. Repeats because she knows that this note is dangerous, can feel its temptation, but whether a temptation of grace or of evil this she does not know. "Mary, Blessed among women, help me." The prayer becomes her breathing, the slow heaving of her chest, almost a sob, and she feels it all: her body, her soul, her mind, and she knows it is so dangerous. This fellow, nice guy, so some say, and smart, but one she finds a bit goofy, remembers how he acted when she just touched him just to ask him to let her by, he had just hung there like a bouncer, some thug, with an idiot cigarette burning his eye, she remembers him squinting, closing his left eye so that he could see her, not taking the cig away, just standing there, then she forgot him. Now this letter. A few of the girls say that he is "odd," not saying the word, just bringing up rumors about having been "thrown out of the monastery"—a phrase freighted with gasps, raised eyebrows, the more unblemished bless themselves. Others say their boyfriends believe he has some secret background—something about being in the Marines and some place called Indochina. Still others laugh at the mention of him, having observed him as the awkward kid unable to ask a girl for his first dance. Rian realizes that she really doesn't remember him all that well, but does remember her mother telling her that some men are apes in looks but gentle in heart, she hopes this Luke guy is a good heart.

As she waits she feels unprepared, though she has settled his letter neatly into the back row of her purse, there ready for her to take out in case she can't figure out what to say, for she wasn't helped much by his call on Wednesday, "Hi, this is Luke. Pick you up at seven on Friday?"..."Great. Bye." Yet it was this confident, quick handling of the situation, almost as if commanding her, this is what confirmed that she would meet with him, even though she has prepared a list of questions and a set of excuses if she decides that things are going badly and this date must be canceled—"cut and run!" Maybe that was it, "confident," where others had been bold or strong or fiery or crazy or just rude, this fellow Luke, well, he's confident. And it unsettled her, she likes it, then she doesn't like it.

Rian comes down within a minute of the call from the front desk: "Rian, your date's here!" She pauses, flash-freezes before entering the Visitors lounge, slips behind a huge potted plant, a sprawling palm, out of season, out of place in the frigid North, but a singular project of Sister Ruth, the gardener, and always a tactical aid, like now, to "The Lady Clares"—"Like Michael the Archangel, dears, he will stand guard at the entrance to Paradise!...so "Michael" allows The Ladies a pause, as Rian is taking now, to reconnoiter the room before entering. Luke is there, tall and looking more imposing than at The Lair—there everything was off scale, she alone the center of the universe, the measure of all things, indeed, he exudes confidence through every bend and tilt of his posture, "impressive" climbs upon her heart, it beats louder, he's like a

mountain, one in flight, he shifts from foot to foot and his eyes glide around the room, she sees him like the eagle: proud, alone, all the sky his domain, he ever eager for life, yet, her vision shifts and it is Luke the uneasy one, a body bordering on embarrassed shrinkage: hot under the collar, so to speak, to see her, she knows he is waiting only to see her, to spy her from the highest mountain and swoop down to snatch her from this valley of feminine delights, he's itching under the sneaky glances of the other girls: suffering their muffled giggles, ducking their non-verbal invitations—"Come here, Big Boy, I've something sweet for you!"...girls: "The Lady Clares"—all whom he does not feel, rather smells: smelling the sweetish perfume of the place, not unlike his older sister's room, this foyer at St. Clare's, it is all sisterly, and on one scale he sees himself shrinking down, becoming that little boy his Big Sis took to school on the first day, walking with him up to the kindergarten room and placing his tiny, sweaty fingers into the instantly calming hand: the delicate, long-boned and alabaster cool hand of Sister Marie Rosario, she who had taught them all, every Jennings kid, she from whom came that smell, like it is now, sweetish, a tad soapy, a fragrance quite innocent, almost tame, yet alluring, as he had found her, Sister Marie Rosario, she was always his to smell and so it is now, he just a little boy at play in the sandbox waiting for his time to sit next to Sister and smell her, so it is with child's eyes that he sees Rian. Yet, from his heart he reaches out, confidently, as she approaches.

His flower—just a rose struggling out of its bud but a flower with a peculiar gesture: his eyes, she couldn't say but if an angel or other greater being were standing by they could have seen the eyes catch her, his eyes were the rose, and she took it, kisses it, and as she does he lights up with the most curious smile, not a grin or a stupid goofy beaming, no, but not a leer either, rather an expression of contentment, being pleased, of satisfaction, and it sweeps her into this wave of himself coming at her, and he says, stumbling over his words, "I'm sorry about The Lair. I'd go somewhere else, but I couldn't get Jim's car," yet they were out and almost there before the smile she put on him begins to fade and the darkness of the seedy college town beer joint engulfs them.

Maybe he couldn't help himself. Maybe it was a matter of his training. Or more, a matter of his being, but all was ritual. He didn't stop to plan it but the rose, well, Luke needed something outside of himself to link with her. He was still so laced and braced by the monkish world that it was instinct, yet, what was obvious, this he did not, could not, think—of the rose as his desire to bleed for her, as a diverted homage to the Madonna, She whom he had suffered for on many nights: too many nights on knees so thickly callused after the tenth pilgrimage around the Stations or after three sleepless nights ("You are allowed only to kneel. The Blessed Mother accepts your pain!") at vigil on her feast-days. No, he wasn't consciously plotting this, rather he was enacting a role, being Disciplined, faithful to the monk's dream. Yet it is what catches her, eyes and the rose, and the transference is complete, the substitution effected: Madonna to madonna.

So it wasn't love at first sight for Rian, not even for Luke, rather it was a connection, a shared communion, though neither knew the full context of the liturgy they were celebrants to.

Rian was entranced and enchanted, this being so in that men—as the few sensitive to a woman's true needs among The Lady Clares lamented—had, in the main, ceased to conduct full romancing and courting ceremonies. Yes, flowers were sent. Meals were lavished. High priced tickets obtained. But it was all transparent. There was only one goal: capture and caging. No magical craft, no elaborate romantic rituals, no mating call, more, just a mating demand, what the crude phrase so often heard late at night at The Lair conveyed, "Fuck me, bitch!" Rian knew this but just below her level of control. She knew that the opened doors, the orchid corsages, the

expensive bottles of champagne with lobster, all had the same singular, bull's-eye end—marriage, or as she has come to understand it...after her mentor had given her Simone de Beauvier's *Second Sex* and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*..."captive sex": this a new image, concept...below her level of control: she wants more, more than orgasm, the hip word, but what?

"STOP!" She screams to herself, walks about herself and offers comments describing the contents of her mind and heart to a spectral audience. "This woman knows about sex. This woman knows the tears of seduction. This woman has tasted the bitter wine of early morning abandonment. She was a Prom Night Virgin!" She laughs, smirks? "And a rebel. Sex-crazy through the last summer before college!" Yes, she knows that regardless of her or their sin, singular or collective, that the absolution and the confessional are just a re-righting to get them back on course to marriage. "And what is marriage?" Not just sex, so "The Church says," but yes sex. Sex as toolkit for procreation. Sex meaning invasion. The violation. That necessary subjection of herself in her most private parts for the propagation of the race. It was not something for her but through her, and all that men do leads to marriage: "captive sex." So, this Luke guy makes her feel a bit strange, has "Queer vibes, not bad, just, gee, its like he looks at me, through me, gives me one rose, just one, as if I'm the only one, has never met me, yet I like it, but I don't." Tension...but being with him was also like natural: the just walking a few steps, holding his hand, and wanting to sit and snuggle... "queer vibes."

"What are you majoring in?" A simple question, asked of the merry-go-round rider stretching for the golden ring.

"God." He stares the word through her.

"God?"

"Yeah. Philosophy. Ya know, *Is there a God or not?*"

"Are you going to be a priest?" Truly perplexed.

"No." Softly but ending with a faraway echo of laughter.

"You can make a living in philosophy?"

"Yeah, teaching. I'm gonna be a pro-fessor. College and all that."

"Oh." That was simple. He emptied her bottle into the long stemmed Pilsner and signaled for another round.

She wanted to talk more but what they had said had been difficult enough given the loud grinding of the band, for it was Friday night and "Live at The Lair—*The Birds on Fire*—the hottest Rock n' Roll in all the North Country!" And it all got just more crowded, more smoke, more getting closer to oblivion and the idiocy of outright lust-lidded drunkenness, with each hoisted mug and each shout from the band just a raising of the lust level, heating the place, and she and he just spending time heads close, their table just two of his palms wide, so as they hold each other it is like embracing the table, they almost only able to wiggle, she with her face resting on his chest, he a head above everyone, and just feeling, actually grateful that they weren't where they could talk, for talk was not what they wanted or needed, they just danced a wiggle, sat out a set, looked at each other, all in the eyes, stood for the slow ones, and cared not about the time.

When dancing with him, when his arms came around her, it wasn't the fear of a guy slipping down to feel her or jerking her forward on a dip step so that he could watch her breasts jiggle, no, not like that, in fact it was kind of queer, and she looks within and sees the Madonna, eyes heavenward, full dress, Virgin, and wonders in a flash that did not rise to consciousness what it felt like to have the Father between Her legs, but then it's Luke putting his arms around her, not locking in a grapple but rather, so she feels, held, almost stuck—pinned, appended: new

emotions to her, as if he expects her to just be there and be happy. Queer guy. And his letter, clearly a bright guy, clever, but what did he mean, "I know where you fire comes from?" Does he know about *that*?

It was only in his dream that he confronted what the night had been about. For she was the flesh of moonlight before him and he reaches, grabs her by a spiral of whisper and begins to weave her around his arm. It's a strong arm. Thick and sinewy. One that has felled many a tree, lumbering in the forests of Wyoming County behind the monastic Theologate, just a meditative walk to Attica's secular cathedral, an arm also graceful, adept at basketball, not just an athlete, but as all on campus now know, an artiste, one with inner grace, a grace that flows through tasks of effort, one that draws the admiration of others: arms that have been envied quite often by men, admired always by women, she likes to touch his arm, has traced its intricate muscular map throughout the night. And now he has her about him. Her eyes float out from the mist of her undefined self and as they draw close he kisses them, then licks them, then with a swift inhale, consumes them. She is for him garment, and an inner eye. There are things that he sees through her, and he knows they are terrible. Terrible in the sense of terrifying. For the darkness of her soul, of her race soul, of her condition as woman, this her eyes unfold, just as the innocence of the Madonna had unfolded the pain which was to be Jesus crucified. Here he knows why he is attracted to her, it is measurable, for he reaches out and finds her two fingers thick, a solid flow of molten energy, possibly some kind of ray, it doesn't matter, but there he is wrapping her around him on the outside, seeing him on the inside, and becoming him so that he is curiously alone. Deeply alone, *Adamic*.

And into his dream he weeps. Bitter tears of his aloneness. For she had gone from measure to consumption and to this of himself that he did not know which was her. He tosses and turns. Sheets and blankets attempt to strangle him. And he floats awake. Oh, the cursedness of it all! For all he does is wake desiring: the desire to consume her, thinking now as he could not think of her then as breasts and sweetness of twinned lips, no, it was only as it could be, still braced, still caged, still at his ritual moment: hard cock listing with lust, the moment The Discipline had conditioned him for, this moment of not knowing her but only as desire, a desire for himself, feeling her as necessary to him, so on fire that he strips naked, kneels by the bed and prays, "Our Father who art in heaven..." and it is a long prayer, aeons long, and he spends the night, back bolt upright, lips moving, knowing that she must be made to know what he knows: that she needs him—this the source of her fire, that he is her salvation, this is the word of his love, the message of the rose: to become one flesh, his flesh, divine flesh, and through him become One with the Father.

Rian's night passed in what to her was an unusual restlessness. She had spent the time back before Lights Out just feeling wonderful. However, she couldn't square how she felt with what little she knew. She knew that she wasn't on fire for him. She knew fire, and this wasn't it. No, she was calm and serene. It had been almost forever since she had felt this—was it Dad?—but it didn't matter, there was no need to connect it, it was just there. But how to tell her roomie Jean? Or her friends? About a calmness, but then about feeling happy? It didn't jive. And then she steps away with the angels, the air about her vaporizes and she knows as only her dreams let her know, with that knowledge that waking exiles, that for him she is the clay, to be thrown and potted, that from which was drawn forms which then live, and there is an uneasiness astir within and about her, but it is like a passing wind, it does not hold though she desires to hold it, rather she is down, backside down upon the earth and the sky is full of rain and the rain tricks itself from drops to downpour to sheets of wetness to howling winds which slice her with every drip

now a blade and she is all bloodied, a body riddled, skin like a sieve, something which cannot stand but only dissolve, for the rain is now acid and she the dissolving entity...she wakes, rises and takes the rose to the window, holds it up against the moon, watches its hunger suck in the rays, "Queer," yet she can feel it rooting into her arm, sinking into her as vase, she the water necessary for it to live, "Is he water for my rose? Do I live only as I am linked to him?" Odd questions, ones that disturb her, of all that she has pondered in these past months, all that she has grappled with in the obligatory theology classes, these, "Where do they come from? Him?" "No," she answers, "not him," because what she has gotten from men she has always hated, having received their "gift" of fading away after the kisses, after sex, "If this is from him..." and the thought falls incomplete, she lays down again and finds sleep, yet the answer follows her, "then he is dangerous."

It is this night the seeding moonscape of Rian's dream: a woman's dream, the dream of many women: unbeknownst to any she is hiding, running, seeping into the dirt and as the sun rises to desiccate any remains, even random molecules of herself, so she finds herself anew, alive, somehow transported to a subterranean world, hidden where the rays cannot go, do not even know they cannot go, and she rests, slumbers with thick limbs, and snores an old woman's snore, a crone's nasaling, it is an unnerving sound not heard by any but the angel who stand guard at The Garden's back gate...and had offered Eve an opportunity to escape.

#### **CHAPTER 14: The Flesh**

"Fleshpots." Jim hears the word, it's a sloppy word, one hanging at the edge of a lip, as if clipped and unwilling to fall off, a word which wasn't sure whether it had wings to fly or whether, looking at those wings, wondered about its feet.

"Fleshpots!" A bit louder, rushed after its first articulation, two times now, and he could see Luke slink further into Big Mama Ass, her monstrous mountain of oft beaten overstuffedness, sometimes a being almost too repulsive, an alien in its own space: nothing else was like Big Mama, and as they got drunker Jim became mesmerized by her Ass and came to appreciate how she existed, how she stuck herself as it were into the air, he laughs, for all is ass: fat ass mooning the world, his laughter breaks into large waves and he finds himself swept under and pounded into the surf so much does it hurt this laughter, and it is tears, large ones, rolling down his face, all this Luke ignores, or doesn't hear, or whatnot, Jim doesn't care, he too is too shitfaced and into Big Mama, watches her suck Luke up her crack and reverse shit him into her innards.

"Fleshpots!!!" Luke screams, a tortured wail, and indeed Big Mama is abusing Luke's genitals, Jim can see that, watches her jerk him off, shoot him high as just one of a thousand unfaithful expulsions from herself: Big Mama finding them repulsive, these humans, these aliens who are so ass-backwards that they fail to see how without Big Mama Ass they are nothing, and as Luke blacks-out into slobbering drivel, Big Mama nestles him within, and sets him dreaming about Rian.

Luke was, truly, drunk with her, pathetically, "Rian! Rian! All you do is get stinking drunk here and blabber about Rian." God, Jim had to try something, curse him, do something to get him going, piss him off, get him away from falling into the bottle, keep him from what has become his too, too daily ritual of leaving campus and getting blotto after practice—and Jim having to heave and heft him to his backroom and throw his sorry ass into bed. Lugged and then undressed, Jim wants to have nothing to do with him, doesn't like jocks, doesn't like sloppy drunks, wonders if he's done right by letting Luke share the pad. On the other side of anger: "Fuck face, if you get drunk everyday, shit, then I can't!" Jim was angry but even angrier at

Luke's pussy-whipped final swoon swearing that, "Tomorrow. I'll go over there, tomorrow, Man, tomorrow."

Jim wonders if Luke does meet her in his dreams? How could a guy be so fucked-face over a Sweet Sixteen he's never really kissed? One Date, One Letter, or, One Date, then "monk-boy returns!" Jesus, Jim knows he hasn't really touched her nor she him: no tongue, no teat, certainly no beaver-trapping—certainly not! For if so Jim knew Luke would be all over the place suffocating from guilt and wallowing in The Muck Of Sin! and off to Daily Confession (Hourly? Minutely?) *Playboy* really fucked this boy's mind...How to move the altar-boy? Attack his pride? Sarcasm? Jim was at a loss. "Fucking-A Luke, hitch up your balls and go cock the witch! She's got you so hazed you haven't been worth shit, lately." But Luke just kept saying, "Yeah. She's fine. I'm okay." Pathetic—not pissed off and snapping at Jim's bait, not bolting into macho action to defend his out-of-work-pecker ("Was Jesus' cock rising what the resurrection is all about?"—no, he wouldn't hit him with that), worse than the dead, the never-alive, *Fucking-Luke do something!* Now its another month gone, Christmas break is over, she calls, he sputters about "Practice...and our away games...finals." She says, "Happy New Year," and whispers seductively, almost titters, "1968 will be our year, Luke." "She's got you castrated man. The witch ain't even touched your big bad bod and your balls are already shriveled."

But what courage at times fails to do, so Fate effects, or Fate given a bit of direction by another's stratagem. It was beyond his belief—there she was in the "Teilhard seminar." She and Sister Marie Rosario both flashing back and forth, fading in and out of each other's vaporish image...Rian there too too tangibly. "It can't be!" and he rubs his eyes, waiting for the pain of the hang-over to hit for it has been only at such moments that he has sensed her this near to him, but then only to lose her as his body took revenge on his dickless cowardice, but no, it is her, and only her, the other seven participants might as well be in Xanadu, no, it's her, and he's all confused, this being an advanced theology seminar, the first joint-seminar ever held with *Gentlemen* from The Towers and *Ladies* from St. Clare on their campus although taught by a male professor, more perplexing because as far as Luke knew it was only for the select few, the Honors Program students like himself, the busty of brain not of bod, but Jesus, *it's her*, and for the whole three hour seminar he's dumb, no words or images, hears he nothing, only sees her, though he works hard to cast his eyes upon the page, it is like Snow White's mirror, "... who's the sexiest of them all?"

"Professor Maitlin said that you'd be willing to tutor me, catch me up." That's what she says, comes over across the room and stands by him seated, he still watching her through the magic mirror, but she standing there, and for a moment she is perplexed, but then laughs, "Hey!" waving her hand in front of him, "I know your rep for being a stud about these serious things but can I *just* have your attention for a minute?" It was almost a plea, more than a request—there was a tinge of desperation behind the words, as if she felt that she might lose something, or be lost, stranded, abandoned, and it was this tone, this pebble of discomfort that defined her, made her real, she was not just there for adoration, not just for praise and exultation, no, she was entreating, almost submitting, she was a heart with one small drop of blood...and the image rocks him, hits him so hard that he launches the chair backwards as he stands, thrusts it with his ass such that it slams the wall, and he's upward in a flash by her side, "Yeah," is all he says, and she smiles.

So fated, they finally get together in a quiet talking space, a private cosmos, and though it's only for a couple of hours of studying on the two-days-a-week the seminar meets, all their time together makes them feel like they've always been together. They steal some other time—

much too brief time both agree—after his home games. As is customary, "The Lady Clares" are bused for what always becomes a wild night, much like the "Fleshpots!" which Luke calls The Lair, so the rafters of the tiny gym, a Forties relic, are heated by lonely Males who see lonely Females only too infrequently. There is always a short dance: a time after the game for working off suppressed fantasies, and so these games, much like Football Saturdays, bond the student bodies together more than the Mass. Yet for him they are games of great temptation. He has to watch her from the hardwood, watch during warm-ups how she is never without a gaggle of men around her, she the frisky prairie gopher and they a circling band of hawks, each a solitary flyer, each wanting to circle her and strike at her, alone, each one alone her predator, swooping down, invading the territory of the other, fearless in their fracture of the rules of nature, violating each other, all to swoop down and snatch her, grasp her in their claws and swipe her from the earth...to...to *what*? Luke's mind wouldn't let the image fly to its logical conclusion, no, he just inches from glare to seething to total blindness, for his eyes tear the fabric of the day and he is fueled, not with jealousy, not with envy, no, with the desire to kill, to slay his brothers, to snatch her as trophy, their scalps as testament to his being the fiercer warrior—and in such a mind he enters the game...*The Sioux* never lose a home game all season.

"Teilhard's view of the *Divine Milieu* is quite comforting. Don't you think?"...After all he has said, all he has taught her, how could she say this? Was she stupid? At first he could think of nothing but her beauty, no, he must be honest, of his lust, "Jesus, forgive me!" This he prayed in his better moments, those which were dry. But it had not taken too long before, as was his way, his mind demanded of her something which most around him: students and professors, could not give: a view of something new, of an original thought, he hears her question and just looks at her, she sees him blankly and waits, having seen him deep in thought before, and she feels a certain satisfaction in this realization that she has pushed him into deep thought, but it is the other side of the cloud now, for he is remembering all that he has laid out before her, spread himself out just like a blanket, shown her all his fibers and colors, allowed her to sit within his Self and even touch the borders of his Soul...oh, he has taken her—simple step by simple step—from Teilhard's belief in scientific evolution to his discernment of "orthogenesis"... "See," and he had flung his arms such that they became the arrows of evolution itself, "See, all around us is motion, movement, and it is not just evolving, it has a direction. *Orthogenesis*. It's not only propelled from within, no, it's drawn from without. Can you see it? Can you feel it?"...and she thought he would rise and fly away, yet though she looked and strained to see, all she could neatly see was this mad philosopher, this guy in love with words, a man who was truly crazed in that he could spend time with her—and she finds it a queer time—time where she was not the center of his attention, no, not an object of admiration or of those darkly male emotions she has come to know too well by this her sophomore year, no, for him she is subject, someone he wants to act, someone he wants to respond, and it is crazy, all crazy, for she has never been treated like this, never felt this way, it's his avoidance of her, his ignoring of her, this she knows is what glues her to him, makes her yearn each day for the next so that she is one day closer to their twice-a-week date, yes, for her the seminar is a date, a time where she is truly in love, but "I don't love *love* him. At least I don't think that way about him. I mean not that way," perplexed at her own lack of clarity, "He's good looking enough. Big. Even amazingly athletic. But there is this attraction. I don't know what to say." *Crazy*. She realizes that he makes her crazy, as with no direction, but going every which way..."and Teilhard grasped so clearly, so simply that if there is a PUSH, if molecules are moved by some *elan vital* as Bergson intuited, well then there has to be a PULL, something at the other end. But let's not get linear, no, it's like an ellipse. Two forces,

two foci. A push and a pull. And the pull is the collective, that all of which the individual is just one. And as the one thinks and feels, so the collective thinks and feel. See," and he turns to look at her, and it is this type of look which she has never been looked at with before, a look which infuses her with a sense of worth, not of being a prize, not that, no, something like "See, your being. Just *being there*. All of creation is just so that you can be! Do you see? Do you feel?" And it is as if they are the collective, two foci: Life's ellipse. As if at this moment with him that all that is, has ever been, will ever be is there, they are it. Her head is swimming, and he is not stopping, no he crashes into bigger waves, wading out into deeper water. "Yes, Yes!" exclamations as if he were seeing it right now, "Yes, every thought, every feeling, it all counts, there is nothing trivial. *Nothing*." Words which fade in intensity as he is wound tighter within, at such a moment she wishes she could be inside him so that she could see what he sees, and then he does something he has never done, never attempted even though they have been studying alone and out of sight in a remote room in the library, he takes her left hand, holds it, raises it to his lips and kisses each fingertip, it unnerves her, something repulses her, yet it is so terribly, terribly sweet, so "gentlemanly" a gesture that she is snagged, she knows that this is how it is "supposed to be"—"the distance" The Faith requires, the control, the sublimation of passion, "Is this what he wants?"...and he says, "As we are now, so were Adam and Eve. So are we bathed in a Divine Milieu. It is Christ present when we touch like this."

Luke wakes as from a submergence, a walking under the water, wakes and catches the image, hears himself say it, "Christ!" he swears, the one word suffices, but it is fraught with much silent dialogue, that which Jim has to bear almost daily, the tortured hours meeting her, the wailing, wandering, bottomless hours when he lets the bottle take him to where he can't go when sober. "Yeah, *fuck*," he rails, "all I do is talk to her about Christ! When all I want to do is reach out, rip off her blouse and pet her to death! Jesus, am I totally fucked or what?" And the hours are filled with renditions of this recrimination, hours of words and images, oaths sacred and profane, all which Luke will never remember, or not let himself remember, but which Jim will never forget, having to put up each and every week with Luke's helpless, hapless floundering—"Pathetic, Man!"—the wrenching of the hook through his heart which is never released. Yes, more pathetic than Jim could measure is Luke clanging in his emptiness like a loose bolt in a large bucket, more, needing blackouts to face his shuddering...almost cowardice, indeed, Jim didn't want to admit his own negative feelings about Luke's cowering, no, couldn't, for it was too close to his own dread.

But now Luke is silent. Jim is out. The room is just him. Him and the couch. Oh, his head aches, but he is not feeling it. No, the greater part of himself is numb, alive but numb, numb so much that he knows he is dead, that he has died without every having kissed her, without ever having held her sweet breasts, without ever have lain within her, dead, all is dead, and Teilhard's to blame.

"Teilhard, fuck you!" as he kicks the couch, picks up the pillows and flings them hard against the wall. "Cosmic consciousness, fuck you!" and he rips the end-table lamp's cord from the wall. "Noosphere...and Divine Milieu, fuck you!" He likes the sounds of the rhyme, so he shouts it again and again, this time taking to stomping out the beat, "Noosphere and Divine Milieu, fuck you!" He is amused with himself, laughing at the edge of what he knows is ultimate abomination and profanation. For all that he is, is wrapped up with Teilhard, all that has kept him within the Catholic fold is there with the thought of Teilhard, he who has given new meaning to existence, to why the Church will endure, to why he can watch the events of today and know them as important but subordinated to the Truths of the Church, verily, Teilhard who snagged



him just as he was about to fall off and plunge over Tradition's edge, Teilhard gave some sense, even if casting but a fragile net, over the weirdness Brooding Dreaming had become. Teilhard who had consecrated a Mass on the World, holding the Sun as Host and the Sky as the Sacred Blood of Earth. Teilhard—suppressed, hounded, censured Jesuit who had, as a paleontologist, dug into the earth for bones and as he found Peking Man so he found the soul of the cosmos alive in everyone and everything, "God-in-everyone, everything", this pan-*en*-theist, he had held, pulled back, "saved?"...Luke not knowing but yet only ever so lightly feeling now what had once been an urgent force, a daily energy, that Teilhard's Fire was but there to ward off the "Dark Vapors," *not* to engage Her Eyes, only to glance at them, and up until Rian, Teilhard had been enough, the only language, the few feeble images which restrained him from total breakdown...but now, Luke is slipping, understands that Teilhard's Cosmic Christ in the Divine Milieu is just another hook, another dream of mis-direction, there was nothing to do but be oneself, to free oneself—breakout, escape!—from others, all collectivities: nation, church, university, the human race, yeah, Teilhard has become the last image which looms and makes Luke feel bad about his drinking, telling him that all he is doing is adding negative vibes to the Noosphere, that his intemperateness is a blotch, a foul wind in the Divine Milieu, *Teilhard*... "Fuck Teilhard!"... and now Rian.

Luke wants her. Is there anything else to say? Any other way to feel? Yeah, sure, he doesn't care that now he's just another in the line of hawks, but he feels that he is the Big Hawk, that he knows her mind like they don't and so he can grasp her where they can't...yeah, they fear her, for them she's just fire uncontained, the bastards calling her a slut, a whore, judgments he can't believe to be other than the wagging braggadocio of his idiot classmates, he knows her in a way they don't, and she, she who is "comforted" by the Divine Milieu, "Can such Innocence be masked?"...she can't be the witch Jim blows loud about, no, he, yes even Jim, he must want her, that's why he's so down on her. Now, Luke can see it all. They want her, not she them. *Ha!* But he knows he wants her because she wants him, "That's it!" *Clear.* It's clear. She came to the Teilhard Seminar because she wants him. "Maybe she didn't know it. But she came because what's in me pulled her." He's so wild and pleased with himself that he fails to grasp the irony in this Teilhardian line of reasoning. *Whatever!* Luke knows that he has stepped over the line, knows that he has answered the question which the Novice Master had asked, the one which he did not believe Friar Alfred had answered truthfully, so he says it, says it out loud, out loud and with a force of breath which others would call lusty, but which for Luke is a breath of freedom or rather a freeing breath, the breathing of something caged in deep caverns within, "YES. IT IS A WOMAN!"

## **CHAPTER 15: Our Year**

Like most young lovers at their first New Year's marking, Rian's "Luke, 1968 will be our year!" expressed the hope of centuries of yearning, of that seed of love within each of us which somehow knows that the sky is filled with terrifying clouds, thunderclouds, is in abject fear of the thunderclap and the lightning strike, yet knows that with it all is the rain, the drops, that which will transform, turn the hard-scrabble earth, once again virgin, into moldable clay, fecund soil, and so is a hope blessed and opened to receive a blessing. 1968 would hold all the blessings Rian hoped for, as for Luke she would always be part of this pivot-point year, a year to leverage the whole of his life, past and to come, "our year," a never-ending year, 1968, that which defines a generation, is a portal to a spiritual quest, yet for so many also a year to follow Alice in Wonderland, free-fall, a year which specially asked, *What is reality but a delusion?*

Living off-campus had called Luke to deal with his father, spar and stand toe-to-toe, well, at least sit and speak as if he were in control of his own life! Then the basketball scrimmages and his real "arrival" on campus, all added up to something new about Luke, something which made Rian confess, only to herself, that she found him a more interesting man—somewhat unpredictable, secretive, "what you see is not what you get!" She knew it was not now simply his being three years older which added a look of maturity, no, it was his inner drive, fire which sparked from his eyes, shades of passions which flowed as he walked and talked, even his dreams, which they never discussed, enticed her.

She watched his most marvelous mind bound about and impress everyone in the Teilhard Seminar as did his talents on the court. He appeared to be a rare individual as most were phrasing it now, "a rare individual," being brains and artful brawn. No doubt, she began to love him: "love *love*." Love him as his mind opened vistas for her and the other students, for he painted with an historical brush but had the eye to involve the present, every abstraction, every capital letter entity, "The Church," "Democracy," "Evolution," "War and Peace," whatever, this he linked to a fellow student's current interest. At times he appeared magical, standing, stretching out his arms, rolling up his sleeves, calling attention to the cells of his flesh, the hair on his arm, all the while making you understand, no, feel, "Feel!" his most favored new word, "*Feel* that this is you as much as it is me!" Again, "Could I breathe if *you* did not breathe? Could *we* breathe if the trees did not breathe? Are they not our lungs? Are we not their lungs?" She liked him when he was like this, at these times the word *passionate* was written all over him, *ah, Janis!*

From the bleachers she found him equally enthralling. Once started it was like watching a ballet, one mixed with the hunt, for as he turned on fire so everyone, including his teammates, appeared to be trying to catch up with him. It was not just that he was clearly the best in the league, rather, it was that his performance was masterful. Whether it was three-on-three at half-court pick-up or in a regulation game, folks just liked to watch, observing him as a crowd does an artist in the park.

Yet she knew, anticipated in the way one anticipates a poem forming—a vague intuition that all that is, is tilted and that when it is grasped, written, imaged that all will be righted yet different, somewhat—knew that he would betray her, before year's end, abandon her, reject her, scorn her. Despite all the changes he had been undergoing, she knew now that he did *not* know where her Fire came from. More, she knew this because she had struggled to understand and appreciate where his Fire came from. That's why she had wormed her way into the Teilhard Seminar. Her grades were fine, before meeting him she could have taken the Honors option but chose to spend more time with the performing arts: dance improvisation and a solid back-up voice. This she believes he believes is the source of her fire, but he is wrong. She had entered his world, and come to understand, so she believes, his need to teach and "preach" as they kidded him, teach and preach and put everything into a controllable intellectual framework: an Evolving Universe, Progress, but towards Omega—the Cosmic Christ. Yet, he wasn't just a "head," no, he had fire, he had heart. In fact she knows, so she believes, his fire's source to be non-intellectual, this she knows because of her own fire, one that she now so vaguely understands and feels again, knowing like the image at the tip of one's imagination: that word or phrase or semi-colon which will make it all fall together, "the penny drop!"—yes, she knows her fire at this level is fueled by an invisible flame: a source, a thing, an entity, possibly a being? *whatever*, it's just almost there in her mind, yet she only knows it through its absence, an absence which defines what is at the core of herself and her sisters, even The Lady Clares, "Especially The Lady Clares!"—it's cock, Luke's cock, his cock, His cock, Cock...and it is because Luke acts as if he doesn't have cock

that she knows his fire, and why he is her core flame, and his own ultimate attraction: he has it and won't give it to her!..."cock" was the word she used, several hard-core words having become commonplace the last year as she and a few whom the Good Sister's called "Progressives" dedicated themselves to exploring those sectors of the world of sexuality which was originally forbidden to them as "young Ladies." This matter of *sexual adventure* had come upon Rian quite quickly. She recalls that on the day when she had really first thought about Luke—just as she placed his letter before the Madonna—she had pledged with her Sisters...they called themselves "Sisters," at first, more in mockery of the Good Sisters who guarded them than with any consciousness of previous radical movements among women...she had pledged to "live dangerously." For them, at this time, it meant "being on the pill." Not that they planned for the promiscuous life, just so that they decided to be ready.

Yet, the danger she sensed from Luke's letter was that it called her to confront the passion behind her desired leap, that is why she had placed it before the Madonna, because the Madonna was her one "Sister" who was deeply connected to the passion which Luke bore, was the common link, so Rian knew, between she and Luke, an image they could, must use to communicate, to tap into each other's passion. Rian knew that she would have to look deeply into Mary's eyes before she could turn and leap. Luke's eyes, so she knew, said that there was nothing on the other side but perdition.

It wasn't that Rian just wanted sex, no, in point of fact she wanted everything that had been left out of that word, not just cock as penis—that wasn't poetry. Yes, she had had her fling or two, one, her long-suffering high school boy friend who indeed heaved and gasped, groped and shook with such force—pleasure or death? she did not know—that Rian truly believed he was either going crazy or about to leave her on angelic wings, the other, the art teacher, Mr. Prout, he who had for years artfully seduced with all the small innuendoes and guarded obscenities which told her that she could have him whenever she wanted. She thought July 4th was that day, but he sputtered and flared and sizzled, disappearing into the dark, clearly satisfied with this singular manifestation of his own peculiar destiny.

What she wanted was what she and her Sisters came to call the "x" in sex. The unknown. The land not traveled by their mothers. More, the land traveled by Mary. For in this period of cataclysmic change in the Catholic Church all ideas about God and Man and the World were up for grabs. Latin was no longer the mystifying language of the clerics, calls were afoot for the use of girls as altar-boys, a flurry of graduate Theology schools had opened to educate the much touted new wave of "lay theologians," men and women, and despite themselves, the Sisters of St. Clare were radicalizing students left and right, but mostly left.

How many years had how many Good Sisters looked at the Virgin Mary and wondered as Jim so crudely stated, How, in fact, did Mary couple with God the Father? Centuries of doctrine, tomes of dogma, all with their tightly screwed and bolted language: words like *homoousios* and *filioque* over which priests had butchered other priests, Inquisitors and Crusaders had slain the heretic and the infidel—all these, efforts of no consequence, each falling like a withered leaf at winter's approach. Explanations like Virgin Birth and Immaculate Conception, definitions of Mary as not a goddess but Co-Mediatrix of Grace, all the pious and revered adorations of her as Seat of Wisdom, Mirror of Justice, Cause of Our Joy, Vessel of Honor, Mystical Rose, Tower of David, Morning Star, Ark of the Covenant, Help of Christians, and Holy Mother of God—all these dried up and shriveled as the Good Sisters looked into Mary's eyes, the eyes in paintings, icons and sculpture, eyes which no artistic male hand could hide, blind or conceal, eyes which were all that Mary is, yet eyes which have seen the Father in His passion, grasped the intent

behind His desire for her, knew the shape and size, height and width of His being, eyes which took Him in and through which He truly became Father, as He had waited for aeons, She had seen his Cock, and let it live within Her.

So despite their lack of self-awareness, their lack of conceit as revolutionaries, and indeed more in consonance with their appointed role as Brides of Christ, these religious women talked about their feelings, discussed the emotional aspect of the spiritual quest, probed the writings of the mystics: John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Brother Lawrence, Madame Guyon and even some rebel Protestants like Jakob Bohme, George Fox, and explored and so opened for the first time to their own as well as their students' eyes, the role of women throughout Church history, finding strength in women buried in the Tradition's root cellar: especially two—Hildegard von Bingen and Mechthild von Magdeburg, yes, The Good Sisters began exploring and this excavating engaged some of the girls, now calling these not Good but just Sisters, bonded, all and each in a mysterious almost mystifying Sisterhood, each calling upon the others to express their own feelings about the images, depictions of women from the hands of the Evangelists (and it was asked, "Were they really all males?") through the literature of martyr tales, Chaucer's romps, and the living testimony of the odd, unnerving and mystifying Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement.

Why had Rian and her Sisters been, apparently, so ready, so receptive to these ideas? This they could not answer, but it was what they asked, asked each week as new ideas entered, old ideas exited, and the danger in the air was palpable. For their talk went from "emotions" to "ecstasy," from "commitment" to "free love," from "duty" to "orgasm," and even without a codification of these changes, a new language emerged: a tongue at once bloody and newborn as it was ancient and bearing the stare of hungering death.

At the end of each meeting they, with the Nun-Sisters, would sip forbidden wine and wonder, "Where all this will go!"...All realized the impact of the Pill, knew as they rose each morning and faced the mirror, knew that they were doing what their mothers couldn't, some wouldn't, but what women through the ages had wanted to do: control their bodies...and so they believed, as a result, control their souls. For as they knew sperm to be the force in control of their bodies: the fear of it, the love of it, the inevitability of it, so they grasped, yes, each day almost gasped as they raised their palms with the pinkish tablet at center, raised and then laid upon their tongues, yes, each day they, given their breeding, knew this as an act of communion, an Eucharistic moment, but more than that each knew not. But they *felt*. Empathy. Compassion. Empathy with the suffering of women of all time who had taken Holy Communion as their only form of birth control, who had approached the altar rail to receive the purified male body, the body which had died for them, the body which loved them, did not only want sex from them, empathy for these women because they did not know the self-abuse of the act, did not connect that the sacred Body resting, dissolving on their tongues was indeed what allowed their men to control them. Compassion. Taking the Pill was an act of compassion, taking unto their own bodies, each one, Rian could so feel it, sense the tiny pill float down her throat, feel it and sense it to be just like the wafer, His Body, body after her soul, but now the Pill, her body, maybe Her Body she reflects, "Maybe Mary's Body?!"—she can feel the thousands, no, millions, legions of women crying out, craving to live through her body, yearning, nearly berserk with the burden of their bodies, wanting to live as a woman freed from the body as The Father had so defined that body, freed, so that she could find, search out her own spirituality, face danger.

She had known each day as she had walked towards The Lair that she was Fire. She had survived the fiery bluster of two males upon her, burned with them, stomped among the embers

savoring each and every burning sensation, and then walked away through the steaming cloud of their mutual exhaustion, strode away unafraid, not satisfied, not yearning for their further entreaties, not vulnerable to their boasts and cries—threats?—no longer, *no*, the Pill had set her body free, and set her on Fire.

At The Lair it had all been a performance. And she had loved it. Relished it. Had wanted to ignite the room. She knew that she was Salome, that they looked at her as Magdalene... she had never been afraid of being called a whore or a nympho, she laughs at the rubbery dicks which the curses of "Bitch!" were meant to disguise. No, she was aware that they were not aware. They did not know. Did not know her, certainly not now. Few men at The Towers, Good Catholic Young Men, maybe only Jim, had any idea about the Pill. They still lived in the era of Sperm. "Fear the Sperm!" Isn't this what every woman had been taught? "Just one. Microscopic. And you're ruined!" The Nuns had terrorized them with the fear of the single sperm, that mighty of mites, Mightier than Mighty Mouse himself, it could stalk them, so the Good Sisters said, stalk them "even after the boy is gone"—sperm on a bed spread, sperm lurking at the edge of your panties, sperm rocketing out from under his fingernail as he touches you... "Don't let him touch you. Never. *Nowhere!*"

And then Luke. It was clear that he had no idea, total zero, about what was happening to women. Just the recent announcement and formation of the National Organization for Women ("NOW")—this should have given him a clue. But it was not part of his universe of ideas, certainly not of his feelings. And she could hardly get him interested in the topic. Whenever she brought it up, he'd switch to talking about *the war*. "Vietnam" and "Indochina" had become part of his landscape since the Tet Offensive in late January. Not that he wanted to fight the war, just that he used it as a way to apply his one unyielding Teilhardian principle: "Nothing is trivial. So, how can I be violent? Everything I do impacts the creation of the Noosphere, and so the fullness of the Divine Milieu. It's inevitable, isn't it? I'll have to file for Conscientious Objector status."

Why didn't she vent her anger at him? She had taken on other men in the Seminar. Why? She wasn't sure. She had had no fear of taking on all the men at The Lair, in fact she was like a prize fighter taunting the crowd, calling for all "real men" to come and give it their best, placing wagering money on the line. Was she waiting for the right moment? That thought crossed her mind. But what moment would that be?

For Luke, the Tet Offensive and the war in Indochina evoked heated discussions about maleness and courage and the patriotic obligation of young men to their country. He had never been politically aware, and even at this time his reasoning and argument were theologically structured, not historically or politically grounded. For him it was all simply another battle in the eternal warfare between God and Satan. "Just the Fall, Cain and Abel, and the history of the Chosen People all over again." Yet it took its toll on him because it forced him back to the Cross, more to the Crucified, to kneeling in front of a mangled Son and praying for understanding why a loving Father would be "satisfied"—as the ageless soteriology of Saint Anselm so described Him—be satisfied in any way by the suffering of His Son!...kneeling in abjection, Luke chokes, finds something struggling to rise from his heart through his mouth, but he is not able to release it, chokes upon observing himself at Golgotha: *Would he have substituted himself for Himself?*

From Tet on Jim changed, radically. He spoke of "January 30, 1968" as if it were his birthday. With intensity he tore himself away from his amusing playtime as campus heretic and cynic, the scoffer, and flung himself into political action. Luke and he hardly saw each other until early April when Martin Luther King was shot. As involved as Luke had become with basketball, so Jim had immersed himself in "radical analysis." When Luke would return from a

game it was not uncommon to find the living-room through the kitchen littered with books, pamphlets and Left newspapers from around the world... moldy stacks under the bathroom's leaky sink! It was almost as if he could hear the roll-call: Lenin, Marx, Castro, Fanon, Bukhanin, Che, and smell the gunpowder: Revolution, Uprising, Revolt, Rebellion, Guerrilla Warfare! Tired and sober Luke gave short-shift to Jim's runaway enthusiasm for the scathing and vitriolic denouncements of American Imperialism and the History of Colonialism. He missed their old drinking bouts, disliked Jim's turn to marijuana and LSD, hated drinking alone, but found himself, in the morning, astink with the sweat of *Jack Daniels*.

*1968 turning for Rian on the Pill, Jim at Tet, and Luke fondling the Roundball.*

Luke and basketball were a big story on campus during this winter semester of '68. It had begun just before Christmas during the perennial pre-season disaster with Notre Dame. The Sioux were, painfully since their first game back in 1953, slain, scalped and destroyed by their rival clansmen: "The Fighting Irish." A long standing Irish vs. German religious connection/competition between the schools and the two founding religious teaching orders had turned The Towers into a stomp-romp warm-up for the Irish. Normally, by the half, ND was thirty or more points ahead, and the Sioux's varsity vainly battled Notre Dame's bench—or, in really bad years, hot shots from the freshman squad. *Should he have invited his Dad?* He wondered. It just had not seemed right for two reasons. One, his Dad would have been torn—and Luke had no doubt that no matter what, that he would have only been pleased by a Notre Dame win. Second, Luke had changed. Dad had never seen him play. Yeah, some grade school games, but not at the sem. And Luke had only written that he played center and that they won more than they lost. More: Luke knew that the seminary league was all bush league stuff—local high schools, YMCA teams, the CYO, and assorted rec clubs. Luke had never spoken, would never have boasted, about his skills, and talking about them now would have been even more difficult. "Pride. Remember, son, Pride goes before the Fall." In the sem it was easy, Luke was twenty-four-hours-round-the-clock repressing everything positive about himself, keeping it out of the Ego and submitting to Jesus' way—Humble Obedience.

How now to talk with Dad? Now that Luke wants to win? That winning is written with his eyes, everyone around sees him scorching the walls of buildings, on the court's backboards, cutting the air, slicing it into the word: *WIN!*...Luke doesn't care if it is Pride, such is not the issue, he doesn't care to hear himself praised or to be praised, he simply wants to feel the win, have it drench him like a shower, walk with it through the gym and know that he is the best, feel it!: "I AM THE BEST!"...He knows he lusts for the win, *how could he tell that to Dad?*

So only at the conclusion of the season. Only when his hometown *Hastings Gazette* ran a feature on him, only then did his father know. Worse. When he did come to the final game of the season, Luke knew that Dad would find out about Notre Dame. Not just that Luke had taken them to task, not even that he had single-handedly "whipped their butts" as his teammates whooped and hollered, no, neither, nor even that he had scored thirty points in the first half and forced ND to play their starters for the whole game, no, none of these, rather, about the offer. Or, as he knew it would be discussed: "The Offer."

True, the summer letter from Notre Dame had been the only one Luke had not discarded. Not opened, not read, just knew what it said—and he kept it, more like a good-luck piece, an amulet to ward off danger, here, his Dad. And so he came, and so he watched, and so he found out.

"Son," did he have to say more? "Son, they're talking about a full boat." Then he said it and with it said it all, "Everything." Not that they were poor, just that with five kids behind him

and three ahead of him the tuition fees at Notre Dame had outflanked his father's dreams. Hayseed South Bend didn't open itself to "working one's way through college." So, Luke had never even hinted at it as an option after his return home. He just waited for his Dad to make a decision, consult with Father Boniface, and decide whether to send him to a Catholic College in the City or one Up-Country.

"I'm not that good," he lies.

"Is it the girl?"

"No," he lies.

"But just the opportunity. To bring glory not only to yourself but to the Church."

Jesus, he said it! But how can I say it? He still wants me to battle Satan, America, the secular culture, "The World." Shit I've had enough of that! Dare I say, "I just want to win, for myself?"

"This is a second chance, you know?"

... so what do you want me to say? your son's a coward? a weakling?... "put his hand to the plough and looked back!?"...a sinner? yeah, I know—a failure. no, make that a capital F. Fucking-Failure. he's not gonna die for you. he's not gonna save you. he can't even save himself!

"Yeah, I know."

They stop where? what crossroad? Is the Prodigal coming or going?—stop and look at each other, and Dad plainly sees that he wasn't Alfred, not even Luke, someone else, scared, something bothering him. *What had made him leave?* Dear Jesus, help my boy, he's a good kid, a really good kid, he's afraid, I can see it, but we're all afraid. Jesus, strengthen his will. He's just a kid, a little kid in a big body. Sometimes it takes time. I know. Please, dear Jesus, embolden him, train him, call him, I know he will come. *Thy Will Be Done.*

Back at home, before he slips off his coat and hangs his hat, Dad carries Notre Dame's letter: replaces in its envelope, still bearing its July 23rd postmark, sets it on top of Luke's bookcase, just under the crucifix Dad, himself, had given him—this Luke, his chosen son—presented the morning the Shepherd had taken his Lamb, received him atop The Mount's steep stairway, walked with hands upon his shoulder, this his Offering. All, now, was in the hands of God, *what wasn't?*

## **CHAPTER 16: The Betrayal**

Luke laid in bed not knowing what to do with his hands. Did they drip with mortal sin as The Master had so often said, so often drilled the image, "Women are succubi!" Yes, she had seduced him, *she* is the magnet towards which I cannot but come, she is not resistible, I am but a moth caught in the death embrace of the flame. "Succubi!" How often had he read that word, heard it through the centuries on the bruised lips of the martyrs?...seen in the paintings of Durer, Hieronymus Bosch and Matthias Grunewald those hideous creatures, deformed, mangled, abortions of the soul—now he is one. She has seduced him.

Not that Luke hadn't wanted it, no, he admits that. He just no longer owns his hands, doesn't know what to do with them, knows that she has stolen them and replaced them with ones that will do her bidding, rush to her at a whisper of beckoning. No, all the tortures of the monastic madness could not, would not, restore his hands. She has them. He is now hers. *Shudders.*

Luke has held them so long, raised so high, that they are almost bloodless, tingling leading to sharp pains has long left, now they are corpishly white, betraying in their whiteness the dark dark sin which shrouds them. When they fall, crashing at his sides, Luke does not notice

for he is suffocating from his tears, submersed in self-pity, lament, self-condemnation...but more—worse!—his cock is on fire.

*Hard* is not the word—so straight, so long, growing at such a pace, rocketing his desires, consuming him: he is being sucked back down his body, across his chest, even his hands, like a snake, a large boa now inching upward, taking in his whole body, it but prey, not dead, being eaten alive, slowly, yes, his cock is swallowing him, for it sees him as prey, knows that now is the time to strike, has felt her alive next to him, knows that she yearns for him, that he is match to the tinder between her thighs, oh, he is awakened, called forth from his deep cavern, so deeply dug, so covered with the mystic webs of self-hate and self-abuse that arousal is indeed like resurrection not just resuscitation, no, not that because he has never lived before, is now just being born, she having birthed him, sent the pangs of her hunger, not just sent but threw, cast off, allowed it to plunge into the depthless pit of his betrayal, knowing that he might have no bottom, that she would never land, just float and float into oblivion—"But what do I have to lose?" she said to her group. But then she spoke honestly, "This is what I want." They heard it, saw the flash across her eyes, the brush of angelic wings, the kiss of the so-named demon, "This is what I want!" she says again, and they were shocked by her courage.

"Come!" It might have been the last word, for certain it had been the first word, but neither would have been heard because for Luke it was more than word, more than invitation: itself a plunge, a leap, yet, as soon as it had been heard, a harpoon flew, shot out of who knows where, flew and pierced right through him, so as he fell he was also anchored, this the harpoon of Manly Desire, the desire to be guiltless, to say, "The woman made me do it!"—so his plunge, while terrifying, was also secured, he fell with the yell, the howling, screaming, blood-curdling yell of the ambushing warrior, a yell to scare to death the prey he was about to fall upon, and his yell was muffled in the full flesh of her bosom, and he, as he plunged, heard this yell ever so more muffled as he stroked her and kissed her and leaned forward onto her breasts, his hulking body pressing her hard against the side-door of the car, his goat's breath generating clouds of randy whispers, soon it was as if the car and he were of one body, it his exoskeleton, he the crab holding, sucking a succulent, fleshy, insanely arousing morsel of mollusk, yes, it may have been hours, could have been days, indeed, crossed centuries of desire and pleasuring, for he held her in his hands, two incredibly beautiful, moon-white, soft and trembling "gifts," all his mind could record was the word "gifts," and he felt them as that, that she was offering him herself freely, saying, "Take! ...and for Luke this was The Temptation, she Eve and he Adam, for all that was just in the touch of her, his tightly controlled but slightly quivering touch, knowing by this touch that all creation was for him changed, no, not simply changed—transformed, yes, it was the touch of Her, Mother, the Goddess yet unnamed, but she who was while Beautiful also the most Depraved Ugliness, that of sin, here, depending upon his desire either a venial sin of temporary stain or the leprous touch of Mortal Sin: Eternal Death, Unforgiven Death, Eternal Damnation, and, indeed, all about them is fire and brimstone but not as that of Satan rather of their mutual desire, a desire of molten lust, and so they are naked, for it is the naked touch, the naked look, the naked communication, "I want you" being curled into "I am you," this the moment of true copulation, not of cock and pussy, but of the male and the female, he seeing her and finding her Good, this The Transgression...and as he was slain by the wondrousness of her breasts, their sheer beauty, his delight at sucking them, stroking them, fondling, jiggling and almost laughing, looking at her and seeing eyes which were wide-open to him, just then he is jerked back, just ever so slightly by the harpoon, feels it ever so gradually tugging him away from her, and in its pain he realizes the offering of another gift, one of knowledge, one of awareness, "There is no



shame!" He can feel this not just hear it, "She has no shame!"...it is the chant of the monks, that chant inherited from the Condemning Angel, that Guardian of the Gate whose Sword of Fire drove them from Yahweh's Paradise, this all together The Brooders chant as they dream Luke-not-Alfred, make themselves come alive within him through their talisman, he reaches and scratches his left eyelid, they are pleased, he is still theirs, and so is she now the rotten apple, one with a core of worm, one with the serpent...and he knows that underneath all of this beauty, all of his pleasuring, all of her apparent innocent joy in having him suck upon her, it is clear that he is not the first, "Not the first."... "NOT THE FIRST!"...words of condemnation, of conspiracy, of betrayal, and he slowly slinks away from her, slips out from under Her mantle of vaporish darkness, wordless, eyes tattooed to her soul, watching each movement, the re-strapping of the brassiere, the buttoning of her blouse, her calm, comfortable, too, too familiar asking, "Would you catch the top button for me, Luke?"...Ah, feline smile, tongue licking kitten lips, satisfied, a smile not a shield for Her Eyes, and he knows that "Luke" could be any boy's name, "Tom, Dick, Harry" whomever....and as he drives her back to campus, she leans against him, snuggles closer, and Luke is grateful for the harpoon, the pain within, the piercing so joyous, yet his hands....

"Finally!" She stands before the bureau's mirror, loosens and flings aside her bra. "Finally!" rings through her ears as she strokes her breasts, searching with her fingers for his lips, the gaze which tethered him to her, the smell of his aftershave, and in touching each minor abrasion scored by his midnight shadowed beard she feels a tingle, a wave, more like a flush of droplets, of rippling pleasures, knowing that he has her within him, knows this more than he knows it this she is certain of, her spectral milk, knows it as true, so true, through the passion of his cock, now knowing that he does have cock, not only felt it flailing against his trousers, pressed bluntly against her thighs, but from his tongue, its cousin, as it probed and licked, knows it as a hungry cock, one which will lap the waters of her delta, knows that he is not just a jumper, not just a wham-bang-thank-you-ma'am, no, that there is something more, that he wants more, he had lain against her breasts as if she were a pillow, almost napped—she could feel him slide into comfort, find her body as a fit for his, much like a glove, felt the sculpting of his hands, not just their grabbing, yes, he had fumbled, he had gasped, she saw the dryness of his throat, parched and begging, but where others only probed and pushed, pressed and stretched, tore and sought to gobble, this Luke, he wanted her, wanted "in," and she had let him, further than he could possibly know, but not as far as she wanted him to come.

For her it was the pictures, pictures which if Luke had seen, and once having seen had compared to his Mother's room...well, call it a Conspiracy?! call it Them All Working Together, for Rian daily gazed upon pictures of Mary much like Luke's mother's collection: Pietas, statue with Mary's heart exposed upon her chest, Mary at the Foot of the Cross...it was these which, in a way, she could not explain, not justify but which those among the Sisters, especially her Progressive kin, they would have understood, not explained, not footnoted, but understood, a common feeling, the exposed breast of compassion, Her Heart.

He wakes in the middle of the night. No sweats, no chills, no jolts, just opens his eyes. *Quiet.* He catches the phrases of early morning chatter: settling creaks, the furnace kicking in, a hum which he soon figures is the refrigerator, can't hear Jim, just now his own room, himself. "Can I ever go back?" is joined with "Can I go forward?" He laughs at himself, sees himself as caught by his own buffoonery, stupid holy moley jerk who tried to break-through and what did it get you? Nothing. Fucking nothing!...You *don't know* what was there, if it was there, if you missed it. Maybe God isn't there. Maybe that's why you left. Or fumbled and stumbled your way out, just like Jim, not through but away, got to get away from this all, the refrain, "Tune In. Turn

On. Drop Out." plays background music to his uneasy desire, *Hippie?* He's listened to them: are they right?...go away somewhere, leave, take Rian with me?—he sits on the jagged edge of a broken mythic structure...but now, "Marry her?" Can you really do that? Got the balls to really stand up and tell your Dad? Tell the world. Tell her?"...Luke stayed on idle for a long time.

Yes, this morning he will rise and go to Mass, go more from instilled response, from the loneliness of the just abandoned, go there for the first time ever out of recognized fear and trembling: seeing himself as almost superstitious, and before Mass he will confess it.

"Bless me Father...I petted a girl. *Passionately.*"

"My son, not a monkey or a dog, not even a rose bush?"

No, there would be no humor. Just—yeah, the training, I can hear it—just a: "Go on, my son, tell me," and the list would be made, a line drawn of sexual geography, "Yes, we Frenched. Yes, I kissed and sucked her breasts. No. *No.* I didn't touch her private parts. No, she did not mine, either. Father we're *in love,*" but such words would not deliver the sin of nakedness which Luke, himself, did not know he committed, did not know that he had participated in, he now not a blamer like Adam, not accusing the woman for he clearly knows that while here in the confessional he wanted to be back with her in the car, no, more on his bed, he and she.

"Are you strong enough not to commit this sin, again?" Naturally, as expected, he will lie.

"Yes."

The priest will know—the training never fails!

"My son, you have bruised a beautiful young lily. Can this young woman look at another man, now? Can she? Have you ruined her? OR STARTED HER ON THE ROAD TO RUIN? For when you stir up the fire, it will burn. Yes, hear me. It will burn! (Pause) Aren't you burning now?"

And his lie, "No," will carry the "Yes" which the priest knows is there.

"My son, you are burning. And it is a good fire. God wants you to marry and become a father. But how can you give yourself purely to another woman if you have defiled another?"

*Seducer! Rapist! Whoremonger!* What other words of condemnation now hang from his neck, are scarred into his skin?

"And you have defiled yourself. Don't you want to have a holy marriage? Don't you want to give yourself to your bride as Christ has given Himself to the Church?"

The harpoon turns and scraps his bowels, slices his liver and severs the cords of his heart.

"My son ..."

"Father, I am truly sorry. Truly, *truly sorry.* I do love this girl..." and without asking, without even wanting it, actually fear struck when he hears it, can't catch it, throws absolution after it as Luke leaves the confessional, "... and I will marry her!"

"Marry you?!" It was a genuine question caught upon surprise. Her whole body turned into the question, it rose from her lips like a slow lifting fog, as she spoke it with a certain clarity like dawn after a heavy snow struck her, here with him, Luke, Saturday afternoon, no sports, no games, so he calls and says, "Let's have dinner," and she comes, excited, liking how she felt this morning, feeling different, not just soiled—she had to admit she had felt that way before, like guys would just spot her, leave themselves like stains upon her blouse—now, she feels, "Different," that's all she could say looking into the mirror, happy, possibly, but different is about right, there was something he has that has turned me—I'm actually looking forward to

meeting with him, knowing that the first and only question will *not* be, "When can we do it, again?"

"Marry you?!" A whispered echo. He just stares at her as if her question is being asked of him, indeed it is, so he realizes. For the first time ever he feels like a prize, as if someone is auctioning him off, or about to win him in a raffle, himself, there with a tag, "35 Points," so all she has to do is throw the dart and hit enough balloons for 35 points, but then he realizes that he doesn't want her to answer, that he is willing to sit here for eternity just not to hear her answer, that he is caught, stuck: this more scary than submission at Investiture, than commitment at Simple Vows, no, there is something terribly final about this, Eschatological: something about losing himself, his body, as if he is on the block, but he having put himself there!—"Yeah, marry me," but inside, gulped, not vocalized, "Please, please say *No*. Release me. Get me out of here!" However, all they share is a stiff silence.

Her eyes had fallen, lid heavy, fingers slide across and around the table top, cut figures, words, questions, is putting up temporary defenses, then shatters them, something sings, "Yes!" and something roars, "No!", and she can hear her Sisters moan and groan and proclaim, "Not you!"—knowing her tirades against marriage, about The Lady Clares who can't find their way out of Sioux Tepees, oh, she has ridiculed "The Sacred Institution," and quoted from Friedan and de Beauvier, found fortifications from new thinking about the historical role of marriage, but there is something which wants this, something safe, secure, someone inside her who wants to be cuddled, cared for, protected...and Luke, his difference appears so tantalizing.

"What about money?" She raises her eyes. He is startled. "How will we live? Where will we live? What will you do?" And there it was, so he could feel it, the oft joked about "ball and chain." She is seeking to control him, he spits out words, defensive words, bitter at their roots. "We can live here in town. Maybe Jim will move out. We can have the apartment. And, and, well, I can teach at The Tower's prep school...have enough behind me to teach there, yeah, believe that will work." Pause: then speaking confidently as if concluding a well thought out plan: "And then we'll go to grad school, scholarships and teaching fellows, I know it can be done," then irritably, "These are just distraction, Rian. The real question is, 'Will you marry me?'"

The answer was cruelly delivered by her inability to answer. There was something within her that could neither say Yes or No. And as he was just awakening to her response, just observing the stiletto of mutedness pin-prick then slit his heart, she says, "Why marry?" and it was as if horns had begun to blare, sirens pitch and scream, hordes of thundering feet trod over and about them, and within all this chaos and cacophony the scene shifts, changes, was altered, as if a totally new play.

"Why marry?" A question which hung long upon her lips, so long because it had moved so slowly, inexorably, had to rise from a depth within her she was unaware existed, a fold of her Self, a partition within her soul that was incognito until this moment. "Why marry?"...she recoils from the question as if it were a vulgar epithet, as if someone had grabbed her by the throat and screamed, "Scum!" Consequently, she missed seeing him die.

Death, which she had seen on her father's face, had snuck in and masked Luke. Ashen. Eyes like glass marbles. Hands and torso stuck in rigor mortis. No breathing. No sound. No blinks.

If Luke hadn't died he could have laughed and said, "Rian, don't be cute. Either Yes or No. That's all. Give me a Yes or a No." But she had slain him with a *Why*. A questioning of the fundamental principle. Acutely sensitive to the philosophical, Luke instantly understood all that

she was saying, possibly more than she meant to say, avalanche, flood, tornado, monsoon—that is the right image? All this he was feeling, swirling about, hurled up by sun plucking waves, crashing down by craven desire of the sand, whirled and twirled around, all the lashes of his flagellations, the smashing thuds of his bones against brick, all the miniature squeals of the wire strangling his cock, all these images of monkdom rush at him astride laughter, buffoon laughter, squealing laughter, giggles, he hears them all, and knows now the force behind the Expulsion: Eve's "Why?"

"You mean you can't. Just say it," came from him like cross-examination, courtroom tonality. She's puzzled, and grasps at the elusive oddity of it all, "I can't? Can't what?"

He leans across and is but inches from her face. She wants to retreat, withdraw, but is immobilized. "You have been with other men."—not spoken with capitals, but sounding from his gut. Not a question, a statement, verdict, finality. Cold, an iced line, not linking, separating, not a bridge, not a rope of hope, not...

Did she hear it all in the two minutes that fled just before he stood up, stood like a gentleman, quietly, formally, and took one final look at her, smiled thinly, and left?

"Whore and mother of whores!" He spews the words, vomits and spits, laughs at himself remembering the beating he had given Jack Kramer in the locker room, he just making a joke about, "...does the thang all night long!"...how the guys must've laughed behind his back! "Whore and mother of whores! Have you no shame, woman? Is your body but a common blanket? A bathroom towel for men to wipe their hands on? Have you no self-respect? No love of your own beauty? Does it please you that men can boast about conquering you? About using you for their pleasure? That they make you like the cow? A stupid *lambykins*? Call you what you have shown them, your animal self: pussy, strutting and preening yourself in public and being fucked by any Tom who comes along, is this what you want? What you have done?"

Inside him he is ashamed. Not at his sin, not at his complicity, for now he does not even tolerate a taint of complicity, no, she is the perpetrator, "How stupid could I be not to see it? Not to understand what her red dress meant? Not to have seen myself but another guy in her daisy chain, just another stupid jerk thinking only with his dick!" Ashamed that he has soiled himself, he admonishes himself, but is consoled by seeing himself as victim, forgives himself, he now becoming all that The Master dreamed he could be, true son of Adam, true progenitor of Manly Desire, a desire buoyed by the spiraling images of fallen women through the ages: the Eves and Salomes, Magdalene and her coterie of magdalenes, all the Devil's Lures, temptations—these reminding him that women cannot take too much love, that fierce manly love is too pure and strong for their delicate vessels, and though they know that they are saved as they bear and yield forth babies, it is their weakness and their sin to see sex as their role and not propagation, yes, Luke has fallen, humbling, it was all too humbling, and what was she? Instantly her question had made her dirt. Scum. The Snake. A Deceiver. The Betrayer. "And worse you have betrayed yourself! Your sex! What woman could glory in what you have done? Tempted and befouled another woman's husband to be. Ruined their hope for purity. Run! *Run!* To your first lover and marry him. This is the least you can do. Submit and pray for forgiveness!"

The monks brood, deep dreams, primal dreams, Dream of Manly Desire.

Back at the apartment Luke sits before a cold, blank TV screen. Yet he sees all his times with Rian imaged before him. His first sighting of her: the flash of her red dress. Her first touch of him: his shoulders burn. His sight of her at the Teilhard Seminar: amazement. Her tutelage: she so open, allowing him to pour in his ideas, her questions, foolish, but then insightful, at times

brilliant. Their dates: slow walks towards the moonlight. That night: now it is a blur, a hand shakes the camera, the sound track is garbled, "Please Stand By" flashes...Luke is dreaming.

## CHAPTER 17: The Lie

For Jim the year 1968 had begun on January 30th with the Tet Offensive: "Year" as cosmos, eon, Age, indeed, Life Itself... all now "Nam," "The War"...they gathered: friends from his small town, cousins from around the area, the southwestern farmlands with names like people—Luverne, Willmar, Kenneth, these the simple folk, farmers, small town bankers and merchants, most of his relatives: sharecroppers, northern style, tenants, but yet in the land, deep, mud deep, knees amuck and hands perfumed with essence d'manure, once he had laughed at these images, now it is a cemetery grave, Larry Clark's...Larry, cousin, shin-skinning brother, cold aching nights camping out, our first raccoon, Larry and Mary Beth, Larry the Homecoming King, gridiron hero, off Jim's right tackle, "Buds forever!" as the plane's armpit opened and sucked him in, now earth most receptive, this muddy April grave, cut like a battle wound, it takes Larry's body as bandage, earth without seed, Jim weeps among his friends, loudly embarrassing his male cousins.

By the time Larry heard about the slaying of Martin Luther King, he had been gone two weeks, two weeks during which Jim had shelved his world of bourgeois comfort and was struggling to take the "class option." He wanted out of his skin: white. Out of his way of thinking: Western. Dispossessed of his gender: male. He wanted to see with other than his blue-eyes, so he switched to the lenses of optometric historians. At first it was a slow trade, a slow acceptance of his need for a new prescription: long had Gandhi set upon his shelf, there comfortably with Macgregor's "The New Testament Basis of Pacifism," there also in line with Quaker pamphlets, with were all tied together by Camus: "Neither Victims nor Executioners." Ah, how he had struggled to see through Camus, to adjust his old eyes, exercise them, take them and read Baldwin, now the tumultuous Eldridge Cleaver who did, without doubt, put his "Soul On Ice"...Camus: who did not expect to do away with murder, just not to legitimize it. Yet, he was a Frenchman, not an American. He could be spoken to by Fanon, he could have been engaged by Sartre or Genet, but how would he have heard the voiceless blackman?...the jingle of shackles and chains turned high-volume into the clatter and rumbling of riot squads, water tanks, and the chorus of "Kill the Nigger!" How would he have met the *failure of King*?

*Black Like Me*, John Howard Griffin, he tosses it aside. Picks up Camus, thumbs and finds: "Hope remains only in the most difficult task of all: to reconsider everything from the ground up, so as to shape a living society inside a dying society." Reads it again. Again, out loud. "Dying society." Could the signs be clearer? So he had heard at the SDS rally down at the U. So he had heard in rap groups—there hearing not just blacks, but Indians, Chinese, Puerto Ricans and some crazed, jazzed up women, all ranting about how dying the society was, and how it needed "Dialectical Warriors!" to deal it its final death blow. Oh, the arguments! Radical epitaphs cast back and forth, arrows and swords, poison words, these too the signs of the dying. He saw Jesus die. Castro die. Bakunin raised and slain again. AJ Muste re-interred. He laughed and went out for a smoke, "Good dope!"...came back and laughed some more.

Jim went down to Minneapolis whenever he could, for sure each weekend, missed uncountable week-day classes, attended rallies at the University, attended a seemingly endless sit-in, decided to drop out and live there, "*Fuck Luke*. Fuck The Towers. Fuck my own lily white ass!" When King went down, so he moved. Just left Luke a note: "Here's the rent that's left. Everything else is yours," as if signed with his name he scrawled, "Seize the Day!"...*Carpe Diem!*...Luke flashes on its Latin root.

Jim had found political enlightenment, had his consciousness raised, but his radicalization came through being fucked, yeah, not through fucking, but being fucked. Ever attuned to the erotic jacks which propped up his own religious world view it did not take long for him to grasp that if he was to depart from his whiteness, if he was to be true to the pledge sworn at Larry's grave, that he'd have to find a black woman. Knew in his heart that he was stained and tainted, one only to be bleached clean, made spotless again through the baptism of black water.

Dope and heavy drinking had brought him close, but there was a resistance, an almost nasal recoiling when approaching Blacks. Jim couldn't admit this, never lifted the lid on this raging beast, actually felt and told himself that he was "radical" since he socialized with blacks, gave what little he could to black causes, shouted "Black Power!" and "Right On!" and raised his fist in unison at all the rallies where the Black Panthers spoke. Yet, in his gut he couldn't move himself to touch their nappy hair, press his lips against the slavish lips, kneel in front of a Black Madonna and suckle at her breasts...dare he think—did his dreams free him of this terror?—what would happen to his dick if he slipped it into nigger pussy?

As King's murder has driven him from his own homeland, made him face his Slave Master self, so it will soon be the bullet through Bobby Kennedy which kills Jim Marshall. Solid stone dead: white stone. Looking at the prized front-page photo—another Kennedy, another bullet in the brain. From whom? Where? Why? Foreigners? Russians? Spies? Aliens? The Pope?... that's how he will forever feel his skin: solid stone dead, without any possibility of Resurrection.

Watching King's burial, Jim's hope, his courage, his trust in himself wavered. With Bobby Kennedy it will mean that the System does not work, not at all, not in the littlest thing, that no white man could politically champion the cause of the Blacks and live, it was anti-theoretical, black and white didn't mix, where was Bobby heading? What type of America would he have created?...More dope, deeper inhales, better stuff, rot gut whiskey, long nights athump with The Stones, wailing with The Moody Blues and hearing for the first time the true blues, Muddy Waters and Mississippi Fred McDowell and Howling Wolf...yeah, Jim comes to love Sonny Boy Williamson, wail and moan...it is while listening to him that Zinga enters.

Zinga hates him immediately. She feeds on hating whites. Laughs at his listening, "Boy," he is snared even in his stoned phase out by the way she says it: disdain and blistering contempt, "Boy, ain't you learned nothing yet? It's only women who can sing The Blues!" and she laughs at him, as if saying, "I'm laughing at your white ass, Boy."...she leaves him, enters the kitchen, shouts and bangs a pot against the wall, Jim hears a shatter of glass but little else, the dope muffles all, at the corner of his eye he sees another guy, a black guy, one he has heard speak and raise the hairs on his arms, this guy rushes from the kitchen, turns half-way across the room and fling a fuck-you finger backwards, turns and shoots out the door.

Zinga, who proclaims herself "Africa. My body is Africa," returns and takes him by the hand, leads him into a bedroom. It's as if she knows what he needs, needs at his core, she grasping his hand like she is reaching out to save a drowning sailor, "Come," is all she says, soft-voiced, so much a reversal from her entrance, her Arrival, that he responds as if to politeness. Once inside the bedroom she sits him down on the edge of the bed.

Jim sits. She stands. His mind is clearing. Dashiki. Golden earrings. Red nails. Ballet slippers. Slowly he realizes that he has not seen her, rather just felt her presence, smelled her, as if a wildebeest smelling the lurking lioness. Now she is there. Very dark. Not ebony, but few traces of lightening towards brown, almost coal shiny, long legs and second-look breasts, but it is her face, alive, swarming, filled with action, calling him to gaze with her, to kiss her lips, engage

her tongue, and then her hands, they reach out towards him, fall upon his shoulders, slender hands yet firm, ringed, three-times, silver with dark stones, like her eyes, they seem to peer through Jim's head, probe and examine his heart.

"Jim," she speaks his name, how did she know?...where? when?... "Jim, I've seen you around. Heard you rap. For a white asshole you're not too bad." Laughs? Stunned? Curious? Gaping like a fool? He has no control over himself, his mind leaks. "Zinga," and she extends her hand as if being introduced by an invisible friend. He takes it, holds it, for some reason doesn't want to let it go.

"Zinga," he says, the word zips and has him tempted to exaggerate the "ga"—  
Zzzziinnngggaaaaaaa!"—but he slaps at the dope, holds onto her hand.

"You don't remember me?"

An innocent question, with an edge of hopefulness, one not afraid of the rejection it carries?

Then, "No. Why should you? I was in and out of St. Clare's in a semester."

Then as if saying something she knew he'd agree with, "A bitching place, St. Clare's. Some of those old nuns are really crazy, but good crazy if you know what I mean?"

At mid-sentence he had begun, "You...at St. Clare's?"

So she continued, "Right on, brother! Heard your rap, and kinda liked it. Sacred fucking, ain't that some shit!"

She laughs; caught in his own befuddlement Jim laughs.

"Was Brenda Smiley," looking right at his eyes, "Some name, eh. My mother whitewashed me after some country singer. *Brenda*, can you see me as Brenda?"

For a moment, neither seemed to know what to do next.

Then Zinga lifted off and dropped her dashiki revealing her fleshy, amply endowed self, one now exposed by the tight line of a three button blouse and the contour of tight fitting pants, within the same motion she begins to unbutton her blouse. Jim's eyes are ratcheted to each movement. One button and fear riddled with excitement throbs through him. The second and she begins to sway just a bit, starts to hum, he hooked to her every action. With the third she dawdled, swayed in an arc closer to him, dropped her left hand to her hip and pushed it towards him, he like a fish gulping for air, the third is gone and her bodice is exposed, no bra, round stones, they appear like polished stones, Jim has never seen black breasts and his guy mind is boggled, not that her breasts were his first or the most beautiful but that they were instantly understood as forbidden. "Forbidden." She was forbidden. Not that he couldn't have her, not that she was unfuckable. No, that she was the other side. The dark side. The unknowing. More through the color of her flesh was she all that was unknown about women, women at their core. But she doesn't wait for him, she kneels between his legs and grabs his hips, smiles and draws his hands to her breasts as if he were a puppet on strings, there he touches her and before he can move, before he can calculate and weigh them, measure them with his kisses and licks, she is at his zipper, releasing him, allowing him to relax, pulling out his cock and whirling balls as if reaching into a Free Drawing bin hoping to pull out the winning ticket, pulls and then begins to stroke the thickening stick, rubs and feels it begin to throb, rubs and watches his eyes and mouth both fall in amazement, watching her as if she were on stage and he in the audience, rubs and with a slight shove has him on his back, his cock now a pole, one she holds, one she slides up and down upon with her hands, tilts and rubs against her breasts, whacks slightly against her teats, plays like drummer stick between her warm roundness, and then swallows, and with that swallow Jim is blinded, like a searing blade across his eyes, a blade which burns out his eyes, so

is his mind rendered blank, devoid, empty, yes, he can feel her, her tongue at his base, she licking his balls till they rise and hide, then as fingers spread against his thighs she sucks and inhales, rocks rhythmically left and right, then up and down, his mind is blazing light, bolts of light, blinding light...then she bites him, snips and tugs, then rips a shred of flesh from his cock, and he flips upward, flops up and down, rolls and cracks her head against his knee-caps, she lands on the floor, watching for a minute which way he will go, he rolls back and forth on the bed, yells, "Bitch! Goddam you black whore, you goddam nigger bitch, Jesus fucking Christ..." words lost in his agony, his sobbing, his shifting to another level, that of survival, looking at himself, gasping at the blood, rolling over and off the bed towards the bathroom, hobbling, blood streaking down his side, yelling, "Goddamn you, you sonofabitch, fucking nigger, asshole ..."

Fumbling and dope-weird he bandages himself—something he found hard to do as his peter shriveled up, so he tied it, took some gauze he found rummaging around in this foreign bathroom, took it and just wrapped himself—it now looking like the head of a mummy, or some kind of amputated limb, but it didn't hurt as much, there wasn't much bleeding, she hadn't bitten him in two as he feared, Jesus he had never felt such pain, and what a shock, he's talking to himself, calming himself, *Man, just about to blow the roof and she does this! Fucking whore. Bitch. What's the matter with her? Zinga. Jesus, why'd she do this?*

All in all a successful self-medication. Enough so that he laughs. Finds some aspirin, swallows four, would like a smoke but doesn't want to risk the heightened sensitivity, needs something to dull it now, leaves the bathroom looking for a bottle of any kind of booze.

"Kill the bitch!" It's like she's wearing a sign slung across her chest, "Kill the bitch!" Jesus she's sitting there, he waddling into the living room and she there, buck naked, buck naked and playing with her pussy, eyes shuttered but she knowing he's there and she's groaning, making fucking sounds, stroking her clit, and beside her is a bottle of *Southern Comfort*, half-empty, Jesus, if I could lunge at her *I'd kill the bitch!* But he is more stunned than enraged, the audacity, the boldness, the recklessness, doesn't she know how he feels, that he'll beat the living shit out of her, Goddam, watching her his dick hears her call his Apostolic name, "Peter! Oh, Peter!" and despite himself he hardens, but then his strong will overcomes, "You're one stupid nigger bitch, know that Zinga! You're just fucking stupid, and I'm gonna whip your stupid ass, so, so get out of her before I do something we both regret."...*God I'm angry, but shit I don't want to beat the girl, dumb fucking black chick. Go away!*...but she just plays with herself, hums again, then unshutters, flips a glare at him, a wild "Dare you!" taunt that slaps him, *Jesus she wants me to fuck her!* Is she fucking-A crazy?...widens her legs, slouches down on the couch, offering herself, "Eat me, whiteboy. C'mon and have some hot oozy fudge! C'mon honey, eat me." But he can't, won't...this is one sick bitch! He turns and shuffles back into the kitchen.

"What do you want me to say?" An angry, bitter, tarwater question. "Want me to say," in plaintive, little girl voice, "Master, yar nigger honey's waiting. Master, let me suck your cock. Master, fuck my little black ass and make me a wumman!" Words that ride in on sing-song, "Master" which is offered in adoration, imploring, begging, yearning, "Master" so sugar-coated that its sweetness will kill.

Jim turns again and peers into the room, this time just standing in the doorway. "Zinga, you've got problems I can do nothing about." At which she bolts up and off the couch, and within the slap she hurls at him but splatters across the wall, she seethes, "You're my problem, whitey. You! You! My problem ..."



How did it happen? What turned the screw? How could so much hate, misunderstanding, ignorance, fear and bile mingle together and produce passion: hot, fierce, bonding, melting and heart bound?

He must've caught her at the "My." It was such a personal statement, one of knowing, as if she had known him for ages, not that she possessed him but that she was him, saw herself in him, right from the first, saw him and all that blared into her mind was a trumpet note, just one, singular, long and passionate, long and riding high and low at the same time, a note she had never heard before...and so she knew that she would have to leave, didn't want this from St. Clare's, didn't go there to find someone, went there to be found, to be the "first" of so many first, *first* Negro woman, *first* Black Woman, *first* Africa, *first* among all of them, but with him to find, to be found, so she had left...here he was, today, she hadn't expected it, just found him...she wants *to be found*.

Jim lands upon Africa. The sun glistens off his armor. They murmur, "He must be a child of the moon. Look at his white face." And when he looks up at her, she sees the moon, and knows that it is her other side, that her blackness is defined only insofar as the moon reflects the sunlight which her body has not absorbed, she the vastness, and he lays his face down upon her earth, kisses the moist rim of oceanic mouth, rides on his tongue down the folds of her mystery and glides upward amidst the spray of her sighs and invitations, around him are flowers of hope and joy, beautiful flowers, and he presses all that he is upon her southern mouth, there listening to the songs of her life, songs of joy, of great births, of nations of strong, daring people, hears the sad songs, long lines of dying babies, laments over ghostly sicknesses, and then the betrayal of brother by brother, of sister by sister, hears the chains, her bones creak with chain sounds, and yet he knows that there is more to listen to, and he probes deeper, holds her cradle, rises upon a deep breath and plunges like the dive-bombing skyhawk— wings pewing sun fire!—into her forest, down and through her marsh, down and under her ocean, he submarine, exploring, savoring, is bathed by a smell invigorating him, the smell of birth, of invitation, and Jim is full tongue upon her, lapping her, raising her clit to amazing vibration, he hears the bellowing of her pleasure, feels her hands tight upon his head, is this not her? his mother? she from whom he was born? is there any place else he desires to be? can I meld with her? melt and mix our skins: black and white candle wax. He kneels between her legs, unwraps his throbbing cock, glances but does not care about his cut, numb as it is now, now all jerking about with hungry sperm, agitated sperm, messengers of his soul, and he lies down upon her, lays and sucks at her breasts, sucks and breathes into her, wanting to blow her up with his breath, have her carry his breath around, have his heat of words and passions of yells, "I am your slave," he says, "Your nigger," he intones, plunges in, "You are my Master! I am chained to you, forever"...he is emboldened, "Forever! Do you hear?"...she takes him, shifts her cradle, sets to rocking him, lays out the blanket of her belly, and he rides her: slow, cautious rides, savoring, feeling her feel him, she taking him in, as if the wind, allowing him to blow through her hair, *Yes*, she says to herself, you are my slave, my nigger, and I am your Master, and there is the feel, the connection, the river once dry now running at full bed, and she comes, once, twice, twenty-times, comes upon his thrusts and his kisses, the tugging of her hair, the feel of his hairy chest upon her breasts, she comes, knowing that she is un-coming, un-folding, being gently ripped apart, yet deep within, back behind her imagination, lurking around in a non-describable place, that plateau where dreams wait, sometimes epochs of waiting, until they slip down into consciousness, there, she waits, waiting to dream a new dream, yet dreaming this one first, *She is the Master*.

## CHAPTER 18: Shuddering

"YOU KNOW HER!" Yes, now he does, The Master would feel justified in his tirade. Her. *Rian*. Held the breasts of the goddess, as Jim would joke, but was it a joke? Here now that she has walked away from him, from his reaching out, his attempt to break-through—what else was it for him? This violation called sin?...He knew that he was called to sin when he left the monastery just as he knew he had been called to grace when he entered. Yet, he could now see the subtle linkage. The sins within the monastery were sins of the interior, of the desire to expel the body, to cast off this old robe, this old wineskin, to be bereft of feeling, sensation, pleasure, and here the greatest sin of all, truly, a mortal, yea, a cardinal sin, to be bereft of pain!

*Pain*. An English word so close to its cousins meaning bread and denoting the pagan god of frenzy and excess. Luke had long dwelt upon the meaning of Pain. Indeed, wasn't this just about all his Tradition was about? About the Pain which Jesus suffered, so fulfilling his Christhood, so through His acceptance of pain satisfying the Father— isn't this the nub of it all? And it is only now that she has made him pain that he realizes why monks flee the world. Aaargh! *Her...* that The Tree of Knowledge exposed Adam to shuddering, he then seeing, feeling and knowing in her flesh, her touch what emptiness means as aloneness, abandonment, and he shuddered from fear and he withdrew from the Knowledge, accusing her, yearning as he was to return to the dream, the monk's dream...that of life without the umbilical chord, ah, the Omphalos Controversy: Did Adam have a belly button?...never a sailor, no navel, *ha!*...he Adam male not bounded by flesh to woman, the only one to know emptiness as his relationship with the creator, with Yahweh, as the essence of himself, Manly Desire.

For what had he found now about himself except that he cannot handle the pain? Luke is not stupid enough not to have reflected upon his drinking, not to have linked it with the wine of Holy Sacrifice, not to have sensed the link—he strove for transubstantiation, for a change of his substance...to no longer be male, for now he understands, *Rian* has forced him to feel the Truth, that Manly Desire is to flee pain. Not inflict it, not glorify in it, but to flee it. Why else does the Theology expound except that we don't have to suffer—that Jesus' suffering was and is all that was and is needed, *it only* redemptive? Why the Story of Adam's Rib? To state that the male was not suffering, that loneliness was not pain, just—what? what was it?—"Jesus Christ Almighty!" Luke is flattened by the thought: "Adam shuddered!" For shuddering was intimacy, and Yahweh couldn't shudder, for Adam was not of His flesh but of His image, a distancing, a son born by another god-force, here the Goddess, She for whom Yahweh reaches, Adams reaches, Luke reaches...but these males did not, do not know lust, lust which craves, craving which is boundaried by pain. The pull and the push, just the simple act of intercourse, *in and out*, pleasure and pain, pain and pleasure. Her as vessel of pain. Why else is she not really Goddess but Co-Mediatrix?... "Jesus!" not a swear, not a prayer, just an exhalation sound carried by deflation.

*Whiskey*. Now no longer beer, maybe as a chaser, just *Jack* and *Southern Comfort*, his mainstays. Looking at the bottle he knows, what he had kept from his conscious self now is too conscious, the Bottle speaks...*you look at me and find whomever you are*. Rather all you are. Your other selves. Those you locked up. Those you condemned to eternal silence. Those who bleed blood you do not want as heritage. But all are you. Now you can see. The blood from Jesus' side. The lance-pierced flow. This they say is wine. *Hic est...*for this is my body, this is my blood. Wine, but now you can see it is not the primacy of the grape, no, it is the transforming power. All is symbol. Yet know that the wine is menstrual flow. The grape a Dionysiac. It is the elixir of change, of transformation, thus the river of pain. *My body is pain*. This just to say that my body is manifest, varied, the All. What do you desire? Release from pain. The confirmation

of the irreducibility of your individual existence. The glorification of your body. Yes, I know. But it cannot be so. For it is not so. She has your hands!

"She has your hands!" are the last words Luke hears as he passes out. This he does not want to hear, not remember. So true, the Bottle speaks so truly, and its wisdom drives him to the land of forgetful sleep, shallow sleep, snorting and chortling sleep, nowhere near Her deep caves, nowhere near the monk's dream.

Yes, if they could have been in conversation, it would have moved them towards communion, that unifying which is not consumption but a novel presence. Something created by coupling. Yet, they are not, but yet they are, for Rian is dreaming the pain she shares with Luke. For Rian is now speaking to the universe, standing before the court of Mothers, allowing messages to be taken to the court of Fathers, stands and speaks, "Did I need his cock in me to know? Did I need it so that I could be woman? Wasn't his touch sufficient? His breath upon me all that is required? His mere intention, even from a distance, the gist of it all, the catalyst?"

"Have I not knelt before the tortured Son and prayed to share his pain? Have I not sought to obey my Father? Did I not dedicate myself to imitate the Blessed Virgin? Have I not been as faithful a daughter as he has been a son?"

Oh, she knows well now how wrapped up in his theology he is, more, how the theology ties and binds him. She has felt his desire, the desire for her beauty, for her comfort. But it is his violence, his hatred which makes her shudder, his lust to rend her, split her open and tear children from her blanketing womb, tear them as she is torn, into shreds, this his manly touch, whether he knows it or not, whether she knows it or not, it is the dreams they do not discuss but which they share.

Yes, Rian has shuddered, not knowing it as such, not wording it as such. This is the difference, the queerness, that which links her with Luke. She who, as so many women through the ages have, has looked upon the Virgin and her Son and known their suffering, understood its commonness, understood the Substitution, that Jesus is Mary's daughter, androgyne—physically male, emotionally female. He to suffer on the Cross what each woman suffers monthly. He the Sun to feel like the Moon.

Rian sees Mary in her vision, she standing with heel crushing the serpent, and it becomes known to her, not in words of writ nor for the soapbox but in her heart, a knowing which moves her and which she does not now nor can she ever move herself...it is that the Serpent is Manly Desire, but only part, the part which Adam came to know when he and Eve ate of the fruit, the fruit being themselves, he sucking her, she sucking him, they consuming in passion the fruit: she the outer flesh, he the inner seeds, both one, and it is this form of male eroticism which has become the serpent, that which Adam disowns, blames upon the woman, yet is forever their bond, their creation, that which separates them as creators from Yahweh, it is the serpent which Luke shares not with her, possibly not with himself, that The Brooders dream for Mary, for Rian—that they keep it under their heel...yet, Rian has lifted her foot.

"I see clearly," she memos to the Fathers, "the presence of the Evil One. Of Satan. He is a he, yes, so you have told me, yet a tempter to women, this his way to tempt males. Here, again, the Substitution. Satan is what men and women share in common, it is he who enables them to have a relationship, to be joined sexually, to be transformed through pain. Satan is what men and women discover, more, create when they couple, isn't that true! Isn't that the message of the Tradition!? You call it Original Sin— because it is the original break with the dream you want to preserve, the dream of male self-generation, of a Father who needs not a Mother to have a Son,

of a homo-sexual embrace, men coupling with men, for then the pain is not there, there is no birth, there is no transformation, there is no transubstantiation!"

It was enough, "Too much!" So her dreaming was abruptly shut down, her mind and body calmed and soothed by flicks of happy fragments from her childhood: pushing the ball back and forth with her dad, hearing her mother read to her....

When Luke awoke all he wanted to do was cry, much against his instinct he stopped himself from driving over to Rian's dorm and asking her to hold him. He knew it was hopeless, felt shame, despair, anger, an overwhelming sense of failure...could not contain himself, he weeps.

Rian got up not thinking about Luke, rather about Jim. Where was he? What was he doing? She had this urge to drop down to the University and see him. Maybe, she says to herself, *I won't come back?*

### **CHAPTER 19: Manly Desire**

The Master assembled the senior monks, these and Friar Killian, he who had taken on another life, yes, Alfred's life—for it was Tradition among The Brooders that a brother who had fallen—not one who had died or even one who had never really been born, only one who had been "dressed" as they say: watching most depart, it was just the burning of the robes that remained, their undressing, but when one had fallen—as Friar Alfred had, so must his soul space be inhabited by another, and, fittingly, being his cousin, Friar Killian had stepped without even his own knowledge of his action, into that space...Alfred's soul...and taken upon himself a dual role, that of being reborn as twin-souled. So as Friar Killian dreamed, it was his duty to remember Alfred: Alfred alive within him in the presence of Luke as fallen man.

Luke was dead to them as Adam was dead through sin; he lived only to be punished, for punishment was his way to redemption, and all Brooders were to be redeemed: this their communal duty. Friar Killian bore, then, upon his flesh the sins of Alfred-now-Luke. He did not call him by name, did not call forth his image, did not attempt to draw him back by emotional memory, no, it was his simply to bear Luke's presence, he now the Devil's minion, and upon Killian's flesh is who Luke was becoming felt, but felt only in pain, shared punishment.

Killian did not need to call her name, for he, as all, knew her to be nameless, as nameless as all of Lucifer's rebellious companions. Nothing need be said, rather all was to be dreamed. And it had come, so The Master had indicated—not in words, not by details of the senses, no, only insofar as he had taken Killian by the arm and led him to the stoop of Her altar, here at the eastern side, where all about was the denial of light, and as denial giving respect to His sanctuary light, it alone what all were to focus upon, all but Killian, he now prostrate before Her, he the serpent's head to be crushed under Her heel.

And it was the serpent's head, fangs at poisonous ready, poised to strike him...he wakes. Yet he still sees the triangular head, ready to strike. "Fucking shit!" he mutters to himself, and as if a magic phrase the room splits open and he is there in time, knowing that he is still seeing it in dream time, bad time, both are bad, nothing has been good, can't dream, can't live—fucking whore!

How could I've been so fucking blind?! Jesus motherfucking Christ! Am I stupid? Too fucking stoned to see? She...she's a cock-robber. *Bitch!* as he swings legs out of bed to stand, then pace, back and forth, not counting, not measuring, this his cell, his grave, his rut—knowing that all shit is falling on top of his head, knowing it is his due, wishing he had been bitten, poisoned with true venom, so that his flesh could die. Jesus, if I had fucked her!...the thought of being the second coming, maybe the third—a fourth, fifth, "See the gal with the red dress on, she

can do the *thang* all night long!" Long lines of men, he had seen them, now not only his dream, now a reality, once feared, once his to beat to the punch, to punch-out and climb over to capture her, she now tattered rose, *damaged goods!* Christ, Dad, would he have known?

Where was he to turn if the serpent was loose? If women were out there saying, "Why marry?" If all was just five-and-dime merchandise? He slams his right fist into the wall, cracks his pinkie, doesn't realize it, strides, kicks the bed, is hyper, heart beating, racing, and the night like a wet blanket, *But I want her*, shit, why can't I not want her, just another dick in the Congo line!...her breasts come at him, rub all over him, raise his cock to artillery readiness, and he is upon her, riding her, knowing that it is a ride into the pit, but he wants to fuck her, and fuck her, and fuck her, but he doesn't touch himself, lunges into the wall, yells, *What the fuck!*—and *It's all fuck, Man! Goddam it, it's all just fuck!*

The next morning Luke is there, coffee and donut crumbs his dress for the day, steaming hot and he liking the hurt in his mouth, waiting, pulling out a cigar, long and thick and black, lighting it, savoring it as a torch with which he will burn the world, burn out the eyes of the world, incinerate and bring the world to its end, an apocalyptic cigar, puffing and puffing, smoke and smoke, almost jumping up and down, at the ready, and before the guy can lock his car, he hears, "I'm ready! Motherfucker, am I ready!"

"Fucking marines, Man, I'm ready," stated as his verbal signature, one matching his written one, the dotted line, and Sergeant Macarthy likes this guy, a juiced up wild ass kid, not drunk, not on dope, just juiced, reminding him of himself, "Kick some gook ass for me, son, will ya?!" Luke never looks back, he's already in Vietnam.

*Drops-out*, "Hey, Man, Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out!"—not exactly his slogan, nor his reason, not to follow a Pied Piper, but for what?...*Dad*: No greater love hath a man but who lays down his life...May and Bobby Kennedy still has six weeks, weeks he doesn't know are so precious, his final days, but for Luke it isn't the sounds of the Student Mobilization, not the winds in the political air, yeah, he breathes them, he's alive, ain't he?...shit, no, its just seven weeks to graduation, the BA or the BS, much the same, bullshit, things just falling apart, "Sign of the Times, Man!"...so, the drop, dropsy, out, maybe into another out, who knows? *Shit*.

Luke says good-bye to no one. Not his Mom. Not his Dad. Not Jim...not that he could find him, he being never here, no, down "In The City"—*Protesting!* Not any goodbyes. Just drops out, leaves his civilian shit in the apartment, just leaves to hang out at the U, sleep in the park, find some smoke, this time some weed, blowing himself up as best he could, drink the Mississippi's two p's, pee all over the place, leaving his mark, chasing down some pussy, getting his *First Fuck*, yeah, "Laid!"—but not remembering, but took a liking to riding the mares, "Saddle-up!" was his echo as Fucked Luke rips into another night of nameless fucks, three weeks till Boot, twenty-one days to fucking crash parties all night long, running and running, loving it all, laughing at sleep, he's alive, so fucking alive, he feels his every sense thrill, drops exhausted, at full bore, hears things he has never heard—guys running this Nam thing, guys who were there, grunts and other survivors, guys who swore they weren't going there, heard the fear, the hatred, the grotesqueries...his ears longed to hear more, for war was what split the logs, got guys spilling their guts, drinking, doping, cursing and praying, but it was war and the word worked him, every time he hears it he feels his eyes need less sleep, and the things he sees, the ways thing are, so he now knows, all just fucking, fucking the mind, fucking the body, fucking the soul, he feels like a man without burdens, nothing to hold onto, nothing to hold onto him, he's a wave, being carried by the war between moon and sun, a wave which was the war...all he did every day was give up the burdens: ran out of money, ate at hippie communes, ran out of clean

clothes, picked off the rack at the Free Store, drank every label he could find on whatever bottle was near, and sat for hours doing nothing, just staring, and then dropped acid, LSD, hours of doing everything, truly a being without burden.

The chick had given him the paper, just a stain on a neatly cut square, offered it to him at the end of her teat, him, then the next guy, and he having just woken, knowing not light, the room fully curtained, aroma of incense, not stopping to name it, caring not that it be sandalwood or musk or patchouli, no, it was not a time to care for names and labels and the task of being responsible to know, no, he was more upon the music, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, and it could've been the dark side of the sun, whatever, for he is not there, not as Luke, not as once-Alfred, not as marine recruit, no, he is the glance of her or the several hers, all glances, and their warmths, all about him, and the movements of the other men, he is them, just there, being the music, being the candles slowly dying, being the touches and kisses, tongues upon his neck, his toes, he the tongue upon their napes, sucking the thrills from them, being giggle with them, not moving, just sliding, like floating, then a stroke or two, these take him to others, they he sees as beings of light, light as it comes from everywhere, no center, light of the candles, they are the candles, thirsting, sucking the air, parceling out molecules of oxygen so each could live, and each alive in the hands of the other, hands which are baskets for the fruits of their flesh: small plums, these he rolls between his fingers, licks with his tongue, breasts like gourds, roundish but with odd shapes of gravity, these he stuffs into his mouth, jiggles and fondles, presses his face into, faces he pulls away from his other self being sucked, no harm, no fighting, a feast for all, he takes one, then another, lets them suck his fruit, plays peel-the-banana, crazed hippie chicks, cucumbers she calls them, moving from guy to guy, she the dressing: blue cheese? she says to one, italian? to another, and the laughter bonds them, rolls them together like strings into a knitting ball, they what cloth will be, and it is weaving that is upon him, he the weaver and the weaved, cock shuttle, he takes one, a delicious one, a moon one, large and heavy, she whom gravity ravishes, pulls upon her ponderous breasts, she of full ass, mounds of ass, and in her and through her he is pushing and she pulling, he pulling and she pushing, another tapping him as he comes, another rider on the storm, and jack makes the rounds, calling cheers to the danields family, rousing them to laugh some more, stoke their heat, and he is singed, burned, feels a hand upon his cock, soft hands, hands quick to the mouth, and he is rising but then shocked, shaken as if slammed like a hard wave of stone in storm, pushes the guy away, not insult, not exclamation, just a push, and he is let loose like a balloon farting air, away he goes, merging into the wood-panel, being only eyes left, distant eyes, eyes from atop a mountain, spying in the valley sights unseen: chicks licking chicks, studs studding assholes, more jack, more tabs, but not for him, not for him, *not for me*, yet he knows he is ready..."Fucking-A ready, Sergeant!"

"Fucking-A, Jennings, do you know what the gooks will make of a big asshole like you? Do you know you're just a big asshole, Jennings? *Asshole*. And those squatty little gooks are gonna put a fucking tomahawk missile up your asshole, they're gonna fucking stuff your asshole with Bouncing Betties, they've got sticks out there, Jennings, you big motherfucker, sticks with poison on them and they're gonna stick them up your fucking big asshole, motherfucker, do you understand me?!"

"YES SIR!"

"Don't call me sir you stupid motherfucker..."

*Crawl like a snake, be a serpent, on yar belly, kiss the ground, crawl! crawl! crawl!* It was all he heard, all he was told, he a liability, like a flagpole, too tall, a signal to the gooks, a liability to his team...then they pulled him out.

Two in the a.m. Foggy. Cold. Just three of them. Pulled and pushed. Following a man, not in uniform, not with rank, just a flashlight poke and "Follow me," not even barked, no DI, just an order, authoritative, and he finds himself with the three. For hours no one speaks. The plane takes off. The guys eye each other but they knew not to speak. Another guy, this one in fatigues, comes by and drops a thermos of coffee, they drink, a smooth ride, Luke almost slept.

It was warm. It was beautiful. It was nowhere that he could figure. Now he wished he had learned some elementary astronomy, paid more attention to the details of those guys like Brahe and Copernicus which he had had to read, taken some note other than that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, he had no clue, just warm, beachy, they at the edge, was it inhabited within? he knew the answer if he had been foolish enough to ask, "You don't need to know" or "Shut-up motherfucker"...something like that.

They were one, two and three, as so named: "One. Two. Three." The leaders were Alpha and Omega. He liked the campy collegiate humor. But there was little to laugh about. All was tight-ass serious. Yet, oddly, things were even...*rather good*. Not being cursed at. Not being called scum-bag or dog-shit or pussy-drip, no, these guys were here to teach him something, and the three of them to learn. So he took quickly and adapted to their new Discipline, not that they called it that, just that it came that way: hard body discipline, jogging, calisthenics, scaling trees, climbing the just one treacherous cliffs...over and over again ("Did I say over again?") ...learning a mix of martial arts: some judo, karate, Kung Fu, and attack/defend moves they didn't name, just showed him...*lickety split, you're dead!*...then called him to perform, real fighting, kick-ass stuff, fists and batons, rocks and knives of all sorts, all times of the day, long-hikes, morning black, evening ebony...the three of them in the jungle: *camaraderie*, learning together, always contesting, fighting one another but really bonding and fighting as one, knowing the other's strengths and weaknesses, able to support, complement, and supplement one another's skills, so surviving with nothing but the clothes they woke up with, chased into the jungle, eating things that crawled, roots out of mucky pools, birds, lizards, even flies....days go by, waiting for the call, the bugle sound...*real campy*, Luke laughs....Alpha blows the cavalry charge!...*rather good*: now taut, not an ounce of fat, mind sharp as a scalpel, pain now the sought after companion because it was pain that enabled him to survive the struggle...sure, Two and Three took their toll on him, scars, his first broken nose, the taste of his own blood, and fighting with cold not hot blood in his eyes, fighting blind-folded, fighting everywhere: jungle interior, one-hand-tied underwater, stalking, playing war game after war game—assassination, stealth, hit and run...Luke was getting higher than he ever knew high to be...fightingfightingfighting, *jesus I love this shit!*...yet he knew that he shouldn't ask and when he almost did Alpha halted him with just a glance, not malicious, just: *don't be foolish!*

Then the Answer to the unspoken Question: They drop him, shove him off the copter into the dense jungle, alone. Just a switchblade, *jesus, can this be true?* one stinking street-hood switchblade, what else, what's the test? the trick? Only his boots, his belt, he fingers his belt, thick and strong, leathery, not even a hat, is it time to come down? stop dreaming? this, a bad dream, a bad trip?...where's the hippie chicks: he wants to see them saunter out from under the bush, sway and giggle their way over and say, *bad trip?* then blow him back into pleasurable reality, but there is no waft of sandalwood incense, only the sucking jungle heat, so he quickly climbs a tree to get a fix on the sun, make a guess about the west, track himself back to the ocean...unknown animal dangers? he often heard sounds he couldn't place, no one spoke about, roars and hysterical chatter, all he had never hunted was for food, mainly birds...but which jungle is this? mexico? the caribbean? jesus, africa?...he lost his adrenaline rush, felt himself like

a dead-eyed drunk bleeding-out on a street corner: fear saps him—tigers, lions, visions of the cinema, *where is tarzan?*

Hours later, faithful to the sun, he is hoping that the smell is that of the ocean, but such a query is soon squashed by the breaking of brush, the sound of something heavy moving...towards me? away? he freezes, works hard to get in control, not piss, not shit, calls upon The Discipline, not theirs but the monks'—making himself invisible, pulling every pore of his body back inside itself, willing himself to be a shadow, the underside of a leaf, *still*, and then he sees Two, walking steadily but slowly, eyes bouncing around his head...he is armed, a pistol, this at the ready, like an Airedale pointing, what is in his eyes? can he see his eyes? is he afraid? should they get together? is this a test?...wo had beaten him often; Luke bested him just once. Luke hates the motherfucker: should I trounce his ass? but that gun, Man, he has a gun—what's he gonna do?

Then the second reel unfurls...no popcorn, no juicy fruits, it opens with an arrow flying, Luke did not see it, Two only feels it, his right thigh, straight through, and Two rolls over bandaging himself with yells and curses, Luke watches, *where, who*, and then another which misses, Two by this time pumping high octane adrenaline and off hiding behind a clump of trees, *bleeding to death?*...then Luke sees what Two may or may not be seeing, Alpha and Omega there, with bows, and drawing a third time, but not firing, motioning to each other with head signs like the point to the shooting guard, and Omega makes off, noisily stomping through the brush, making a lot of seemingly foolish sound, yet clearly trying to draw Two off-sides, *don't they know he's wounded?* maybe they're just checking, sure, the game's not to kill...Two fires from somewhere Luke can't see and it is Omega who screams, just one surprised *Damn!* but with a tone Luke has never heard, the slump-grunt of a large beast drop-dead in the hunt, *jesus*, Two must be outta his motherfucking mind! dragging himself over to the kill only to be met by an arrow through his neck, *jesus*, don't let me see this, what did I do, mother of god protect me...prayers of every forgotten moment, prayers omitted because of sleep, lost because of his fleshly weakness, all these rush and scramble across Luke's tongue and mouth but in muted silence, he wants to shut his eyes, wants to hide and hide further back under the bed, in the closet, on top of the roof, under the car, *disappear*, but his eyelids are petrified, open, dry and cracking, and from amidst the cracks seep images of two men dead and another kneeling to care for them, but it is not care, it is checking out the pulse, feeling for a throb and it is clear from his bodily recoil into readiness that both are clearly dead, *where am I, why am I here, jesus*, is all he can say, not mommy or daddy, not *rian!* or calling out in the loss of night for JIM!...no, this is not a drunk, *this is war*.

Like a serpent, that's what Sergeant Folk had said, "Crawl like a serpent you stupid motherfucker, asshole, Jennings, you're the tallest asshole in the whole goddam fucking Corps!" So he crawled, got down and moved on his knees, lowers onto his hands, and when he had to he went by belly, not counting the mileage, not worrying about the time, just following Alpha, not following, this he knows, *tracking*, wondering where Alpha is going, does he know where Three is, now knowing why there were no names, no banter, *jesus*, this is fucking weird, but he isn't concerned about flashbacks or any of the other horror stories he heard guys tell, guys in America, guys in Nam, flashing-back about bad times, how could it ever get badder?

*Serpent I am*, serpent was image and so reality, serpent which sheds its skin so he never dies, there is no cunning to this, no plan, no power of the will, it is a mere transformation, a something wrought from his guts, as if his body has been shed, Luke moves almost without sound, has no lungs to breathe, only his tongue tells him where, sucks the fragrance of heat from



Alpha, in the bush, watching him back at the camp, no fire, smart, has some grub, senses a spoon touching cold food, Luke is not hungry, snakes do not have to eat every day, not sleep every day, not worry about droopy eyelids, no, he is the earth wiggling, and at rest, but poised.

*When does the serpent strike?* When not expected. At a moment of inattention. When the world is not centered upon him, but upon itself. If Alpha slept, the serpent did not care, sleep is its own readiness, he himself being attuned to the movement of shadows, the change in direction of the wind, the shift in heat when feet move upon the ground, so he lets Alpha sleep, lets him wait, lets him waken, walk to the water, splash himself in the face, allows him to survey the scene, lets his mind start rolling, the seed of cogitation explode, a plan unfold, it is not now, but it will come. There had been a two-way radio, this they had all heard, used each morning, short burst of sound: talk and signing-offs, they had given it no thought, and he let it pass into its routine...in time, time not counted nor measured, Alpha is overcome by the greater force of his life, overcome by that which he cannot but be mastered by—he, creature of habit that all creatures are ("Habits! These are what lead to sin or glory!" so said The Master.)...Alpha loosens his trousers to be faithful to his daily duty, to dump his load, heave and parachute down the ash which is all that he is, and it is at this moment of uncontrollable pleasure that the serpent strikes! Left arm like slicing fang: Alpha's throat is cut, almost severed, face ever now stuck on backwards: eyeballs lusting for asshole!...*yeah*, the serpent is powerful: sank fangs into his left, then his right carotid, the pupil has learned his lesson, "Top grade!"...blood is all the blessing, all the gratitude the serpent needs, blood-spray rising on fetid odors of shitting and farting corpse, all a bouquet to Luke, but one he does not pick up, ignores, for excitement is his, the excitement of heat, heat of the body, heat of the dying breath, heat of the eyes which are portals to the fires of hell...lets Alpha slump against his body, ooze and turn cold in movement, allows him to surrender to gravity, the serpent now readies to swallow his prey.

"Motherfucking Christ I can't believe you killed him!" This came at him like thunder, but Luke does not move. Wildly gesticulating, madly throwing his head this way and that, all the time shouting the same sentence over and over Three comes rushing towards Luke. "Motherfucking Christ I can't believe you've killed him!"...then jolting to a stop, freezing there like a statue, all at once realizing that One might kill him next, Three is but an icon of fear, Luke says nothing, notes that Three has a machete, but it dangles from his right hand as if a huge useless hang-nail, Three is almost unaware of himself, makes to speak again, but stops, steps backwards, ever watching One, five steps, slowly, ten, twenty, then, angrily, but a worked up anger, almost theatrical, still the serpent relishes the coldness of his fear, of his death, it is a dying like the wind at storm's edge, once it was fierce but now it is playful, despite itself... "I'm going!" that's what Three starts to say, over and over again, uttering as he moves, shouts it as he flings the machete into the ocean, announces it, knowing that it says, "I'm unarmed. You wouldn't kill an unarmed man, now, would you?!"—says it as if the Conductor at Penn Station, "I'm going!"...runs into the jungle, flees chased by his own sound, the frenzied blast of a train careening through the station unable to stop.

In the morning Luke was awakened by the crackling cackle of the two-way, all the tribal codes rendered, the voice asks, "Today?" Luke replies, "Today."

## PART THREE: WARRIOR DREAM

### CHAPTER 20: The Call

Luke knew the call had to be made, knew he would be dialing, Dialing for Deliverance, *naw*, not some crap like that, shit, Boot and The Island—How to tell them? How many times has he told them? In his dreams, day and night, his rehearsals while bellying through the muck, aiming a goddam rifle and seeing his Dad's eyes at target center—Sweet Jesus!—and the naked bodies, all grunting and groaning, black-zone farting and snoring, just a wild ass last six weeks and he supposed to be walking the aisle this weekend... sure, Mom's probably wondering why he hasn't called, asking for his best suit, she knowing as women feel it, that gush of Spring in the male, such Fever turned to curious Fervor for "the girl," hoping that it is some Good Girl, allowing Luke to enjoy his own bout of Senioritis, this she would permit, but Dad, *Dad*, fucking orderly scientific mind, he's just packing knowing that the day had been circled on the calendar...did Father Boniface scoop the news of his disappearance? Christ, Luke hadn't stopped to account for that Benedictine gossip-monger, and so he dials, not even collect.

But it was the other call, surely to him, "The Call," one of substance, Earth shattering, what he thought his call was, would be: "Mom, look," long, uncomfortable pauses, ones that told his mother more than his words: "My son, my son why have you forsaken us?"—but she does not ask, just listens, like Morse code: "I'm a Marine, Mom. Just out of Boot Camp. Know I should've called. See, The War, no, this girl, no...It's all behind me now, Mom. I can't go back. They shipping me out from Oakland. I've got a short leave, but I can't, can you understand? Can't come home, not now. Just gotta do this. Look, let me talk with Pop." Luke knew she was like a yellow pad, taking down all the notes: facts, impressions, extrapolations...all the time but just listening, quiet, like a good student. All she says is, "I love you, Luke." She wasn't crying, that's what he remembers most, not crying, "I love you. Come back home, soon." It was the "soon," as if he had some control over it, as if he were going off to graduate school where after three years he would be done, not to The War, "soon," it stayed with him.

Dad took him off-stride, came to the phone quickly, yeah, she must've told him, must've, he was almost jocular, "So, I guess you've found my Just War argument against being a Conscientious Objector more compelling than I first thought?!" And then he waits, for an answer? repartee? confession? "Yeah," is all Luke could surrender, what to say to this man, The Man, Father, all his life what God as Father was, could be, must be..."I am a bit dismayed that you're not graduating"—*a bit?! Jesus motherfucking Christ, he said "a bit!"*—"but I know that that is the least of things right now." And then it flows like a benediction, almost episcopal in its tone, certainly papal in its intent: "I'm proud of you son. *Proud of you!* In these times many men find that they have no soul. That they're cowards. They seek to run away. You, my son, are running towards a great prize: to win Freedom for an oppressed people. To fight godless Communism...I am really, *really* proud." And then Luke hears him cry, his Dad, not a whimper, but that cry from deep within, carried by the word "really," drawing out a call from one man to another, one warrior to another...and without waiting for Luke's response—did he really need to respond?—his mother takes over: "I love you. Sorry, already said that. *Luke,*" and the word was more than address, his name but then something more, something of herself she was speaking to, "Luke, you've always been a tad "blessed"—and under the word: odd, peculiar, strange, but as God has determined, in His Service—"and I can't say that I'm surprised, can you believe me? I can hardly believe myself, but somehow I knew...oh, God Bless You, Son. Write, please write, please...*often!*"

That was the easy part, so now he knows, accepting that his parents misunderstood his every reason, were totally ignorant of his every feeling—JANIS!—that they simply fitted him into their worldview without being one iota aware that he was out of the universe, dropped through the center and was free-falling, *Yeah, Rolling Stoned! Ha...*but, "Shit, ain't it all fucked up, Man, fucked up!"...Patriotism: for them it is part of religion—God and Country! Military Service was akin to a Calling: God's Will—Luke remembers the Crusader's call, "Deus vult!" "God Wills It!"...shit, Luke knows it ain't Religion for him, nothing Redemptive about killing, but then..."godless Communists!" hmm, aw, *fuck!* He could still go either way: not fight or fight, fight for his ideals as a pacifistic CO or kick-ass for his Country as a Good Son of The Church Militant...but thought is deserting him, only feeling, *Drop In, Drop Out...*Shit, do both! Just, goddam it, you screwy motherfucker Luke asshole Friar, JUST DO IT!!!!...A few tokes, a round of boilermakers, and him only talking to himself, not with words but with archaic scribble, pre-verbal scrawlings, these he scratches and etches into the table, the wall, draws on whatever was near, this way talking to himself about the serpent, about Numbers One, Two and Three, Alpha, Omega...he now ever so totally drunk or stoned or both whenever he wasn't "In the Army now, You're in the Army now!"—shitfaced and stupid, "Goddam it, I'm a Marine!...*Semper Fi!*"...Then *The Call*.

Somewhere in his head it all flowed smoothly together: The Call to Abraham and his call, the sacrifice of Isaac and the death of his Dad, "Luke, God called your Dad today. This morning. Just after Mass. Yes, Father Boniface had intoned, "Ite Missa Est" and your Dad, right there beside me—God Bless him!—I saw him smile, broadly, his eyes gleaming, and the words, so firm, so strong, "Deo Gratias!"...and then he knelt down, and slumped forward." It was his mother talking! She *calling*. Not crying! Not blathering! She, there beside him, he the Head, all the glue which keeps us together, and she calls me, takes the day in stride, phones his brothers and sisters, talks with Archibald the mortician, takes care of business—and then calls me, "I can't think of a more blessed way for your father to answer the call from Our Father!"...Was this woman a Saint or a Mad-Maiden? Did not Death frighten her? It reached right next to her there in the pew and slayed her lover, her spouse, husband, breadwinner...Luke is stunned as he listens to his Mother, talking about the Feast of the Visitation, July 2nd, about childbearing being the vehicle for Redemption, this the day Dad had invited her to accompany him to Mass (a premonition?), he, on the way, *thanking her*, in a most heart-rendering word, for tears come into her voice, for birthing his sons—Luke does not hear our or your, just my, and not children, just sons, and, *sweetjesus*, she's taking this like a new birth: she laboring with Dad as he dies and so lives on, in eternity!...he chokes to ask "How?"—"Heart-attack. And just last month Dr. Doyle gave him a clean bill of health. Imagine!...*God* certainly does act in mysterious ways, doesn't He?"...How mysterious she doesn't know: *Who did Luke slay in that jungle?*

As if a frenzy of tiny but steadily striking bolts of lightning were hitting him, Luke shivers with the queer cadence of it all: a death and Death, then his call and The Call, still, how to tell her, "God's Will Be Done!"—just this morning the secular god's Will, Mars, his orders, stamped *Top Secret*, delivered by a man not in uniform, "God, is this going to keep getting weirder?"...and he had begun to pack, had finished by the time Mom called, knew that he had not a snowball's chance in hell of getting to the funeral, *Death*, how could he tell Them about Death? They who on his first day had shown him a body-bag, how to store it, how to "ensure that all body parts" are inside, the tagging, the zipping and how to stack them. From whom could he expect pity, a shared tear? "I just don't know how to say this, Mom, I feel like I'm clutched in the jaws of hell, being pulled by Satan himself...I've got these Orders and I can't..." but he

couldn't finish, just hung there, not crying, but then crying, yeah, bawling in his belly, shaking like the last leaf of Autumn on the astral level, quaking and quivering, not able to stand, flowing like melted wax all over the floor, *yet*, just standing there, holding a goddam motherfucking cock-sucking stupid shit-faced phone in my hands!... "I understand," she says: no, Mom, don't say that! *Don't!!* Please go berserk, yell at me, condemn me, no, no, no, no!!!!!!... Yet, a voice from the Sky told Abraham that he was not to slay his son but rather a ram caught in yonder bush... Sarah's voice? "*Mom...!*"

*Dossier:* Dad dead. Fatherless. Then details: Didn't attend father's funeral. Then what? A sentence to hell for parricide? No, Luke couldn't let this be. "Not be!" And so he fended off fatherlessness, talked with his Dad each night through prayer as he had done for so many years, talked with him and waited patiently, *The Good Son*, listening, not The Prodigal but The Good Son, knowing that what he is doing pleases his father, feeling his father with him, always, so Luke holds it all together, knowing that God's Will is being done, that his father is alive, waiting...but it doesn't hold, not at the deepest level, and soon not at the most superficial, so he pickles it, pickles The Call, both, forgets, forgets as he has been trained to do, not look backward, just forward, not to who he was, but to whom he will become, not just soldier, but now warrior, hero: a man who needs not history, yet one who craves to make history, become a legend, the stuff of story, mythos, that part of a Story being written, written by those who win, only the winners...and so when They come again, this time two MPs and all standard procedure, when *they* come, he goes, shuts the door, walks down the steps, pauses, keens his ears to hear, truly hear, faithfully hear: The Call...

## **CHAPTER 21: Sunflower**

He liked the flowers. All around him: flowers gardened along the streets, the profusion, almost whale-wake at the Arboretum, all throughout the park: Golden, and her, or the many versions of her: these Hippies, flowers in their hair, uncut, just ripped out from the earth — natural, I'm sure they'd say "natural", and the smoke: campfire and incense, it all seemed just that way, like the whole park was just one meeting place, one tribal gathering, everywhere he walked there were flowers and smoke and music, Holy Smoke, lots of drums, Luke laughs, not to his own consciousness but hidden, an off-stage laugh, seeing himself in that real jungle, there without the music, but there within what this music wanted to get at: the animal beat, the natural rhythm of fauna and flora: bursting life, seeping death, wasted seed, so he does not hear his laughter, but it is as if she did: nameless, she comes over, one sandal off, in her left hand, just a step or two from him when he sees her, a mix of yellow flowers of some sort and two roses, not neat, not as if for cosmetic effect, just there, floating in her hair, hair which is long but tied at spots by leather strips, and she smiles, not as in putting on a smile rather as if she is a smile, and he is gone, they are gone, off together, somewhere on the beat, naturally.

He didn't even think to ask, if he had been asked he might have said he didn't care, but they didn't and he didn't. All that went down was as weird as all that had happened. They picked him up, no questions about the others, landed and directed him to a Quonset hut. He knew it was a large base, this time they flew in during daylight yet he still didn't know where he was, didn't care. What would they ask? What should he ask? He was just too fucking tired to give a hot damn, so when they moved him about with minimal directions, he didn't complain, not inquire. It was a hot shower and a still damp drop into the bed for sleep, this he knew he wanted, and if they were going to give it to him he would take it. He didn't stop to consider what might happen when he awoke, it was a four cot room but with no detritus from any other humanoids, so what the fuck!

If he had dreamed, dreamed in the sense of waking and knowing that he had dreamt, then maybe he would have awoken and spent some time pondering and reflecting, but he dreamed as The Brooders dreamt, as in Story, he went over the episode time and again as if telling it to himself so that he would not forget, not forget deep down there where stories are bound and shelved, kept in the psychic library for future withdrawals. As it is, he wakes just with that bright eyed awakening that happens when one naps, drops off deeply into a good sound sleep and then surfaces in the mid-afternoon: all at once one is back into the sunlight, no shadows, and the sun is bright, too bright from the west, had to be the west, and he puts his left hand over his eyes, not to blind himself, rather to see, and it was the same hut he remembered, he alone: the only one messing a bed.

Naked seemed all right but after peeking out the side of the bamboo-strip curtain he knew he'd better get back to normal dress, just khakis, what else? A small supply in the open closet: two sizes, one his — was someone else expected? Before it was answered, two men opened and walked into the room: appeared and entered so quickly that he felt that this must be their hut, not his, and he was almost about to say, "Excuse me, I was just leaving," when one, the taller one in fatigues, holds out two beers towards him and says, "Thirsty?" The other guy, in civilian dress, laughs, as if they're sharing an inside joke. "Thanks," Luke says, takes the beers and just stands there, feeling a bit more naked than before. "By the sink," and he didn't need to decode this one, the civilian meant a bottle opener, Luke knows this, and as he steps back and towards the sink the other guys sit down.

He had half-expected an interrogation, something along the lines of a post-exam review, some type of explanation or questions about what had happened. Instead, the soldier asks, "How do you feel?" pausing between you and feel so that it was clear that he wanted to take Luke's emotional temperature. "Fine." He drank his first, actually drank it all in one practiced gobbling, gasping gulp. "Thirsty!" laughs the civilian, again, and Luke just wanted to go over and piss on the guy but instead he takes a swig of the second, then holds it in his hand, easily, at rest. "What would you like to do?" the soldier, again, but presents the question like a teacher or a shrink might do, really just another version of the feel-question. "Drink another beer." This time the civilian says nothing, a serious look shapes his face, he leans back, pushes his chair up on its legs, balances himself and says — no, pronounces like a judge — "Your dead", that was it, a judge and a mortician. It took more than a moment but now Luke laughs, "Fucking-A, motherfucker!", empties his second.

Where's there a wall when you really need one? he says to no one, as if anyone could hear him over the music, good shit, and he thinks about Jim, and their apartment, "pad," as the Jim-boy liked to say, and now needing a wall to erase with his empties, maybe ten, who's counting?, and this chick, jesus, "I'm Sunflower," that's what she had said, maybe that's why I came along, a fucking human flower!, never fucked a flower before!, and Luke rolls off the mattress and onto the floor, a drop of maybe three, four inches, the room with no beds, not frames, just two mattresses, a stereo, lots of posters: Let's see, "Student Mobilization" blah, blah, something pasted over with a picture of some wild assed Hippie, says, "Yippie!", and then Judy Collins, he remembers her: "Suzanne takes you down ..." or was that Baez, what the fuck, never been a hootenanny fan, christ, a huge peace symbol, flowers: Peter, Paul and Mary — who else?, others psychedelic, and "Make Love, Not War", that stops him, he wants to be clever, say something to himself about "What's the difference?" but another part of himself says fuck your shallow cynicism asshole, and just about when the serpent begins to crawl she comes back in, fucking Sunflower's half naked, just hauling a nice rack of cock licking boobs, jesus, with beads

only down her chest, slightly bouncing as she moves towards him and with one slip she is totally naked, not as if pausing to ask him, "Screw, sir?" or anything, just coming in as if she's been coming in here for years, old friends, old lovers, married?, Jesus, what a piece of ass!

"Dead." Not a question, just a repeating of the word, Luke says it almost flat, just an edge of the reflective, as if ever so slightly pausing to see if the word actually lives at the end of his tongue. No one moves, no one smiles, no one farts, he'll never know why but he just wants to fart, stand and bend over and fart in their fucking stupid ass faces, but he doesn't, just drops the bottle to the floor, their eyes hop on it, "Anymore?"

Only because Sunflower leaned over to light an incense stick from a big fat candle did he notice, though upon noticing he realizes how stupid he was not to have noticed, noticed the display of candles in the room, maybe ten lit, all types, maybe ten, fifteen unlit, and she blows the flame, then waves causing swirls, takes it and waves it in front of him, "Sandalwood. Lovely, isn't it?" But before he could respond she is next to him, all the flesh that he could ever want to see, he sees nothing else, yet he does not reach out and feel her, doesn't grab her and pull her down, just looks, gazes and it is her smile again, does she ever not smile?, and she is the one to lean over and dive into their embrace, splashing into him, a rush and wave of kisses and hands exploring: Luke feels like he is a toy box and Sunflower a happy kid rummaging around for known pleasures and new surprises.

"Okay. Don't be cute." The civilian, who else? And Luke and the soldier — shrink? — know that no one is being cute, but that the other guy just doesn't know what to say, what did he expect? want? "Look, Jennings, there's only one thing I want to tell you", hey, man, spill your guts!, "if that other guy hadn't been such a shitless coward, you'd be fishbait back on the island. Do you understand?" "Never would've happened," Luke begins, but the soldier stops him with a slap of his hands together: "Shut up!", then a stern look, almost The Master's stare: "Don't let it happen ... again."

Maybe it was the grass, fucking-a ain't the booze!, for she had blown him sky high and yet he's still Moses' rod, what is it about this broad?, and he pulls her up to him, draws her up like a blanket, kisses her hard and then soft, works his tongue deep inside her — god, how sweet! — and with hands that betray the control of the past days he is trembling all over her, working so fast that she doesn't realize he's trembling, she also trembling, little gasps and longer, deeper smiles, Luke's arms hold her, squeeze her, his lips take to her breasts, suck and lick, come all over her with the lust of the serpent, yeah, down inside himself, there, again, is the serpent, long tongue, licking up and down Sunflower's body, around the apple slope of her sweet teats, down and across her body, lapping up her sweat, taking her in drop by drop, and down to her thighs, he feints towards her pussy, she arcs upward and falls back, spreads in anticipation but he moves down her thighs, her calves, to her feet, kissing her ankles and then kneeling up to look at her, survey her as if a pilot looking for the hidden landing strip, her eyes are shut, the music is smooth, just a stoned instrumental, candle-lights pop in and out like fireflies and he lifts the blanket of darkness enveloping them and heads towards her light, her campfire, going prone and resting his head an inch or two before her firepit, there, pausing like an ancient angler spying the lie of the weeds, looking for the best spot to cast, and his tongue greets her vulva, tips a fold left, the other right: Luke licks around, up and down her bush, finds her clit, circles it, breathes upon it, drips himself as rain upon her, she rising, the pillar of fire rising to lead, and she shivers, he feels her like a small earthquake, shivers and rumbles, her flesh falling about him, her clit now hard and to his tongue rising like obelisk and he kneeling in worship, he there to adore her, and he dances, tongue and small touch of fingertips, and her sounds are like distant thunderclaps,

sounds which make him happy, sounds like the rain coming, the reward for the rain dance, and she presses her thighs against his cheeks, presses and with her gentle hands pulls upon his hair, pulling him towards her, not up her body but towards her soul, her treasure, who she is in her desire for him, and her storm is gentle, like the lovely rain at summer's break of twilight, drops which are not seen but known, movements of the ground which are felt as welcoming, not frightful, yes, he is no longer thought or name or just a guy, no, he is the serpent, all that he is, is alive through his tongue, a tongue which enters her and is rewarded with life, her gift of pulsation, small shakes and trembles leading to great groans, a sweet almost singing groan, sounding like a chorus, almost Gregorian, and she calls to him, "Take me! Please take me! NOW!" ... and he is so tired, so tired, so tired, doesn't she know I'm dead? ... and he draws up upon his knees, there to be spotlighted by her eyes, eyes which have turned from resident in sweet smile to carry the crazed look of a frightened animal, but eyes which are hypnotic, latch onto him, yank him down, and he is upon her and with the same movement in her and she snaps her legs about his waist and they rock, rocks glued by sweat, hot sweat, sweat which he knows is blood: his, hers, and they rise and fall, clit and cock, pussy and rod, cunny and prick, one in motion, one in breathing, one in grasp ... and he could not, would not, should not? ever remember the moment of loss, a terrifying loss, all of himself, all lost within her, his whole body, every muscle and bone, all six-foot-five, all his looks and licks and sucks and touches: all lost in the fire, them firestorm, obliteration, blackout, for the serpent struck, swift slit and the opening of his gut, this time his heart and lungs and liver: all seats of his power, and her, for she is wrapped around his cock, wrapped so tight that she is his cock, all of her: and she is lost within him, he seeing her like liquid fire down a volcano, bubbling, blood-red, human lava, and being sucked up through his penis like a straw ....

"Again." That's what shut him down, that's what replaced "The End" to his story, "Again", and they stand shortly after its delivery, stand not for a nanosecond, not waiting for a tip, just delivering the message and then beating-ass away, they walk out the door as they came in, casually slamming it shut, as if it was their hut.

Maybe morning, maybe night: the light in the room did not betray the time, even the candles had subdued, the incense stick had withered to ash, so, what to do? What did I do? Shit, it was my last night. Knew I wanted to get laid. But what a fucking bitch! Luke looks at her, a slight nasal snore, not disgusting, actually quite interesting, exposing her restfulness, her satisfaction, he likes that. But must get going, no matter what. Hoof it back to the base, report, yeah, report for what? A question he'd just as quickly throw away, but ... rolls off the mat and gropes for his clothes, dresses, stands and sees himself in a movie, saying good-bye to his gal: "Sunflower, we might never see each other again...I'm going off to war!"—would've been a good fuck-me line, but he hadn't had to say it, now doesn't know what to say, doesn't know what she wants to hear, needs to hear? Jesus, a Hippie Chick! It fucks his mind, humorously, laughs at him, but he doesn't make to move away, doesn't think about Rian, no one, just looking down at this woman, Sunflower, who, where, why? But questions which don't stick, questions the serpent is not gifted to form, and so he picks up his big cloppers and concerns himself only with not stepping on her or waking her: two, three steps and a hand-on the doorknob, he pulls it slowly and slides out, halfway, "Hey!", shit!, "Hey!" and he turns, she smiles, "Can you bring me a glass of water?", turns his head, head only, not his body, half-way out, she watches his lips, "Look, kid, I gotta go fight a war."...Would he ever forget? Was there anything else more eternal that she would bequeath him with, could have offered to him last night?, anything?, but it is

always his: her face, there on the pillow, eyes filled with depthless emptiness, Sunflower without a smile.

## **CHAPTER 22: The Good Doctor**

The doctor felt Friar Killian's pulse and was amazed. "It's simply too erratic," whispered first to himself then spoken as if a conclusion to a detailed analysis to The Master. The Master knew, and so dismissed the doctor, a man who had been perplexed more than often by his trips to examine the monks. When younger the good doctor thought that he'd write a book "someday" about the "Physiology of Mysticism," but then as the years progressed he realized that no one would believe him: men whose ages he rarely could accurately diagnose, men whose internal organs were of shapes and sizes one visit and of quite radically different compositions the next, granted that "the next" may be too, too many years in-between for him to accurately record data, either empirical or ethereal. Amazed, some astounded him with their strength of limb, a strength given the lie by their scrawny muscular character, yet it was their eyes which most fascinated him...and of which he dreamt in alarm. Eyes which rarely stared at him, in fact, so he felt, eyes which actually avoided him, pinning their focus on his lapel or an instrument in his hand, but eyes which when they spoke did so in a peculiar language: one which foisted images, not words, into his mind—he saw men entwined around a rose, with thorns growing slowly through them, piercing their limbs and as they pierced the doctor heard music, as if of joyful angelic swells, grand Christmastide chant, and then a scene which spoke of agony: twisted, contorted men, twisted and contorted around each other, with each other, through each other, but an agony as much of pleasure as of pain, more of pleasure, even, but it was a chilling pleasure, as if these monk-eyes were speaking of a land not just of forbidden pleasures and unknown sins but rather of a land not here, rather somewhere else, but a real land, a land to which their eyes were maps, and after his visits the good doctor never failed to dream what he considered the most shuddering dreams yet ones which gorged him, filled him like a lidded-well atop a geyser, dreams which lead to astounding nights with his wife.

"Erratic," the only word he finds useful, but certainly not just erratic, a word which conveyed a sense of deviation from some norm, no, the pulse had, in no common sense of definition, a norm, it was not normal, nothing about this place was normal, so he is thinking, "Whatever he's doing, Father," the doctor says to The Master as he gathers himself to leave, "whatever it is, you should consider changing his routine." But what did he expect other than the usual nod and forced smile?: the twin indications that The Master thanked him for his effort, futile effort I'm sure he judges it, but his thanks, and his realization that the matter was more of earthly making than he had supposed, knowing, now, by the good doctor's visit that, indeed, the source was Alfred.

Friar Killian's routine was changed. An outside observer would have inferred from Killian's behavior and tasks that he was a Brother and not a priest, for The Master kept the young friar busy with menial tasks, mostly gardening and painting, true, Friar Killian will never cease painting the monastery till the day he dies: expires with paintbrush in hand, painting: staining, varnishing, highlighting, switching color patterns, just painting over and over again like those who labor on the Golden Gate bridge, a never-ending task in subordination to the fog, that ordination from another dimension, the natural, She, the Ocean, and so Killian, rarely to the altar, was watched so so carefully as he pronounces the words of sacred script, of otherworldly consecration, watched to see if the other's hands, his twin-soul, would reach through his flesh and snatch the cup, thief that he is, thief of the soul, outlaw from the other realm, he, violator of The Dream.



But who then, The Master, ponders, to dream Abraham? Who while Alfred still lives? — for he could not think of him as Luke, Luke he, himself, has slain, slain as he dropped the veil of monastic robes over his eager and obedient head, not Luke, and certainly not he called Luke again who was Luke-not-Alfred, what new name could he use, should he use to control him? ... How to name what he knows this rogue Friar really is?...Never did The Master think that this one would be a legendary one, one not seen in The Master's lifetime, not seen in the times of his teachers, not seen for several centuries, only spoken of through the oral transmission, only behind monastic—no, not monastic, rather only behind Brooder walls, deep within the monastic enclosure and only when a new one is appointed as The Master: for the matter was one of Dreaming, how to form the Dream, control it.

Possibly, so he excuses himself, that is why he missed the signs? "The Bodywanderer" was known more, so he came to understand, more through discernments of the imagination than recorded fact. Indeed, the accounts that he had received—didn't they to all reasonable minds?—appeared couched in legendary garment, the stuff of martyrs tales, not just fantastic but fabulous, "an excess above excess", and so to him, initially, he had surmised that all was just about mending the tattered edge of the Dreaming, that—and as his grounding in empirical methodology (the fruit of his early academic pursuit as a physicist) had so prejudiced him to conclude—that this whole Bodywandering issue was composed of "soft data" and (ah, the ego-daring of youth!) "mattered to not much" ... yes, "nothing falsifiable in the way of hard facts can be substantiated," so he concluded in a highly praised monograph, all was the result of too much fervor, too much humility, indeed, "an excess above excess"—his judgment still standing to this day as "the accepted interpretation", namely, that all stemmed from Fear, that residue of Her, that She was still about and might return ... indeed, it was a Fear which still lingers, despite his most exacting and detailed research, because all—so he had to admit in a "A Postscript on Methodology"—that he could know had been only intuited through the negative effects of such alleged Bodywanderers. Yes, it was simply Fear. A capital letter fear, as "The Temptation in The Garden," and though he had spoken—now, so many years ago, so it seemed, but yet as if just now—and only the ancient ears, the elderly Friars, those whose wrinkles carried memories he did not know how to research, only these looked at him with skeptical eyes ... if he could read them he would have seen them as laughing eyes, not laughing as to ridicule but laughing as to his bungling, they seeing him like the hapless Adam, he bungling his way towards The Tree, tripping over roots his youthful eyes could not yet see, not see the spectral Tree of Her flesh, Her Body, yes, these decaying ones, they knew, they laughed...all that the young Master knew was that numerous Councils had been convened, doctrinal errors hung as heretic necks snapped, and dogma clarified and articulated with cold language and hot prongs at those times the word "Bodywanderer" had been whispered, yes, "negative" effects: the recoil from something, and, back then, he passionately urged his readers to take "much comfort and solace" from the simple acceptance that what was known was only that which could be interpreted from the actions of these who left and "almost" wandered, but—God be praised!—repented and came back. Yes, these were The Saints, those who had heard Her Call, possibly seen Her Body, even—but only The Father knew, knew the depths and the cavernous void of Mortal Sin—embraced Her! But it was their responses, their preachments against "this life, this worldly den of sinful pleasures" and their subsequent Devotional Practices: measured in degrees of harsh, severe, bloodied, and tortured, these the measure of Holiness—of how to break-through by breaking the sinful body: Her Body, Her Bequeathment, Her Temple, how to shatter the bones and muscle, how to stifle the heartbeat and the sigh, yes, this their Sainthood testimony...but what, so he ponders now more

hesitantly then he had ever, but what is it that She is, really is, Her Body?...and he wonders what it is, how it is, when it was that Alfred had so stumbled towards Her...?

Now, years removed and more seasoned, comes self-doubt: a missed footnote? Times like this, aren't they ones of "an excess above excess?" Why had he not seen the earthquake as Her heartbeat? This Vatican Two. And Alfred—he the dreamer of Genesis. Did I not direct him, drill him in study, and lift him away from the Sixth Day? Its Temptation of "our image." The hint of a pantheon or at least a twin-soul both god and goddess? Didn't I lock this verse with the key of Revelation: that this "foreshadowed The Trinity"? Not lock and chain him to the Tradition's Dream: Yahweh and Adam, *alone*?...Gnawing doubt and acid self-recrimination: Did the Serpent slither through the versicles of The Dreaming and draw him—*seduce!*... where was I, God forgive me!...seduce and set him dreaming on Her?...Only now does he tremble at the sleight of the Trickster—did The Serpent tattoo the talisman? Did I myself, oh, unworthy Master that I am Lord. Forgive your Servant, dear Father of Justice. But spare me not Thy Wrath or Rod!...and so The Master broods: seeking to approach "The Dark Vapors." To find a link, a clue, a connection... and as he does so he racks his mind, reviewing the history, no, not organized, not clear, not thematic, rather the jumble of stories, but then seeking guidance in the only lineage he had ever found useful.

Describing the Lineage, this the singular task set before only those rare Masters who had demonstrated superior Theological skills, those who could tread the border between Sin and Grace. Yes, a papal appointment, three years of special, extraordinary study, not just of secret texts, suppressed writings, but of Dreaming, the permission to wander all the tombs, hold all the sacred relics, Dream with the Pope, himself!...but more, most astounding and transforming was his Call to lie prone upon the wood of The Cross—yes, The Cross, what others only know as legend, he, The Master, in the bowels of Vatican City, there, touched he The Cross...and Dreamed...with the Communion of Saints: All Souls, Living and Dead...yes, he, himself, The Master, he had traced the lineage of those who had, but then had not, who had been Tempted but did not Wander, had teetered...Dreaming back to Paul and his Thorn in the Flesh, which to the initiate was the weakness of sexual desire but The Master knew as Pauline ears which still heard Her Voice, "Eat!", and his restoration of His body as Cosmic not intimate, in no need of egg and sperm, a body of wonder: removed—as it should be, and this was the pattern which all such Great Souls would follow, those held up as mystics and seers and spiritual guides: Origen—he whom The Master held as the greatest of all theologians, one whose synthesizing tears the fabric of Truth in half, he who in abject obedience to the literal words of the Scriptural admonition: "If your eye—even if it is your best eye!—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away."... this Great Soul, with the iron clench of his own hands, grasps his offending rod, that link with Her, those round-eyes of penetrating lust, clenches and slashes, by himself, alone, castrati...ah, it takes iron in the spine not to wander!...and so The Master recalls how Augustine learned: having dipped into Her well and drawn water, he then with Lust only for the Crown of Glory, rejects his wife but, true Saint that he is, saves her through his fleshly Deodatus ("Given by God")...yes, this impulse to hear and then once heard, to flee, this was the sign of the spiritually strong, and it was a lineage through time, from St. Bernard who smothered Her with honeyed sentimentality, onto St. Francis, he the most "almost," almost a Bodywanderer, but so much back into the fold, bringing to every seeker the knowledge that his flesh must bleed like Jesus' had bled, flesh which must be impoverished, "Lady Poverty", made not flesh at all but a rack for pain and torture, an imitation of The Crucified, fit only to be cast into the thorn bush—not just a crown of thorns but a skin of thorns, he being blatantly in quest for Blood, and he most blessed by Blood dripping

from his hands and feet, stigmata, that mockery of menses...and yes, true, so The Master smiles: the vested glory was in Aquinas, he whose net of doctrine and intellectual armaments has held for the greater part of a millennium (ah, how Hitler must have admired this achievement!)...yet, to the side The Master chases away the nervous footnote: that in the end Thomas cast aside all his writings in hard judgment—"All is straw!"—and ceased to write, it was debated whether he began to wander, again ... but of no matter, the Tradition held strong, for then arises Luther, the Great Trickster, he who married in the flesh but not in the soul, he who so magisterially subdued and subordinated, House Maiden, Beer Hall Floozie, non-sacral Sex: sex with her but without Her, both shes there—invisible!...yes, it pleased The Master that it held as strongly among the Protestants, indeed, for so many of them all was protest against Her, images of Her, she as Mother, in the Manager, by the Cross, at the Tomb ... what they hated among the papists was their homage to Her, "as if she were divine!"...a blasphemy submerged in their many sectarians witnesses: come the Puritans: no images, whitewashed, saved by His Blood, only, come the Shakers, celibate: Sixth Day Dream decide, come the Quakers, all Light but no Fire in the Hearth...yes, She is contained, her Voice is stifled, so it should be: this The Way ... so he hopes, this The Master hopes, and Teilhard de Chardin had been his hope for Alfred, in his mind not yet a Great Soul but an admirable weaver of the Tradition's Story, a laudable student of St. Paul, his "Divine Milieu" filled with Scientific Light, Evolutionary Thrust, yes, Teilhard was The Master's hope, but...?...Now, but to wait and pray, meditate, labor at The Dreaming, Be On Guard!—for from his own thorough research he could never fathom what it was like to hear Her and then go Her way, be that male who listens, those hims who need hers, not just as chattel, but as companions, as necessary, who dreamed the Sixth Day, "our image" ... yes, Mary as Co-Mediatrix will hold the day, pure Theology of The Garden...but what of this Luke-Alfred? The first effect of his Bodywandering is known now only too blatantly here within the monastic walls, inside their Dreaming, known through its disruption of their Dreaming of Genesis: for Isaac this day slew Abraham....

Luke's effect is manifest as "the simple fact": Friar Killian had murdered the venerable Friar Camillus, the most ancient, the dreamer whose dream entwined them with roots from centuries past, he who had entered the Order at twelve and who, like Jesus in the Temple, had astonished The Brethren with his preternatural insight, his grappling love, his tenderness, yes, in the midst of this, what others: pious laymen in dread and hope, jealous clerics in cowardly snivel, call The Pit, this sacred space carved out from this isle remote, off the coast of civilization, off the map of The New World, so they believed, sacred geography, here a Pit where men came to fight, at least upon their first coming, fight against demons, real and perceived, came to wage war against darkness both inner and outer, came to flee and so to find, flee pain and find pleasure, flee pleasure and find pain, here, all, at times, like snakes in a pit, hissing and spitting, crawling over and under each other, all sharing a common hunger, a common desire for another, a something other, The Other, into this Friar Camillus had brought sustaining love, a fatherly affection almost motherly, he always responding, "Let the children come to me" and counseling, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it," a source—at once wise, at once practical, at once mystical—which many did not fail to pervert, to these men he infused all about with an infectious affection, saying, so often, "That is good"—this after hearing about the most tormenting struggle, a struggle where flesh was bitten off and blood sucked, a struggle where dreams of killing children, children by the droves, killing them with fire and bombs, running them over with cars and trucks, such slaying, such torment, and Friar Camillus saying, "That is good"—now dead.

It was the character of dead that flattened The Master, knocked him down and drew out from him all emotion positive or negative, sapped. This flattening is what stunned him. For after a death there is still the Communion of dreaming. Always the deceased Friar stays within the dreaming till his dream is championed by another. But not so with Friar Camillus. No, he totally disappeared from the dream. And it seemed that only The Master was so aware, no other friar made mention of this fact nor spoke the aged spiritual leader's name. Rather, they spoke about Friar Killian, talked about him as if he were dead, as if the one who was murdered, yes, it was his dream which hovered about at the edges of their dreaming, his dream which waited for a champion ... but more, worse: doubts and fears, divisions, harsh opinions, all began to surface as friars discussed and then jumped at each other's throats claiming that their disciplines, their methods of pain and pleasure were the right ways, there was no one longer about who could utter, "That is good," and so stem the tide. The dreaming became a swirling about, and the once calm exterior manifested during the communal exercise now became one of near bedlam: monks acting out, walking about, pulling their hair, screaming, shouting at odd times: The Master was compelled, night after night, and much too often at the Common Table, to rap fiercely for silence, each meditation became a struggle more unsettling...yet, he did not fear that The Brooders would splinter or rupture, did not attribute what was happening to them to what was happening outside to Mother Church, there where the disaster of Vatican Two was evident in the wholesale departure of men from the sacral priesthood, no, never did The Master fear that all was lost or forever out of control, he knew better, He knew better, rather, it was a Fulfillment, this he feared, his weakness, his spiritual flaw: he did not want to live in times of Revelation, but so it seemed, yes, he knows, a new Revelation, the coming of a Bodywanderer.

"Alfred!" he offers-up in hushed tones. "Alfred," again. But he knows that he knows not his name, but he needs a name, how else to dream him? How else to gather in the fragments which flow backward. He now, "out there" yet more so "in here", not just living within their emptiness—oh, how smug have I been! Forgive, dear Lord—no, their emptiness was now his emptiness, his dreams, their dreams, they to struggle to understand what he was doing, communicating, The Master knowing that the friars were missing so much in the messages since they so broadly lacked the experience Alfred-now-Luke was having. So much that they had missed, believing—oh, how smug, how shamelessly self-indulgent I have been: O Lord! Help me!—believing that their talisman was all they needed to control him, that the shimmerings of Her from the Darkly Vapors would be all enough to consume him and possess, yes, obsess! him till he died, "Lord, I am not worthy...", The Master knows what the Good Doctor couldn't: that Isaac had slain Abraham, this the cover-up for the ages, now unveiled, but such an unmasking that it shook with the tremor of Revelation, yet, it did not killed Friar Killian, so The Master knew—this he did know so truly and squarely from the Tradition—that the Story yet to be told was only being re-structured, characters re-arranged, that the message, the interpretation, the Truth: this was yet to come, yet to come, so he stands, now, as circumstantial witness to the words from "the Lord's messenger," a messenger so often wrongly transcribed as "angel," but a message delivered so The Master knew: that Revelation waited upon no Tradition, that, indeed, Isaac had slain Abraham ... the Bodywanderer is here!

### **CHAPTER 23: White Father**

Zinga knew that the White Father had to die. Knew the power of his Story, but fearlessly seethed with the vengeance of his dreams. Vengeance: her family was adrift somewhere in the history of slavery, all she knew was that, "We come from slaves," that's what her parents had said, and they had sought their past, followed Marcus Garvey, dabbled in Father Divine, now

opened their minds to Elijah Poole, yet their past eluded them, only Zinga knew, so she thought, what had to be done, could be done to break the chains.

Zinga could see the erotic shadow of whiteism: from the outside—or was it underside?—it was clear what in her was forbidden by them. She was their shadow, "spook" — the word first heard almost instantly moved her onto the ethereal plane. As she grew she heard others speak of being invisible, then she read Ellison, heard about "jungle bunnies" and saw in her teen years the why of the animalization of the black male. In college she laughed reading Frazier and assorted anthropologists as she became aware that the White Father had endowed his black sons with the totem of his greatest fear—the Large Cock... Yes, for the White Father there was to be no cock, not cock as penis: body part, no, only as symbol: of power, of God's Will, forever, domination, no love tool, not for worship as of the ancient lingam, and so no yoni, definitely no worship of the ancient yoni, and no yoni meant no Mother, no sacred sex, no marriage of heaven and hell, no, all that was, was possession, property and the act of capturing.

The White Father—and, yes, her Baptist upbringing had once lead her to pray to Our Father, but back then she thought He was a Negro—The White Father possessed his women, not as females but as chattel, He named through Adam's naming the animals and so Eve, labeled them with his patronymic so that they could be inventoried, and so his children. What else was slavery but the release of the pent-up sexuality of the White Father and his sons? The White Father had needed sons to carry his Big Dick, and women to vent his sexual frustration. This was becoming clearer to Zinga every day she studied, with every new book that unearthed the structure of Western Thought, Patriarchy and Slavery.

So when she heard Jim, she had heard the voice of the White Father. Jim was in touch with the erotic underpinnings, not just intellectually, yes, he was amusing, insightful, but in his spirit. She could sense that he wanted his cock back, and Zinga knew that she must only give it to him as she slayed him.

How had the White Father won? By rape. By lynching his black sons. Raping his black daughters. Denying them legitimacy, not just his name but property, work, the material world. Black males were more than invisible, they were, indeed, spooks—ghosts, spectral entities, but in the most empty of ways, no power. For Zinga Black Power so championed now by the black male ghosts could not flow from black males, no, only women had Power, and it nested between their thighs.

While black men, whether Black Panthers or Black Muslims, railed against "our women" who fucked whites, Zinga knew they were wrong-headed. The only way to materialize future generations of black sons was to force the White Father to take back his Big Cock—to fuck the Black Mother. More, for the Black Mother to fuck him.

Jim tried desperately to overcome his attraction-repulsion reaction. Despite himself he, at the end of sex, would immediately go in and shower. He told Zinga that this was what he always did, even with white women, but he lied, and she knew. To his dismay she would lie about on the bed playing with his bodily fluids. Talk with him about his sweat, how "Look," and she strings a gooey line of perspiration-with-semen up in the air, "Look, here we are," and he wouldn't look, knowing what she was doing, having looked once before, and she draws a smiley face with the line, her belly the canvas, and his come, her juice, saliva from her mouth, "Our kisses!" she'd shout, knowing that he was cringing, "Look, Candyman, your sweetness is all over me!"

But Jim was doomed, in the sense of fate not as with a lingering disease, doomed to become in body what his mind said it wanted to be, wanting to stand as a Revolutionary Brother with the rioting black males, and he had taken his stand with King, not down South, not as a

Freedom Rider, but at the marches in St. Paul and Minneapolis: though more symbolic than confrontational they served as vehicle to satisfy his sense of commitment. Now, with Zinga he was most proud in his public self, proud to have other radicals—white and black—see that he was committed, that he had taken sympathy beyond empathy and into identity, Zinga was "my woman," so he spoke. Yet each time she loosed the phrase, so he recoiled hearing its mate, "my man."

"My man"—he hated it because back down in his mind a distant voice anguished, "No white woman will screw you again!" He feared that they would not want him now, now that he had put his penis inside the black whore, for who could say that any black woman with a true American background could have any but whores all the way back to The Passage? Wouldn't each white woman, no matter how radical, fear his cock? Slave Women. The Master could do what he wanted with them. Anything. Despicable things. Acts which Ladies would never think about, never ever do!

Zinga knew that she was rendering Jim unfit for fucking White Bitches—"Shit, ain't they all Bitches. Dogs. They were the ones who bellied up to The Master after he came back from the shacks. They knew." But no one talked about it, not in Polite Company: Hip, Rad, Revolutionary but still, on its own terms, Polite. *Denial*. White Father and White Mother had been in denial. Remain in denial. So they kill their sons and daughters like mad dogs: "coons"... Zinga knew she was giving Jim balls, but just such balls would make him too crazy for white flesh.

Zinga would announce, "I'm Africa. *Come*." And Jim could not resist. At times she'd say, "Come. Invade me." Other times: "Come. Home." Jim never knew the difference, but to Zinga it was of the utmost importance. As invader she hated him, their sexual embrace was combat. She the Dark Mother, not just Black, but killing, fierce, defending herself and her children with her natural weapons: shaking her boobs and jerking him off, spreading her legs and emptying his ammo clips, flaunting her big black moon of an ass and sucking him up her asshole, here, draining him of white spirit. Yes, she knew from some instinct, some sense, an attention to her own bodily rhythms and fluctuations that her hatred had to be hatred, here, not just of his whiteness but of his maleness, of all maleness, and then it had to be comforting, that within which love resides, the resting, the hearth, having him tend her fire, stir her embers, *Home*.

For Jim approaching her, touching her, fucking her, no matter what she said, how she called him, it was the same: he feared dying. Yeah, he had screwed some Sweet Sixteens, sucked and "felt" a lot of boobs: tiny titties and floppy jugs, but after these ventures he had felt good, relaxed, satisfied. He could look at the chick and know that she was his, his little piece of ass. He liked long foreplay, when drinking he'd played rough and had forced more cock into their mouths than they ever dreamed of, liked to lick them, boobs not pussy, no, he fucked them, not ate them. But Zinga, it was always "Eat me!" Yeah, but as he ate all he was rewarded with was more hunger, he was never satisfied. No, not that she wasn't satisfying, not as guys talk about it, "Shit, this Black Bitch sucks me dry and fucks me till my bones creak"—this he never said in public, just to himself. Satisfied, sure, she was great at priming his pump, licking him, licking his balls, stroking him, tonguing deeply, she'd even roll him up and lick his asshole! Christ, his mind would go ballistic, all types of shrapnel flung about inflicting excruciating pains and pleasures, with her he never knew the difference, he, himself, giving her what he knew must be pain: nipping, tugging, pinching, all these, and then ramming her, up and down, jackhammer, pile driver, on automatic drive, creaking her bones, he could hear her joints scream, and he would be near exhaustion, his cock insensate, and he'd come, she a million times, *Christ* all I need to do is touch her and she has orgasm! And he couldn't stop, knew that he had died, she had sucked him

in, and then spit him out in placental fold. He just continued and continued, ate and ate, had himself rotated on a spit and she eats him...whenever he'd awake it was to the awareness of a thousand pains, stabs and piercings upon his every part, all but shadows of his hunger for her, hungering.

Zinga gave him back his Big Cock the day she said, "We're pregnant." Just stated it after he had come back from a protest march on the Hennepin Courthouse: all riled up about Mayor Daley's PIGS! and The Dickless Democrats and sputtering about They're bringing the war, home, baby, I mean home, said it with calmness, casualness, but knew it was a bomb, had calculated the fuse—*We're*.

"Marry me?" It was the question which loomed to be asked. Yet it was like a message on a blimp, just floating somewhere in Jim's mindful sky. All his life he had anticipated asking this question, formally: handkerchief on the ground, he on bended knee, she some blue-eyed blond bombshell ... "click!" wrong picture!

Zinga knew his thought, had planned for it. "No," she says, again with matter-of-factness.

"No?" Jim is caught off-guard, "No to what?"

"Marriage."

Then it kicks in, his reverse reaction, the insult, the degradation, *How dare she refuse to be my wife!*

"You want a bastard?" Clever. He knowing how much bastard blood flows through Black America.

"No. I'll have a son. You'll have a bastard." A jillion dead voices cheer in unrestrained jubilation.

"I'm not that kind of guy. You know that. *We must* get married."

"Must?"

Caught. Backtrack: "Want to. Should. You know. I'm a good man. I won't have others think I treat you badly."

"It's not about me, don't you get it? It's about you."

"ME?!" But he does quickly grasp it, understands her.

They eat in silence.

Immediately after cleaning his plate, Jim stands, leaves without a word or gesture, and heads for the bedroom. She knows he'll be asleep, soon—he handles crises and depression through drinking and sleeping, tonight, just sleeping.

Alone, but now not alone, here with child, here as flowering seed, she reclines on the bulky, half-broken barcolounger in the living room. Alone with *him*, she is certain it is a son, a true black male, one not stuck with the hideous totem of the White Father. No, her son will come to know that his father was a slave, a slave to the Black Mother, a slave whose liberation he, the son, is. He'll come to know his mother as Black Mother, she who spawns black males, she who has forced the White Father to claim his cock, to be in love with his cock, to be slave-cock, for is there ever any other type of slave? Even if the White Father has denied it to this day? The Black Mother reduced to whoredom, just a toilet for his fluid expulsions, just a mimicker of his name, not Mrs. but stealing the last name: Johnson, McGregor, Jones, Smith...toilet paper names, common, no, she would not take his name, not give him even her last, the clownish "Smiley," no, this is to be a son who will truly be free, truly be able to chose, who will not be confused by Black and White, not be seduced by the color of his skin, no, come to know himself as a new creature, with a face no one can define, no one can properly categorize as to hue, no, Zinga, in her belly, is re-materializing the black male, a child able to claim White Father and Black

Mother, and in claiming them so banishing them, no longer idolizing them, no longer needful of carrying either's totem.

### **CHAPTER 24: Room 7, Floor 3**

If he were to describe the landscape of the world in which he lived it would only be rewarded by the poverty of language. If during his monastic years he had ever desired to be stripped of his longing for "things": the material world of things, the spiritual world of things, so now he was stripped. Naked not in majesty nor humility, no, he was just a naked entity unaware of his nakedness. Within what had been a hungry mind, one that ravished knowledge in every guise, now there was no hunger. Just a being there: as if an open plateau, mesa, eyeless prairie. Yes, it was still what only the word emptiness approaches, lays a claim for, something akin to the Zen for stillness, a non-being, not just a passage into shadow from the light, no, rather a place waiting for shadow and/or light. Yet, Luke saw himself and felt more alive than he had ever.

The impact of what he could not, even if he tried, to think about and evaluate was the speed with which he forgot things—it was this forgetting which he could not remember. His Dad dead. Father. And with him God. The Father. Both: *God Is Dead!*...Luke spent not a moment of musing or reflective thought about how, from an observer outside of the framework, he had been catapulted and in so being was somersaulting through time, space and any other area or dimension of exotic measurement. Yes, it was zing-zap-zong! Like a pinball...he never even had known that he was silver and round, never anticipated that such had been the game.

The monks. Brooders. Dreamers. The Communion. No longer part of what he dressed with, and all of the forgetting. Purgation: they had counseled him, despite them, it had come. New images: locked now onto the ending of "2001"—wine glass shattering, one bends to pick it up, babe in the womb...*Ha!* Saw it four times: twice stroking the White Rabbit, plummeting down..."2001" aboard The Yellow Submarine!

Rian. No. But he writes to his mother. Automatic. With accounts chronological and topological such that she knows he is alive but knows as mothers know that he is not her son, an impostor, but this her only connection to her memory, as such she accepts her blessing.

Rian. No. Because Rian is of the forgetting, part of what has been jettisoned by the speed, whipped off, yet No because she is also a center around which an aspect of *Semper Fi!* Luke revolves, not remembering this, because what he came to know about her, this was one force catapulting.

Vietnam. A word of meaninglessness. A word of magic incantation. A word without image. Yet all the image of the world he now occupies.

Vietnam. The War. Godless Communism. Atheistic Materialism. Primitive. Pagan. Lost Souls. A small people who live in rice paddies, live on them like insects, like insects they have no private life, shit in the street, pee upon each other...Despair, Nothingness, Buddhist Nihilism, beggars in saffron robes...all jotted on his yellow pad, notes not musical, but notes drawing him towards them, words becoming images and offering themselves as stakes he can put into the ground, as crutches he can lean upon.

As words and images, as they took form as sentences, as paragraphs emerged and as a baseline outline plot was scrawled Corporal Jennings began to get excited. It dawned on him like the punch-line to a joke—"I could get killed!" And it excited him. The intensity of the possibility moved him deeply. Somewhere between the advanced armament training he had taken, slipped in between the comic opera of war games, sliced and crammed somewhere between the sandwich reality of the guzzling holes, somewhere it had begun to come together: "War, what is it good for?!" and he answers, "Absolutely *everything!*"



He didn't want to say Yes. He didn't want to say No. He wanted to slide between them, kissing each ass as he whizzed by, poking each asshole as he laughed himself through it all. "War." He could see it on the old Sergeant's sleeve. Smell it on the machinery designed to explode and consume humanity. Yes! There was a Yes! and it was to the freedom of it all—he was enthralled by the freedom, the freedom encased in the shells which whistled through the air to land and move boundaries: of flesh, time, history, souls, and Yes! the freedom of combat, that face-to-face embrace of one, two, thousands, millions who were willing to lose all, gain nothing, be transformed. For there was one thing he sensed, and believed he sensed properly, and in sensing gave the death-knell to his forgetting, for from that sensing on all that had been once again re-flooded his being, not in consciousness but in dream and instinct, yes, he sensed that war was the code for transformation, for transubstantiation, for the real play, not the phony play of sign and symbol, not the mimicry of the act, not the sleight-of-hand priestly art, no, the Yes in war was to the flesh and blood, to the body, not just capital B Body, but to the body as you meet it in the concatenation of the other, not an ethereal other, nothing astral, more than material, because it was flesh with heart, heart with guts, guts with dreams, yes, yes, from the first time he was struck and the first time he had struck he knew why they had sent him to The Island.

Then onto eight months of, well, of what? Oakland to Saigon: thought he was there as target practice—his punishment for killing Alpha? For living?...jokes about being a basketball scout for the ABA—looking for insect sized Asian guards: to bounce the ball under the legs of all those seven footers...but it is almost a joke, his whirlwind around The City, then some choppers in-country, but there as if an officer: never in battle, just observing, flying high watching the chess pieces disappear, gobbled up by tunnels and the sucking jungle...choppers and thick layers of dust, but soon he is dusted-off — just as he was thinking that he would be plunked somewhere to do another Island thing, maybe in Laos, maybe in Cambodia, who knows,? — just then as he was thinking that he knew what they were training him for, well, he is stateside and into thick curriculum of Language Schools: several, mastering Mandarin Chinese — Nuclear War? The War College: Guerrilla Warfare, Domestic Terrorism ... curious curriculum, but he was a superb student, picked up some Vietnamese, self-taught: *Why?*... and six months back in Rome, but this time watching the Backlash, not identifying with the clergy, just a tourist, a student, in civvies—were his reports read by the DOD or the CIA or the FBI or Interpol, he doesn't care...no Hippie Chicks, but some tasty Pasta Mommas! and fine wines, lots...cathedrals only for their art, so he believes...feeling, well, like Janis' Ball and Chain was no longer on him...The Brooders *sigh*.

When his new orders came, instructing him to report to an address on a downtown street in Minneapolis, he was not surprised, actually relished the sarcasm in it all, as if to say by making him come back home that it had been there all the time, that he had had to go through The Mount and the Novitiate and the Theologate and The Towers...and all that shit just to find it under his nose..."Room 7 on Floor 3 to meet 1."

Here—but now it was a Minneapolis vibrant with the war—March and the massive Spring outings, not breakaways to the beach, to Florida for sun and fun, but to The Streets, slushy, uncertain about Winter's end...ah, Nixon, his election was the juice, LBJ was the pathetic end, stumbling clown, but Nixon—Luke loved him and hated him, "Commander-in-Chief!" knowing he'd have to salute him, but walking through the protests, this one about a local company called Honeywell, standing to hear an aging mustache proclaim a long history of Minnesota Resistance to such corporate criminals..."war criminals"...goddam, the ante has gone up!... and as he had read so he hears about "Task Force Baker" and the latest word turned image:

*My Lai*, sounding funnily like a drink you'd give your date, without alcohol...but, here, it was a River of Bodies, children and old people, sounding like *Absolute Evil* in the mouth of this man...Luke turns and walks away from the shrill of this progeny of Isaiah, from this warning voice of Jeremiah, from the Lamentations and the rising call, secular though it be, for Repentance as The End Draws Near!

The fellow who simply says, "I'm the one," shook his hand and motions him to sit down, coffee-pot plugged in and the first cup was fresh—nice touch!—and the story he sets is what Luke is there to hear. The other guy, however, is not exactly sure about Luke. Contrary to expectation he was anticipating someone a bit more, well, what was it, *despondent*? Jesus, this kid's been through the fucking wringer and he sits there, hmmm, not smiling, but content, yeah, content.

"How do you like being a Marine?" asked in that stupid way which tells Luke that at least he knew this one wasn't.

"Sweet." That should hold him, looks wonderful on my dossier!

"Okay, lets, to the point." Chairs re-positioned, numerology in place, cardinal points aligned, even the coffee-pot squared with the moon. "You are to proceed to a camp in northern Laos. There you will study the necessary languages and meet with the necessary people. Your objective is to become clerical advisor to the Cardinal of Hanoi. Do you know who that is?"

"No."

"Bao Duc." Luke nods. "He's the spiritual leader of the Vietnamese Catholic Church, but" and there was a long pause, and one slide backwards, then a lean forward, so close that Luke can smell his aftershave: perfumy, thickly-sweet, so Bao Duc rides on that smell, "but we believe he's an agent for the North Vietnamese." The one—Luke now becomes aware of his non-descript attire: plain gray suit, wide but not as fashionably wide as he has seen paisley ties, lots of amoebae in varying colors, a definite joke on this man's mask—this one ends and pulls himself up, adjusts his suit-jacket cuffs and waits for Luke.

"Want me to fill in the pieces? Draw the picture? What?" This he says with his look. The other one seems to savor the dangling space he has thrust Luke into. Several minutes of sipping coffee and waiting: "We have a pretty strong belief that Bao Duc is the front runner for the next papacy. I don't have to tell you how quickly Popes have come and gone this decade." Luke didn't even think about the message his own reflex response carried—"And Presidents"—but it was out before he could erase the Cheshire smirk on the face of the other one, this one just going along on his route..."come and gone so quickly, so Bao Duc all of a sudden so to speak leaps from the jungle onto the world stage. You know," and this has a ring of the wearied expert rehashing a line that has carried many a day, "You know, no one would've ever heard of this shithole called Vietnam nor this Bao Duc if LBJ hadn't seen himself as Teddy Roosevelt rounding up the new Rough Riders and taking them for a quick ass-kicking romp through Southeast Asia." And as if to prick Luke, grinning: "There's one president not shot in Texas!"

Then there was this switch, as if the guy had his own scene changing entourage, all of a sudden he is the papal expert, an historian of the Vatican, a walking encyclopedia of sacred bureaucratic trivia, gossip, intrigue and foolishness, for he launches—for two hours!—into a detail exposition (proving himself to me? boy, am I impressed!) of how the Cardinals are positioned, what each does, how they have been winning or losing in their schemes to snare the post of "Servant of Servants" (he has a dry twist, this one!)...and what the war is doing to each of them. This he speaks of in ways that Luke readily understands: "A war not of worlds but of truths. A war not of land and cities, towns and villages but of passion, heart, souls and spirits. A

war not in this time but of time, which will form time, change it, alter it, provide new boundaries. It's a war through which reality as you know it will be melted down, re-cast and set forth." Luke begins to like this guy, but just as quickly he shifts again and is salesman-with-deal-concluded-rising and he shakes Luke's hand, and with his other extends an envelope, it is heavy: *maps, tickets, money?* Probably all, so Luke says good-bye, the one indicating that he wants to leave first...Luke sits and sips the remains of the coffee-pot.

Only one thing from the thereafter: Luke opens the envelope and in simple script across a biographical card on "Bao Duc" is what the one had not said, and is the reason, clearly, surely that Luke is here: his ordination, "Cardinal Bao Duc, O.S.O."... a Brooder!

## **CHAPTER 25: The Round**

Rian had left The Lady Clares to find Jim down in Minneapolis but she found The Round instead.

How do these things happen? Whose question? Everyone's question. A question for the times, especially "interesting times"—yeah, painful times. "Bitching times," as she hears, and it was just an old girlfriend, one from the hometown, out of Luverne, SW corner, Gopher hole, one who had gone to the U: a cheerleader to boot who now was in boots, hairy legs, unkempt self, "Barbie's Evil Twin" she anoints herself, and actually said, "Don't call me Nancy anymore. I've renamed myself," and a pause as if steeling herself to swallow the fiery sword, "Thorn." As if in monkish refrain Rian utters, softly—but the softness of a careful handling of a gift given of which one is immediately fond—"Thorn."

Thorn took her to The Round. Didn't ask. Didn't explain. Just at the end of this party: just yet another friend, this time one who had left St. Clare for the U last semester, she with whom Rian was bunking, sleeping on the couch, she who had the party, not for Rian, just a weekend smoke and dope, beer and booze, a couple of guys from the other apartments, door open, Rock 'n Roll: Beatles, Stones, a dose of Judy Collins, then the Airplane, and so it gels: Alice and her White Rabbit, The Doors...and things which Rian wasn't aware of, and no one really made a thing about Thorn, just all talking, yeah, political jabbering: raving discourses, rambling commentaries, stoned fugues about the futility of elections, organizing for Earth Day, the aptness of the movie "Catch 22"...how the phrase summed up all political—and Luke smirks, *Yeah most moral*—action, about the importance of forming a "counter-culture," now a serious phrase, now with its own growing lists of sacred books: Roszak's "The Making of a Counterculture," Norman O. Brown's "Love's Body"...on and on, then others more testy: salt and pepper of marches and protests, stuff Rian wants to hear, especially about DC and the quarter million in the streets: "Far out!"...but Thorn, she always butting in to drop a word or two, serious words, talking about S.C.U.M. and its wounding of the impish Andy Warhol: *exploiter of women!*...juicing up every conversation with calls for women to pick up guns, *not dicks!*...the stoned guys laughed at Thorn, maybe with her, how could Rian know?...then they leave...in time the always tantalizing round of gossip and fucking-news, the sly code of who's with whom, this normally coming at the latest hour, as lonely ones pine and others couple, soon, just a group, not a crowd: small to slimming, back down, and when Rian leaves it is just Thorn giving her a head-shake and Rian having nothing much to do, so she goes. It's near midnight by the time they find The Round.

Was it like any meeting or gathering, class or seminar, club or conference, she had ever been to? Not the question, for it was what the times called "a happening," a word chasing an experience, something out of regular time, a moment when new eyes see new flesh feel new heart, "Fuck!"—maybe that was the incantational word, for certain it was about all night, riding

descriptions of past sins, future hopes and immediate feelings, it was a screwdriver word used to prop open lids which had been rusted for aeons.

But *Fuck* was the cadence and a common sound, a word passed around like a relay race baton, necessary, but just an instrument. On the other side of *Fuck* was nakedness. And maybe that is what fascinated Rian, made her stay, was the happening, nakedness of soul, not body—well, not till later—just women, sometimes "Comrades!" ...other times "Sisters," mockingly then, "Girls!" ...and inside herself Rian laughs, "*Ladies!*" ... all naked as the newborn, nakedness in a bloodied entrance.

There had been a lot of hate. And Rian was surprised by the gush of her own bile. Yes, Men. The capital letter Men. The indictment of the species—some testifying that men were aliens: the only rational explanation! M.E.N...and talking about them as Dicks, Cocks, Fuckers...yeah, Rapists...but rape was more than the "Wham, bang, thank you Ma'am!" More than the "Suck this bitch, you'll love it!" Yeah, some even regaling Rian—and others, surely there were others novice to this talk!—about butt-fucking and gang-banging, and all that. The real word was the *Fuck* word again: *Fuckers*.

Fuckers conveyed not just one act but an attitude, a look, a sneer, the curl of the satisfied lip as he pulls away, the dangling cock dripping cum, in its limp pose still oozing gunshot, yeah, Fuckers..."*Coming* at you from ever side, *all* the time...Sisters, it's metaphysical!"

But the Hate was like scissors—not Fire. Each clip of Hated Memory cutting loose a small binding, gnawing a bigger one which, through collective effort, was finally sundered. Yeah, Hate was just the de-dressing for the ritual, the making naked of the soul's enshroudment, snippets of chiffon, and in time it came to bareness, it just had to be, one still named Sally couldn't be free of her uncle's lust until she bared her breasts and jiggled them for all to see, shouting, "Take 'em, they're free!" And from then on it was all so simple and all so expected because all knew it was the right direction. Starshine: sweet self-described Hippie Chick, goes down on all fours in the middle of the room and props up her butt, truly a cute butt: round and firm, Minnesota alabaster driven pure by lack of clothing sun, but yet a mother-lode, indeed, and Starshine exhales, "I am a Great Piece of Ass. Mount me! Ass! Ass! Ass! Great I Am!"...and what begins as living theater of degradation, of humiliation, of shame, so quietly changes, *errr*, not so quietly, for as her tone shifts from angry invitation to exhausted submission to vile detestation, the engine of *Great I Am!* roars, blasts, like a jet stream: a bellowing fart, loud and rushing, so boisterous that all are shocked, caught off guard by this anatomical jape, and Starshine laughs, falls belly flat and kicks the ground with laughter, a laughter that binds them, breaks them, cracks open the succulent fruit and is passed between them, they feast upon the freedom, the release, the exit from maleness and the entrance into femaleness—Sisters, Mothers, one body.

From the tears of laughter, the instance of changeling, so they are all naked, and so clothed in their new selves, *Corpus delicti*. A feast for the Warrior, to swoop down and capture them all, nubile booty...but it is not Hector and Priam, not Joshua and David, no, it is Athena and Artemis, Esther and Sarah, the descending of the forgotten, the obliterated: those who had the power, could mingle Cook and Slay, these come, now, an exotic love arising, one at once fiercely sexual, truly, an orgy of flesh, bodies flung this way and that, defying dimensions, propped up by hungers ancestral and unnameable, these to each other with kisses and licks, hard hands and soft knees, of probings and gazings, holding gently and then pressing so hard that astral blood flows, slithering thickly, and they all drown, fall deeply into the blood, sucked in by their common womb, sucked backwards by desires which then propel them forward, forward

into each other: mounting, sweating, playing and swimming, ah, so many tears, so much water broken—they on fire and melting, the music long ago stopped, the clock long ago forgotten, just this moment, never now again to be forgotten, never again, never...they sleep akimbo.

## **CHAPTER 26: Slime**

Like a caterpillar, the emergence of wings was but potential, all now was slither along, slime the path, go nowhere in particular, not knowing now that there was to be butterfly wings, any type of transformation, if anything there was the feeling of having been shed, feeling more like a snail which lost its shell, no, not lost, more like heaving off, and something it was of that significance, knowing that there was an exposure, a danger, that of dying which was about, but not fearing it, not actually desiring it or planning it, no, the forces were environmental, meaning all encompassing, coming from within and without, but he in his inner sense feeling more like the hole in the middle, that place where it must be not-now-caterpillar and not-now-butterfly, like his name, he was beginning to feel that it wasn't Luke, sense that his effort to put it back on was as futile as that of the snail if ever he had desired to hoist it back on, but not knowing a name for himself, he kept Luke, and just slimed along.

So he left Minneapolis, once again, stopping long enough each morning for the week he was there to eat at Al's Diner: one truly baffling mystery of life, a hole in the wall, that type of place where if an archaeologist came upon it millennia hence that such a scholar could only but misconstrue its meaning. It a place oblong, like a shoe box, possibly a small foot, and a set of toes of stools, maybe with one or two more, not having expanded in over twenty years, but folks always be crammed in, and you thought there was someone with a gigantic shoehorn there slipping folks onto stools, you had to press your body against others to leave, press through five layers of Minnesota cold and then even press the mosquito flesh in the summertime, but it was worth it, all the grime, all the yellowed paint, all the red plastique soda-fountain stools with slight scars, but it a feasting place, like an ancient watering hole in the desert, a place the archaeologists would, for sure, say was a shrine, not figuring how people could get in and out, not believing that the stove was really for food, but possibly saying, and adding a footnote to some other like misunderstood phenomenon, saying that, "It is narrowly constructed. Estimates are that two bodies could not move through at anyone time. Clearly, one would have to eat with another behind them, almost perched on their shoulders. No, this was not an eatery, "Al's" is a shrine. A place where late Twentieth Century people —and here the evidence points to men, since males of that era did not cook, that it was a male shrine—where bits and pieces of food were symbolically and ritually thrust forward onto the stove, not for cooking but for burning. Indeed, Layers XXII-a of the mid-1990s points to a massive disturbance of charcoal. This can only be clearly interpreted in light of Abdu-McRae's thesis about the excessively cold weather in what is now a blistering desert. "Minnesota" having become, back then, a name for death-by-freezing-breaths, yet, curiously, today a name of a leading elixir of life. In the past, it is clear, and all scholars agree, this "Al's" was a secret gathering of a high order of priests who performed daily ritual burnings to placate the God-thrusters of Cold whose worship, the evidence inscrutably shows, was outlawed at the time. Yet, Thousand-Tons-tballs' hypothesis that there was an international linkage of such burning shrines dating back to the split between the Neolithic and Cro-Magnon cannot be casually dismissed."

*Whatever.* Luke favors the New Orleans omelet and would always wolf down a side order of whole-wheat-walnut flapjacks, at times: blueberry, and naturally a pint of coffee, simply one of the best in the country, but it was the omelets, especially the Eggs Benedict which he was

to never find even humbly imitated, and so he ate, not knowing it was his last meal at Al's, at least as eaten by Luke.

So after a week...he had dropped home, chatted with Mom, failed to find Jim, didn't look for Rian, didn't know about Zinga, was grappling with the death of another Kennedy, not too consciously but grappling because he was at his Dad's side, graveside, "Dad..." and the word stood alone, more stolid than the headstone, it was all he had to say, the only word from their common vocabulary, a greeting, a salutation, the body of text, the valediction...and he left— Mom cooked a meal, all the siblings came, no one asked him about why, no one asked about why not the graduation?...they all were silent assassins, collaborators, verily, unwilling they were, shut down by the craziness of the times, presidents vaporizing, My Lai's flying, Secret Wars in Laos, everyone looking on their maps for Canada...silent about pains they did not know they did not want to share.

Where now? This he was wondering as he checked in at Fort Ord. Another Language School? But, no, but, yes: an introduction, "This is Tring Luong." Shake hands. A short man, at least next to Luke, but tall for a Vietnamese, he just starts talking in Vietnamese and it is all chicken-peck and record-scratchings and an ugly ooze from the heart of this man, the disgust in his eyes, *Does he think I can't see it?* The laughter, yes, cruel, not in its cadence but in its brevity, as if choked off, as if Luke's fumbling with chopsticks was in itself an indictment of the technological idiocy of the West, as if Luke's lack of digital dexterity was all that had to be said about the difference, about what this man had to say, *Fucking Tring, your name's like a dinky bell! Asshole!*...it was a laugh with a smirk, worse, with condescension, and somehow Luke knew that Tring was congratulating himself on how well he was concealing his disdain for this barbarian...even his fucking-muttered-stupid French—*Thinks I don't know French. Asshole!*

But it wasn't at Ord. As things were going they were off, late one night: helicopter to troop transport, empty of soldiers, full of boxes without labeling, just plain brown cardboards, like moving boxes but without freightage tickets, just he and Tring and the pilots, he knew it was Hawaii when they walked off and then walked onto a smaller jet, almost like a Lear, Luke had heard about these, certainly never thought he'd be in one, and it was comfort, lots of booze, but the story was the magazines, all Communist or at least Left Wing, many languages, and religious rags, ones with the Cardinal in them, and Tring speaking Vietnamese and to his own amazement Luke picks up and starts relating Tring's scratching-like-the-chicken, sing-song, birdsong twitter to words, thinking it a language of bird-shit, meteorically attaching sounds to printed words he had taught himself, with every decipherable word finding that he hates the fucking bastard Tring, faces that he doesn't know why, but he likes the feeling, *real disgust*, a feeling which sends a wave of relief towards Friar Killian, gives him a respite of weeks, such a remarkable change that The Master wonders if Luke is alive, "Hector slain? Or Circe entrancing him?" But it leaves, and Killian takes, once again, happily to the bucket and sponge, wiping imaginary shit from the immaculate John, but Luke and Tring, now conversing, Tring being more than a bit taken back by Luke's rapid-tongue, more, watching him drink the language and with it the culture, for as he sips a word he wants to know its origin, its etymology, and Tring sees something which his lack of scholarly past denies him understanding, of a mind comparing, taking sounds and wondering with them, wondering where they met with other sounds, how far back were all people speaking the same tongue, and then starting to break-away? Why the break-away? Or break-down? A distant sentinel snickers: "Break-through?...so he does, breaks and sucks the inside, quickly do the words form his flesh anew, bestowing Buddhist flesh upon his frame, skin like saffron robes, and Tring sees in Luke's eyes the thousand-eyes of the village shaman, and he is terrified, dry of

piss...wants to land, wonders who this caged beast is? But it is Luke who is beginning to enjoy things, begins to understand Tring, taps music with his chopsticks, a few Rock and Roll beats, a jazz scurry, and then the atonal tings and tongs, against his cheeks like a gong, laughing with Tring, laughing *at him*—finding the play of superiority, the class-structure, the caste of words, and Tring wants to kill him, drop a grenade in his lap, blow him up, having hated for so long...the Chinese, the French, himself, the Catholics, the Buddhists, the Viet Cong, all of them, finding hate to be his only relief, so he was used to this feeling, but it had been but a few men he actually killed, and none an American, not that he hadn't mapped a way a million times, but now this one—he wants him dead, dead of soul as well as dead of body.

Tring—he would never come to understand, never in time, but right now Luke is smug, believing that he has juked the guy a thousand times and earned his respect. Stupid Luke!...This bizarre flying school ends after four world-tripping days, zig-zagging East, North, South, West—*why?*...the sun is departed from, they surrender to gravity in all its ignorance...land in a remote jungle airstrip. Ox carts at the ready. "Taxi!" Luke blurts out, Tring does not laugh. So, it is a mirthless and conversation-less lurch and bump up and down The Rockies, all that Luke can think to amuse himself, "This must be Colorado!" he chimes to himself, saying to himself, "Laugh, motherfucker, that was a joke!" But no one does, and so it is just weariness which finally gets the better of him, and to his ever perplexed memory he actually falls asleep, waking to the moon in a starkly dark night, a moon like a tethered balloon strung to his cart, a cart in a clearing, not a town, certainly not even a village, would he call it a hamlet?...Shit, a clearing.

What is happening is a journey, one without a map, so it seemed, more a wandering, but the exertion makes it a journey: a word weighted with sorrow and delight, indeed, if Luke hadn't handily mastered the language he would have thought that Tring was muttering curses to himself for being lost time and again, but he wasn't...he was chatting as they walked, so it seemed: along the same path, past the same trees, through the same villages, eating the same rice, and sleeping on the same cut-grass mats, whether rain or more rain or just rain-rain, it didn't matter, they went forward, and at times the sun, all it did was bake the bugs on his back, he feeling at moments of elation like a french-fry—pasty, salty, cooked...it went on for days.

Days of chatting, sometimes haranguing, about the history of the National Struggle. About Uncle Ho. About Diem. About Kennedy. Going back to the French. Dien Bien Phu. Then Tet. Back and forth. Talking Communism. Talking about Democracy not working in Vietnam. Talking about the Cong. Talking so much that Luke wondered if Tring was a Cong. He couldn't figure which he hated more: communism or democracy? Each was spit out. There were moments when Luke was spooked. Was he to come out of this jungle safari alone? Was he to kill again? Was this a test? Yeah, so he figured it, a test of some kind. All this chatter. Info. History. Politics. Luke's head burned. Sizzled his sweat, the wet, toasted the bugs—*Purgatorio*. Surely this *is* Purgatory. Where is Dante when you need him? We're both fucking blind? Shit, where's Beatrice? Could use a blow-job right about now! ("Hail, Tiresias, old man with woman's dugs!")...Sodden: certainly not his fat, for he was sweating away more than he ate, they eating peasant food, taking what the villagers offered, paying only once for a chicken, scrawny, but he sucked the marrow from the bones, "Not Kentucky Fried!" but he gobbled it, chewed it to wattle as they went back walking, most nights it being a rice brewed with bits and pieces of things he did not want to ask about, but he was alive, the walking made him stronger, not weaker, just lean meat, he could feel all of his muscles, as if totally alive, each with cognition: ancient genes awakened, revived transmissions—reading the earth, toes like ears to the ground, heels like

messengers sending warnings ahead, his legs striding as if setting poles with his feet, markers: confident, no, fearless, almost witless, conquering, a warrior's stride...*just getting stronger*.

Mao's Little Red Book was plopped out, "Quotations from Chairman Mao." Then mimeo notes of General Giap. These Tring paid special attention to. Held them, not handing them to Luke, just reading, not passing around, "He is the enemy." Said so that Luke did not have to ask, "THE?" For it was true. And, again, a shadow of admiration passes over Tring's face. Luke's mind was slogging down, just like the roads, for the rains had never ceased, only diminished, but always wet, and they were getting to him, and so he asks Tring, asks knowing that it is an act of submission, but too goddamn tired to fight it, "Man, let's fall out for awhile." And Tring obliges, more, loves it, savors every minute, feeling that he has so cleverly hidden his own tiredness, not embarrassed by his trickery: the hidden food—dried meat, the magic plants, no, "drugs" wasn't in his vocabulary either Vietnamese or English, not French, he didn't see himself as into drugs, that was for the stupid American soldiers, no, for him it was the superiority of his Land, it gave him strength, the ability to go on without pain, to never tire, to best Luke.

As he rested Luke knew it was all suicide. Walking through the countryside like a freeway billboard with sound, "Here comes an American!" *Shit, where are we?* He had noticed differences, not being too keen on the subtleties as of yet, Chinese and Vietnamese features merged, and what about border raids? Cambodians. Laotians. Thai. *Shit*, Invasions from Mars. Why not? And he in simple battle fatigues. Boots. Thank God for the boots. Great American technology. Waterproof. And bug resistant. Wondering how the molecules defended themselves against the wet? "Halt! Only American molecules allowed!" And since this wasn't America. Bingo! Dry feet...preciously dry. But now Tring comes over and hands him some black pajamas. Silky. But then not. *Who cares?* "What the fuck ya want me to do? Put these on?" *Asshole!!!* No, not the boots. Fuck you, say it, "Fuck off, Tring!!!" So he does, *Did he really think I'd wear those retreads? But shit this pajama and the coney hat, fuck'em.* But then....

They got up and walked a bit. More slowly than usual, Luke noticed that Tring was cagey, I mean shift, like a weasel, Yeah, Weasel. That's it! Eyes here and there. Almost his nose sniffing. *Rodent!* And then the eerie feeling as Luke finds it is just he and Tring, the others having faded into the foliage, only he and Tring moving forward, bending down, giving battle-zone signals, hand and body movements, Luke reads furiously, a pain wakens, somewhere inside himself something is walking, scurrying around, erratically, nervously, like a dog circling for a spot to piss and not finding it, almost desperate, too fast, Luke grabs his gut, not retching, no puke, no piss, just a fear he'll have to get used to, *Shit*, it fucking hurts, Man!...he is beside Tring, just below his thigh, trying to hear through Tring's ears, using him as an antenna, but nothing, nothing, then as if Tring had heard "Operator, may I help you?" he moves out, with Luke as leggings, close, not caring about close, no smells, no words, no hatred, just together, two sides of breathing...they are atop a rise, there below them a precipitous drop into a valley, sloping less steeply from a higher mountain a distance away, and he hears, both hear, their hands feel the leaves and the leaves are jazz-riffs from the roots, hip-hop and bebop and clicking of the fingers, "Cool, Man!"—it's war, the slender vibrations of war, a trembling, not a shaking, just a trembling, the leaves shimmy and the captured raindrops are released, to fall like tears, insect tears, monstrous tears, Noah's Deluge, and it comes, sharp rifle fire, the display of armaments, a grenade, some rockets, no planes, then an uproar as if a magical waterfall had just thundered free from out of the mountain—Centurion's Lance—and the veil is lifted, black dots and unseeable camouflage, but not the yells, they can be heard, all languages melding into one: grunts, curses, swearing at pain, the songs of bravado, the symphony of chaos...why are they in black? why



here? Should I strangle the bastard? but if he does he knows he kills himself, suicide, no matter how you twist it.

When it subsides he wonders if it is over, or just a break, "Lunch!"...and little servants scurry around, college kids earning an extra few bucks during summer break, but, no, it's over, he just knows, Tring knows.

He couldn't not follow him, curiosity being the pimp of death, and they go down, just the two, almost slide, yeah, I'm a snake, he's a weasel—"Serpent!"—they are passing dead bodies, Cong, no doubt about it, young and old, just left there, and soldiers coming, Shit, "avec vous"!! Frenchies? But then, "Fucking-A motherfucker!" and assorted clips tell him they are all friendly, but who? Where? Marines? Berets? Out here had to be, but where is out here?...Tring leads him away from the human noise.

Time drops the day like the curtain before the play...they had waited at a distance, long lines for the tickets, Shit, we'll be way back in the third balcony!...but it isn't, no, they're crouching on a catwalk, now watching the crew do its things, laying out and down the infrastructure of the play, he knows it, Luke knows it, does Tring know it? He watches. He knows this story.

Somewhere a live body. Strip it. Look at it. Look at it hard and close. Look so that it knows you see it all. All the invisible parts. The fear. The hatred. The terror. See the dark pool. Know that it can't shit. Too tight. So you know it is hiding something. Not wanting to give. So you flush it out. Degrading words. Spit. Some slaps here and there. Just to see how valuable its treasure is. This the fruit of the dream. And like fruit to be peeled and cored. Seeds spit out, but only on barren soil. So it is. The sacral knife. Lifted and wielded. Blood-let. Drops at first. Then like lifting the lid, a slice, and a line dripping. Blood. Let the dirt drink it. Think I'll drink your blood you motherfucking piece of shit! You drink my blood! And he gives him his metallic blood, draws the ore from his veins and stabs him in the gut...Don't kick him! Let him feel the pain...Man, we gotta do it! Shit, no, Man, can't do that! Fucking-A, sarge, Meatball's right, we gotta do what they did to Jackson...and he walks away but knows he isn't walking, knew the day he found Jackson with his dick and balls hanging from his mouth, eyes wide, fucking-A God, *Father*, I mean I didn't want to think it, forgive me—Jackson like a nigger with a big slice of watermelon lodged in his mouth, eyes wide-open, not fright, shit, was like delight, god forgive me foregive me...always from that day a body part for a body part, they all knew it as holy.

Luke is gone, long gone, Man, Friar Alfred is long gone, skeddadled, and is it the Serpent?...Man, who knows, the Serpent, no talk, but there is the ritual, alive, the dream alive, knowing why the bitch came from the rib, knowing it wasn't a rib, *Fuck!* it's a cock, from the cock, source of male power, didn't want them to know! 5,000 years of not wanting them to know, the cock—in the mouth! That's what *is* the creation. Sucking me off. Sperm soup. Slurping it down. That's the birth of male power!...the Serpent transforms into the Eagle, not Uncle Sam, not hard-assed and kill some squirrels eagle, no, not even Eagle, more Bird-of-Prey, and if he could laugh it would have been at the sound of the double entendre, but there is no laughter, not in this dream, this of landing upon the cock-faced gook: there to rip out his heart, claw, with one vise grip, claw it out and then lift it like a man, lift and crush the flesh into a flow of blood, "Take and eat..."—it is so, the Warrior dreams.

He was bigger and Tring was smaller, so small, now a maggot, and the Eagle flies, high into the sky, following the warriors' trail, soaring above and beyond them, over and around them, netting them with The Dream, following them to villages, there to alight and be sentinel, watching, but in the watching actually directing, he now The Master, The Master as Bird-of-

Prey, oh, if his brain were only a brain he would be so amused, but he is all soul, and his acolytes assemble, they and their priests, incanting the name of The Enemy, with practiced steps the moment unfolds, encircling, stopping, The Call: loud, fierce, blood-curdling, and then the grenades as gongs, all rise, are resurrected, drawn from the other world into this the holy place: war. And it is not the killings, not the blood, not even the question of morality, for what is morality to the Warrior? He who by fate is beyond morality, who lives The Dream, and in so living tethers the world of whatever peace: communism, democracy, fascism, communalism, theocracy...all names of reverence, so the Warrior speaks them all, polytheist that he is, and they come to the moment, Friar Alfred's moment, but that name is not mentioned, not even forgotten, just not, There, now Here: they come forth, kneel, live cocks jammed and rammed, head's bobbing and bouncing, screams of pleasure like invocations for divine release!...the coming and The Coming, not just first, not just Second, endless, and come is all over and down and in the feminine receptacle, enacted here to grapple the ever-tender dream, the dream of eradication, of abolishment, of the obliteration of The Enemy, of Her...and so it is: the youngest the most tender, the obliteration the most satisfying, the humiliation of the mothers, a necessity, and the crones: symbolic death—gun barrels with missiles of come, no blood to drink here, for She is not to live, not even to die, yet to be obliterated, *scorched flesh*...and yet some ask for the simple rewards, as only they know, mounting the hump and pumping the bung-hole with pleasure, only my pleasure, *Fucking Bitch!*...they ride her as they ride the land, ripping and tearing, searching and destroying: denying it its natural fertility, no seed to hymen moist, no pretense of farming, just the rooting-up and the ripping-out, so rip out their spirits, fuck their asses! Mount them! Ride them! Destroy them!...and in time the sentinel leaves, soaring, soaring the laughter of the sky, flapping and being delirious with the air, plunging, laughing without laughter, knowing that the Land is being leveled, defiled, destroyed, oh, yes, humiliated, it must be humiliated, for they are shit and must know it! So, let's show 'em! *Waste 'em all, men!*

Tring began to fear, not directly fear Luke, no, it was like the shaman in his own village, a fear before he arrived, the fear he left behind, this Tring felt was coming from somewhere, not from Luke, couldn't have even fathomed what the stupid American was doing, one semester at Occidental College in Los Angeles and Tring knew they were scum, people without a Story, Marauders: chaotic, lost, just stupid, his favorite American word...one of the first he had heard thrown at himself, so it became his...now Luke, was it a stupid look? Frozen. Not catatonic. Like not there.

But it didn't matter. The Cardinal was a patient man.

## **CHAPTER 27: Mother of All**

Rian did not live in The Round. The Round did not exist, no one actually called it that, they all just came together and it became, actually, came together as The Round at those moments when description of the happening was not necessary. No, Rian just went off to live with Thorn, a commune of sorts, six women: other women, all in different phases of their life, Sisters as they preferred to call themselves, themselves hearing the capital S even if others didn't, yes, a Sister from the broken rank of marriage, a Sister back from Vietnam, a Sister still entrenched in graduate studies, another actually from the ranks of Sisters with the capital S, religious, a convent, but now feeling truly like a Sister, the other just from the farm, too many years even by her mid-twenties as a "hand: gook, grunt, at Corporate Agriculture's plow—ConAgra, Cargill, General Mills"...she not released yet, but yearning, and then, Rian, the Sister on the streets, not working, spending her days searching, bringing back messages to the dinner

table, earning her keep by her unmarked endeavors to keep the house together, these added and computing with Thorn: *seven*.

Like Thorn, over time, in different places, names and identities were switched, adopted, slipped on as masks, and they always being seven, even when one had to go, somehow another appeared, always adding to the stew, and it not being noticed that The Round would only be when they were all together, maybe more but never less, and so in recall, when time would be such that recall was a power, in such recall Rian never remembered the numbering, but never forgot the spirits, the souls, the kisses, the licks: all that became The Round.

"What is the formation of a woman except as Mother of All?" This is the question which, unlike what others expected, was The Rounding question. For many years it addressed itself in this way. At first it was hammered out in protests, a series of "Don'ts!" and "No's!"—a way of finding that required losing, what many once called the *via negativa*, but not as linearly interpreted, no, they know, Rian knows, that it is a force propelling them towards something, maybe someone, a force within, facing it and accepting it in all its negativity: dread, fear, hatred, murder...ah, murder, yes, hadn't they themselves come together to murder? To slay? And weren't there nights and mornings, hey, even starkly bright and beflowered midsummer afts, yeah, so many times, around them, like a golden girdle, this the power of murdering, they saw it in the males, how it was their way, their claim to fame and "weight" and measure, their stories, their mythos: Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac...shit, it was Adam and Eve again, for what was his creation but an obliteration? Creation through murder. *Stop!* What's so weird—it's just the resurrection theme: from death comes life. But see the males pretend—a most cowardly pretense I must proclaim, but they do murder...and it is all murder as obliteration, not a giving back to life, simply a being stuck on death, they have no pussy, no sweet summer lips, no, they are only cock and asshole...and they don't know what to do with it all!

"Mother of All"—hmm, it reeks of the Great Whore. If Mother of All than wife to none, a declamation on polygamy, no, not any bondage, just the wilding of sex unbridled, and what is a woman if she is without saddle?...*Whore*—that time she sees Luke, the look in his eyes, despite his craving, his ravagings, his volcanic intensity to love her, sex her, rip her, drink her...yes, she had seen it all, felt it all: his every sense...all this the first time she bumped into him, she feeling him from that moment on as ever latched onto her, like a string following her through the maze of days, all to end so, yes, let's be honest, "Stupidly!"—she now forgets him by that word, would say, "Stupid motherfucker!" but she likes being fucked as a mother, Mother of All, likes the disturbance of it all—now his legacy of shock, abandonment, total perplexity—and scandal! Yes, he had been scandalized, profaned, blasphemed! He wanted to murder her! *Yes! Yes! Murder.* Such a warrior, "Stupid!"...couldn't find in her the Mother of All, just wanted her for his mothering.

If she had been called to do so Rian would have explained the connection between the pictures and the statues and Luke. She finding in Mary with her heart exposed, with her birthing eyes at the foot of The Cross, with her knowledge at the Open Tomb...yes, Rian would have explained about the remnants, like the bits and pieces of cloth, old sweaters, discarded dresses which her mother and friends patched together to form a quilt, yes, these images, there not for what they are but for what they could become, and she was that, their becoming...Luke would not see it, this she knows, but the quilt, this he wants, this she also knows...knows that *men need*.

So, men as males, these at times she took. Men who came to her on the slip, so lusty they couldn't bring themselves to say her name, only drool, others who smoked more dope than she cared, but it being their only way to release, yet others in betrayal, to themselves, to others, for

them she was Mother of All...taking in the darkness, oh, there is so much darkness today! This time of cosmic war, this time of the diaspora of the gook, all about her, the males, taking all them in, mothering them, Mother of All.

But she couldn't be Mother without Thorn, Thorn as Sister, one of The Round, they who discussed the war, indicted this insane denial of death, "Warring is the male's way of fleeing death, no, embracing it. John Wayne is in flight from his maleness, not a paragon of manliness." Ah, so many ways to describe it. Males kept rewriting their flight in so many ways, always with the gravedigger's tool, this their cocks, the tool of the gravedigger, coming to women as if entering the cemetery, parting their vulva lips as if heaving the dirt from side to side, then resting in the grave, cock buried, seed interred, and watered with base water, not love, not the heart, nary the soul, and departing as if in remorseful funereal march, no band to strike up and dance, yeah, maybe, but then only to the beat of the bottle, booze to numb, no tears, all back to the dance of departure.

*Why were males always fleeing?* What had happened? Sisters, this we will never know. Maybe, someday, but it is not important. What is important is that we do not flee. That we not become warrior. That we become Mothers of All. Yes, Sisters, men must be born again. But to be so they must understand what The Rib means. They must understand their dance of obliteration. Realize that in their world we have no bodies! Their Father God created Adam—*directly*. He did NOT create Eve. No, Eve is from Adam... ah, to speak of blasphemy! To speak of an act, this thought, which is so depraved. Where in all the world and human history about us is there such an act of the obliteration of the female? And, to justify themselves they call it "supernatural." Ah, the depravity.

Yet Rian knew it wasn't depravity. No, depravity leads to wholeness. Opposites are linked, not counterpoised. Nothing in life is obliterated, all is transformed. What men needed, so she knows, is to be depraved, so depraved that they experience all of their murdering, yes, to murder and accept it—Did not Abraham stab Isaac to death? Sure, the tale denies it, but how else was it, if it had been other, then would males have fled?...Yes, Abraham striding down the hillock, not accepting his murderous hand, not screaming at his vile Father who sucks the blood of the first-born, ah, Abraham, why was Sarah not with you? She obliterated from the act—Is it that murdering is man's act, not woman's? Why Abraham did you not accept the truth of your act? Why twist all into a knot, yes, not a contradiction, for from a contradiction might have arisen the other word: life. But no, the ages are baffled by the act so recorded, they ask, "What really happened?" ...*Flight!*...Flight from the knowledge that sons do not rise from the dagger! This dagger his cock: his cock The Rib, the futile attempt to pass on creativity to his son through cocking, as such this message was not to be spoken, the pretense was that Isaac lived, that Abraham lived, whereas no blessed male has lived, as from that time forward...*Sisters! This is our story to tell, Her Story, to birth maleness, anew.*

Yet they rarely discuss "maleness." They prefer to just use it as a target, hit the bulls-eye and go elsewhere. This time of war, what the males called Nam, was surely a time of pain. All in The Round suffered, daily, at the shrine of the Evening News. Around them Sisters wept as brothers, lovers, friends were buried. She who had been there told them how none could accept the love, only desire the mothering, not but approach her as Whore, yet she wept every night, weeps now in our memory, and is always there, for, for her it was more than stupid, it was a senseless shame.

Men were all about them. But they were like dung to winter seed: a something of promise. Yet the Sisters reveled in being dung, for they had come not to fear themselves in any

manifestation. "Oh, it has been quite difficult at times!" This how one always framed it, and they just about always laugh, for it was and is difficult. Not only the thoughts: radical, revolutionary, purging, slaying, but then the healing, it the more difficult, it accepting every part of their body, mind and soul. Accepting that the smell of the body was good, not just perfumed smelling, that was okay, had its place, but rather the body itself, the odor of the flesh, this in the sweat of the everyday, coming to what others detested as Boot Camp Chic: combat boots or sneakers or whatever would not fit Snow White's foot, drab clothes, most times part-khaki, others dungarees, yet always just any baggy assortment, shirts which slopped about the body, then, for some, a ragtag hat or scarf: all a composition to free the deception of clothes and adornment, a new cosmetic, so to see a new face and a new soul. And all this so that men would say, "Holy Shit! Look at that hag! What an ugly bitch!"...Such compliments!

Yes, for Rian, only women were the contradiction, what the Marxists raved about in terms of the dialectic, thesis-antithesis, all that babble, but what was right was The Cauldron, they The Cauldron, it a brewing pot, their bodies just one savory entry into the stew, and it was in The Round that Rian lived because in The Round she died, all that had been held as forbidden was allowed, and all that was allowed was forbidden. Forbidden to use the names, forbidden to hide the feeling, forbidden to capture, forbidden to love. Yes, love as it existed, this was forbidden, these forbiddens a discipline, not Luke's Discipline, but ones of practice, knowing that they too would one day, maybe not would but at least could one day be theirs, for all that was forbidden was allowed.

*Should she say that she found her mouth?* Yes, that which eats the world and is the entrance of nourishment? Found it in her southern parts. This mouth so sweet and yet so bitter: ah, it spoke to her of dying and birthing in the same breath. Whenever she kissed with it, all kisses were sweet and yet stung by bitter water. Could she laugh? Oh, she laughed, and from her laughter the clownish distortions of existence arose and faded away. She dropping monstrous beings and beatific beings. She laughing the comedy of pain and the comedy of bursting pleasure. Ah, this mouth which had no words but suck and sound, clutch and glove, snatching and spewing. Her Sisters she played with mouth to mouth and they hummed a song which shook the Earth, sung the song which stopped the war, sung the song which began the healing of the males, though no one charted their song, yet it was sung.

Mouth to mouth. The play stuff of creating. Lips to lips. Hands to hands. Legs to legs. Assholes to assholes. Upon their dryness. Upon their moistness. Upon their blood. All wild. All calm. This The Round. It was a vision and a dream. But such as The Brooders could not dream, had long ago dreamed against, for which dream Luke had been Alfred, and at this moment is standing vestigial guard at the gate. *Ah, Luke...*Mother of All, and she waits, not thinking it waiting, for this her child to come, her brother, this Isaac walking down Moriah, and she knowing him in his call, "Mother...!"

## **CHAPTER 28: Father Luke**

The time with the Cardinal proved to be surreal. As such because the war raged about, and all within the Cathedral confines went on as if the war were simply part of the day. When Luke and Tring had arrived they both slipped quietly into the clerical world. Yes, both. He became "Father Luke" and Tring, "Reverend." It was like on the road, so much was not said, Luke just watched Tring transform, and it was a transformation gliding on an avalanche of little things: Tring's now seemingly permanent smile, his gesture of hands, now behind his back, leaving his front open, exposed, but Luke suspecting that he was hiding something, maybe holding a grenade, then the attitude of shoulders, just hunched forward enough to communicate a

story of humility, yet not hunched in weakness, no, Reverend—and why *Reverend*, why not Father?—Reverend Tring made his way about the Cardinal's enclave as if he had been there in service for twenty years. Now, once again a sacred personage, "Father Luke" was instantly aware of how removed the sense of the priestly and its sacredness was from the everyday, even if — maybe especially?—the everyday was *War!*...It was clear that the clerical mind believed that the clerical soul should keep itself above politics. All that transpired between the Cardinal and the Vatican—and here is where Father Luke served as messenger—all that transpired was but the same message in a thousand cloaks: "Don't get involved." And the response: "I am not involved." But Luke, Father or not, knew that these messages were codes. Or at least that the response was code, Brooder code.

He realized that he had known this, even known back during his two friarly summers in Rome—Biblical languages and Philosophical Theology seminars aside—he had absorbed the "politics of the Vatican," which to him at the time was heard only in its denial, "As Augustine so clearly defined, there is the City of God and the City of Man," a separation like oil on water. As Luke sees it, little in the much touted reforms of Vatican Council Two had changed much, just rhetoric, not action. Now, however, he was to see someone who did put it into action, action which was justified with old, conservative language— indeed, the Cardinal vigorously called Augustine to his cause!—yet whose practical results oozed heresy. The Cardinal preached and practiced "Catholic Action," an innocuous enough phrase but his sin—oh, yes, Sin—was that he translated this and other theological texts and images directly into political solutions, as such, tagged as a "fellow-traveler," a "pinko," and in the harsh truths of hushed late night indictments, "A Commie!"...a Judas Shadow.

The Cardinal, in so many ways, threw Luke, baffled him, tripped him up, gave him no straight read. What he was, was summed up and symbolized by his physical presence. The Cardinal was one of those creatures whose biological ancestry was rooted in many pathways. His body was birdlike yet he moved like the cat. Indeed, his voice was so low, so much a muted sing-song that Luke thought he purred. Hands! At times like butterfly wings, almost translucent, they appeared to flutter as his spoke, at times, in anticipation of his words they flapped about and communicated with the mute and the dead. He walked, no, moved is the word, ah, this was the most difficult aspect to characterize...like a snake upon desert sands, not forward north and south but sidwinding, then, for most, he was the water-spider, this instant here, the other there, as if the physical world he strided with invisible legs. But it was his eyes which told Luke why he was here, *here*—what is here? Vietnam. Indochina. Saigon. Not here because it was God's place, Dad's Home, the Fatherland, this cathedral. The Chair, for the Big Ass: cathedra, such thoughts in Luke's psychedelic world, this world at war—yeah, *here*, so the eyes said, here in the dreaming again, eyes of the communicant, Cardinal's Eyes, his eyes, The Master's Eyes—did the Cardinal know? *Of course he knows, how could he not know?* Yet Luke wasn't sure he knew, not himself, not about the how and the why, just that he would be one of the few, of this he was sure, who would know what those eyes were doing, no, more, where they were, not here, That's for sure, Luke reassures himself, *not* here.

Surreal. It was the only word he could write, no matter how many times he sat down to note his observations, all his hand would write is "Surreal," and then it would stop, not paralyzed, just empty, fatigued by the word. I mean Tring is just a functionary. He plays this dumb-waiter type of role just bringing things to the Cardinal, no, not even to him, just to some other flunkies or to Father Luke, himself. Yeah, something's weird here. That asshole was out there humping and pumping on the road, just looking to strangle someone or something with his

hatred. Now, well, he's nowhere. And the rest of this crew. Just like the lambs who gamboled about the seminary. All blacks, blacks and yellows, stained brown like coffee spills, do I hate them? Shit, yeah. And me, what the fuck am I doing? Why didn't they tell me what my mission is? Did Tring forget? Or is his hatred a lid on his tongue? Or, shit, Man, that would be too much, he doesn't know? *Fucking-A.*

Surreal. Joining the other priests in daily Mass, Cardinal as celebrant, all in Latin, no guitars, no Vatican Two hip-desecration of the vernacular tongue, Luke snickers watching himself at High Mass filling the thurible, Man, what did I do to deserve this? And all the saints and sinners about him, emblazoned in stained-glass, saints only because of their great sin, the one they tortured themselves for, self-flagellation, Luke remembers Alfred, sees his face in the faces in the stains, faces still aglow in midnight darkness, and upon the stones of this Throne Room he tracks the sweat and bone molecules of the faithful, never having adjusted to the alien faces sighing the same rapturous sighs, of the Asiatic slant weeping the same tears of sacramental repentance, this just giving an off-beat coloring to the surreal: slants and yellowed cheeks like fading paper, Shit! *Slopes.* Gooks. I can understand those G.I. words...The strangeness of the air was getting to him, getting to him with the edginess of a familiarity, for as he breathed so he knew that there was something else lingering, something else waiting for his exhale, for it to be then inhaled: Buddhist air? Witch doctor air? Certainly something else, but what?

*Weird.* It accompanied, at times totally displaced, surreal. Just that it was all out of joint. He found himself sinking into being "Father." Yeah, quicksand. If I could tell you about it, I'd tell you about quicksand. But he half likes it, it's comfortable. The grateful eyes—as if I'm doing a goddam thing! Sorry, God, it's your thing, let them know! Just the confessions and the blessings and his own side altar Mass, never being asked to celebrate the main Mass, not even concelebrate, but what the fuck, dig it, I'm doing The Mass! And he laughs even as he does it, approaches the Consecration and forces the words out, spits them out with what the worshippers hear as strength but for him is distaste, just too weird, but what hasn't been weird since The Island?...he places The Body of Christ upon their lips as inside himself he weeps.

Weeping: alien, weird, surreal—all balled together, compressed. Somewhere within him he sees it starting with Rian...within that place of displacement, distanced self-observation, pursuing one's interior as if a Detective Story...her breasts. Not remembering his savaging of them. His hard sucks which he hoped would never end. His frenzied lickings which left him ever unsatiated. His hands upon her, holding her, wanting to squeeze her till all the beauty and pleasure spurted into himself. Not this he remembers, only the moment when they wept—oh, god!—the thought, the image, he fights it, fought it every time, her breasts weeping, not leaking, no milk for foundling's lips, no, as if her chest heaved and her maidenly breasts were but her tears...and from then he wept, not tears, but anger, hatred, ah, so fiercely, the fire, her tears striking him like flint towards tinder, from that moment he was raging, a force to be contended with, weeping, Her Breasts—Betrayal.

So there was and had always been a dream, this which cut him asunder from Killian's clutch, this which swept him along with the tidal wave leading to The Island, this which he did not know until now, now that he plays the role, is the thespian of the holy, he now aping all that he once treasured as the actions most divine, these Fatherly actions for which he had once dedicated his life, they now so empty, but then are they? Ah, "ex opere operato"—did that phrase ring true? That bit of tortured sacramental theological reasoning...he remembers Father Blase, "The spiritual condition of the priest, himself, is irrelevant to the power vested in the acts,

themselves." It was more beautifully said in Latin but for Luke what was of import was the indictment in the words: "Sinful, dirty, cowardly Judases!" and Blase blazed, "All of you. Each of you. Worthy only to betray The Lord! But even you Judases cannot stop and stem the flow of divine grace!" And so he learned that simply to pray the Mass, to hear the Confession, to join in Marriage, to close the eyes and lips in Extreme Unction, all these acts, despite his lack of ordination, these acts carried God's fullness to the faithful, only he, impotent and charred vessel—vessel! *ha! pisspot!*—yeah, despite himself he knew their God...my god?...reached out and touched them: Body of Christ.

Six months. A year. Men on the Moon. He noticed the feeble humor in the name: Arm-Strong. Mythic if nothing else. Aldrin: a nasal medication, TV ad? But they passed almost unnoticed. Yet, he had asked, did the Cardinal, "And so my young American, now you are on the moon. Will you call it New Earth?" And for one of the rare times in his presence the Cardinal laughs, not at Luke's response, no, just inwardly, to himself.

The Vatican had kept Luke informed. Again, messages coming through Tring, but Tring as Reverend, not as with comment, just a delivery boy. Did he read them? Was his metaphorical Latin that good? Messages which were too often of great length, filled with details of the war and its protest in America. Long letters about radical priests, these Berrigans—two brothers, one a Jesuit, the other a Josephite, crazy priest, protesting, burning draft cards, breaking and entering and burning draft offices, all in the name of non-violence, "Holy Non-Violence," he snickers at the phrase and snorts, "HOLY!"...but yet another tortured theological prop, still the Vatican wants him to be informed, "just in case," prudence, preparation—are they coming to Vietnam? And then he learns, yes, American priests are coming, to chain themselves to the fence at the American embassy... Jesus, from Minneapolis—Minne-no-place! Christ, he reads, Father Bury, Newman Center chaplain, fucking small world!...This can't be true? What bullshit! Such things, and the rising issue of My Lai, about murder during war! Christ, Luke can hardly believe this is all happening. He reads their weekly missives and wonders just how crazy it all is, and then Sunflower, just a fleeting glimmer...smileless, he hates himself for stealing that smile!

But it was the stuff about Woodstock and Manson that caught him totally unprepared, maybe not to the others, but to himself it made being in Vietnam seem like a sane refuge. Yeah, he had not been back at a scene of battle since he and Tring left the jungle, but it was all about him, the sounds of planes and copters, the grindings and shrieks of trucks and tanks, but more in the smell and sound of his fellow Americans, not just soldiers, yeah, he missed, at least thought he missed it, but, *For shit, I've never known the regular routine!*...not just them, but their being Americans, it made Vietnam seem like a safe place, a place where the savagery of war: all the killing and destruction, lying and betraying, sins, these were topside, open-handed, unashamed. But the States, The World, Red, White and Blue, all that he could sense was but the weakness of it all—The Denial—Woodstock, all the Hippies trying to jump ship, but into what? waters or fires? Ya can't jump from a nightmare into anything else but a nightmare. Did he want to write that down and send it back? If he did, who'd understand? And then Manson: The War Within, the basis of it all, he the dreamer, this Luke knew, both hummed "Helter Skelter"!...one who would have flourished in the soil of The Brooders, but a dreamer nevertheless, for he dreamed Vietnam, his eyes were the eyes of the dead, those who die denying death, so death lets them live as their bodies rot. Manson and Woodstock—were The Brooders behind this? Their way to...*Christ*, Luke jumps up from his chair, here with a beer and a shot glass, thinking himself just fatigued from the day, and all of a sudden swept up like Dorothy in the tornado and whirled about, now not distanced, not observing, drowning, suffocatingly close, his sweat pools and



drips, he now finding himself thinking about The Brooders, not having thought about them for sometime, not thinking as they had thought, but shocked by what he had felt with them, feeling now, backwards, but right before him: Manson's eyes weeping Rian's tears...Woodstock and Manson: must've set something off...two shots, one swig of beer, his eyelids begin to twitch, his gut begins to ache, there is a trembling rumbling up and down his arms and legs, oh, Christ, it's the touch, coming at him, coming from within him...drink! drink! blast it away!

*Holymotherofchristsweetjesuspreserveme!*

## **CHAPTER 29: The Cardinal**

It had been a long night, not just a dark night, not just the mystic wandering along short-circuited neural synapses, no, long only as to memory, as to chronology, for Luke relived his whole life, all the choices, the coincidences, this way and that, drawn long by the always question: Did I choose? or Was I directed?...Even now: Manson, Woodstock, Father Luke, Her Tears..."*Hic est...*," a dream, being dreamed?...dreaming.

What's important is the now, hold onto this moment, look at it, plunge into it, scrape it clean, only then...yes, a discipline, maybe even some of The Discipline, he thrashes about, strips himself, lies prone on the floor, presses his nose straight into the hard stone floor, not cold, not suffering, just trying to pierce the moment: *Who am I?*

"Father Luke." Yes, he has to be who he said he was, hold onto this, take it, whether choice or direction, submit so that you can control...Now, think about now, how it lead to Now...Luke was readily accepted by the Cardinal's staff. Since the start of the war—meaning war with the Europeans, at first the French—there had always been a Vatican representative, "spy" as the Cardinal half-smiled in greeting, "So, my new spy!"...he rises to shake Luke's hand, yet in the same gesture accepts Luke's genuflecting kiss of his episcopal ring. "Spy?!" caught Luke off-guard, he had rehearsed his small play of protocol: references, academic background, "...to broaden my understanding"—that was the phrase they told him to insert, but as he did the Cardinal merely drew two fingers aside his nose, a gesture of contempt? an itch? Luke stammers on about his theological credentials—he knows that he is young so he has to create some image, some plausible reason for being here, and so he banters about the terrible summer of Rome, the magnificence of...but he is interrupted, "You are truly a giant," said without mockery, not a hint of condescension, just a statement, yet one which kicks Luke back a step, as if the word somehow was a tool by which the Cardinal reached inside of him and pulled—on what? Then he remembers: he's a Brooder! Christ, better watch his eyes, and, indeed, the eyes were looking behind him, not through him, not up and down and over but beyond, and Luke knew he should say no more, just quietly step back, spectral powers, eyes of The Master...he wasn't ready for this, not again, not yet, and with great relief he hears Tring step forward and say, "As you have directed, your Eminence, he is ready." ...What the fuck does that mean? was only the trailer to his departure, being led by Tring, fingertips on his right elbow, piloting him out of the harbor—to where?

For the rest of the staff Father Luke just stepped into the role, routine and office of the previous Vatican "Communications Director," Father Zilock. Yeah, they were amazed at his physical presence, Luke being a giant, truly, in body, though they quickly grasped an almost mute giant, for Luke did not engage others in but the shortest of conversations, only Tring was his confidant, that meaning someone he talked to daily, though not in depth for Reverend Tring was not Tring of the jungle and with him Luke felt even more isolated, having only Tring's hatred to share.

Everyday, Luke followed a carefully planned work routine. In the early morning he would read the mail from the Vatican, then breakfast, then read the Cardinal's mail—one of his responsibilities was to digest and summarize the volume of mail received by the Cardinal, a bluster of mail which seemed to reach blizzard proportions of late, mostly inflated by hundreds of letters from Americans, a raft of self-styled "Vatican Two laymen" each and all sprinkled with spicy doses of theological and political messages, pleas, interpretations, extrapolations, Calls to Action from an assortment of clerics, some self-nominated "Peace Priests," others just "Your Brother In Christ"...and among them all never did he find an O.S.O.

In the afternoon, he spent several hours reading. But not theology, well, not what he would have once called theology, rather the sacred writings of the Buddhists, some Hindu text—teaching himself some Sanskrit—*why?*...then, at twilight, walking about, just out and about the city of Saigon, not in clericals, just layman casual, and so as not to call attention to this he always snuck out the Chancery's basement backdoor, yeah, he said to himself, "sneaking about!"—but shit, he needed to get away...and it was himself now as "G.I." for that is how the bargirls called out to him, "G.I. want some boom-boom?!" And when he stops for a drink it is to be among the guys, his fellow comrades, hurting that he could not tell them, and when asked just saying that he's a journalist, knowing that he wouldn't see most of them more than once or twice...each Tuesday inevitably terminating his outing in some safe hotel room, with some Jack, and then some jack-from-jill, for he, soon after a bolt or two, finds himself snickering at "Father Luke"...spies himself lifting the Host and the Chalice and saying the words—perfect Latin pronunciation!—and then watching himself as a congregant gazing upon himself, worshipfully...and not recognizing The Lie, rather seeing The Faithful One...but then another shot and he is here in the land of The Enemy, and it is back on the trail with Tring...now flying high here in the bar, swooping out the swinging doors and soaring high above the city, a city just like any other city, it could be New York or Nineveh or Oslo or Cape Town...or Sodom, maybe Gomorrah—*do eagles smile?*—and when he comes down he is in a room with two of them, lately it is always two, so much alike, sisters? mother and daughter? just two, women: four boobs, two cunts....

Each week a different part of town, but each week the same women: aren't they all the same?...but he never sees them or feels them or fucks them, no, he only kills them, strangles their spirits, he the spirit-slayer: scion of Natty Bumppo—Deerslayer, *Dear Slayer*—but he did not have a name for himself, not a name for his feeling, he knew he had to have them, just like he had to consecrate each day at Daily Mass, without either he could not be here, not as Father Luke, not as "Semper Fi! Luke."

Yeah, there was taste and there was pleasure, but only because all was such intense distaste and pain. *Intense!* Ha, fury, rage: the women always wanted to flee, but he wouldn't let them, captured them, tortured them, slew them. They who had come to know war as it plodded through their pussies, battles as they sucked hard so that the dicks would fire before the GI popped them in the head and slammed them against the wall, "Fucking whores!"...war as survival, war as money...but with Luke they knew war as war: torture and merciful murder—Didn't he know that they had taken to prostitution to avoid being killed, wasn't that a sufficient Substitutionary Oblation?...itself a living death?...so what does he want?...yet did he know? care to know? Oh, how slowly he began. Gentle. Kissing. *Was he a sad man?* they tittered to each other in Vietnamese, he understood, did not let on...and he takes their clothes off slowly, one piece at a time, *Was he just a peeper?* and only when totally naked and lying upon the bed does the one being touched know that he is a savage, a cannibal—for he begins to strip her flesh, with

fingertips like surgeon's blades Luke works up and down the body, balling the strips of flesh and popping them into his mouth, fingers which not only feel, take but give, give her a sense of knowing, he knowing her, all her shames, all her desires, not allowing her to escape into her performance art, not allowing the disguise of whoring to distract him, no, Luke rubs her, massages her, the other one looks on, entranced by the gentleness, Does she know why she is there as witness?—for her he is the village priest, shaman, healer, a male with a soothing touch and she is hypnotized, though by her watching so Luke is penetrating her, drawing her into himself and making her him, she penetrating with him, and her shuddering, trembling, so small the motions, no words does she have, not in Vietnamese, not in English, yes, he is robbing her, stealing from her her heat, her heart almost stops, he leans down and kisses her, sucking her breath, all the way to the bottom of her lungs, then farther, further into her entrails, drawing back all that she has exhaled, farted...and she starts to struggle, not just hitting, hitting him is like pounding a rock, no, she instinctively screams and runs away from him, all in her mind, yes, he is there, her dreams, her privacy, watching her being woman, the look, *Is it everywhere?* Her Eyes within the Dark Vapors, they come and cover her, she seeks transformation, shape-shifting, calls upon her mother, grandmother, sisters, cousins to come and cast spells over her, invokes her villages protective spirits: animal, mineral, vegetable...yet he comes, unstoppable, now flooding her, tongue a stream of water washing her and in washing pulling her molecules to him, he laps her, her breasts dissolve in his mouth, her belly receives him like water in a cup, her cunt is like the sweet dripping of an over-ripe fruit, all about him, slobbering around him, she now the water, he the receptacle...she is licking him and sucking him and screaming silently into his muscles and chest, hoping to find refuge in the protection of her slayer—what else can she do?...There is no place to hide—and when he has had his way with her: torn her, stripped her, slurped her, chewed her, then he lays her face down upon the bed, spreads her bottom cheeks and rhythmically jabs and inserts, pressing deeper with each move, jabbing and inserting till his cock is her spine, her ass as cushion to his cock, she there without willing, just being opened, and then his fury, his rage, but it is sexual and she can take it, it saves her, this she can handle, the pounding, the slapping on her buttocks, the pressing on her spine, the hatred flowing, she knows he did not come within her, did not lay his seed upon her protected ground—yes, she feared he would impregnate her, despite her protection, despite her aborted desires—and so she is relieved, not wanting to give him anymore than he has taken, hoping that his perverse pleasure is her ticket for release, focusing upon it, not daring to look at her empty shell, not fingering her empty soul space, not worrying, not today as she will tomorrow, that she can only live as he lives....

*Why did he need one to watch? Why did he need to butt fuck them?...Questions which fly at him now, pester him, buzz and irritate him just below his first level of consciousness. Sure, based on his old morality— "Old?"—he would have known this as satanic perversion. But—and here Rian comes to life, she whom he has never seen naked, only bare-breasted, she before whom he knows he could not speak of what is happening—given what has happened, *Shit, war just screws a guy up!*...and another *Jack*.*

But since Manson, yeah, his eyes, not at you, beyond you, since Manson he knew he had to talk with the Cardinal. Talk, confess, testify—what? Just get there, but he's here, at my door, I know, his knock, could it be anyone else? Moloch?... and the Cardinal enters without waiting for Luke's invite, walks—yeah, sweeps, like low flying over the ground, hovering—across the room and sits down in an unadorned wooden chair. Luke remains lying on the floor, naked, nose smashed: Should I look or just start talking?...Tap out code with my toes?

Later he knew it had been a dream, and as such, real. He knew all along! No need for the O.S.O. tag, no need for the Vatican pretense, no need to hide his military mission. "You are here to kill me." That's how he opened the discussion—or dissection, yeah, more like cutting up things, but then he did patch them back. *Shit...*

"You?"

"Yes, my brother, for you are my brother...Alfred, isn't it?"

Luke too quickly blurts, "I'm not Alfred!"

"Ah," the Cardinal sighs as his head bobs just a tad and his hands ascend to his lips in prayerful fold, "Certainly, not Alfred, but certainly not Father Luke!" and it was such a sudden unveiling that Luke laughs, himself, at his own nakedness.

"Yeah. Okay. You got me, Man!" As if waiting for the condemning sentence, nervous, throbbing, lots of sweat now, feeling moist insects squirm and slime and slither along his arms and legs, puddle under his belly..."Okay. So, what's this all about?!"—as if he were the one in authority!

"You know that Friar Killian is dead?"

"Look, I don't connect to that anymore."

"Dead in soul. Like your father," Luke is transfixed, the Cardinal accepts the entry, "Like your father is dead in body. (Pause.) How is it that you killed them both?"

"Jesus!" is how he literally jerks up from the floor, whole body flip and landing on his butt, backbone against bedside, eyes straining to see the Cardinal, Cardinal eyes straining just as hard to see him.

"I understand your father's death from your dream...."

"Wait! Stop!" But he doesn't, and Luke knows he can't.

"You are Isaac—so you think! But it is not so."

"Yeah, yeah. Killian was dreaming Isaac...Christ, what am I saying? This Brooder stuff is great, I mean I've seen your village witchdoctors go into trances and fly like cranes and hawks and slither like snakes, yeah, great stuff, I believe them, all it takes is belief, which isn't of the mind, shit, you know that, look, I don't know why I'm here? Yeah, I got fucked up and joined this insanity and killed a guy—*jesus*, I kill, I screw, I get fucking-A drunk...."

"You are a Bodywanderer."

The phrase never heard before, no image comes into his mind, the oddity of it blips him away, "A what?"

"Bodywanderer."

Then the Cardinal stands and blesses himself, not Luke, and is a-quarter way out the door when Luke's words halt him, "What in God's name are you talking about?"

"Not God," words which follow his hands as they reach and alight—butterfly landing, on the crucifix next the door—"Not Him." Then he turns full-face and peers at Luke, deep compassion falls like sunlight from his eyes, dark fear peals like thunder from his hands as he claps, "Not Him," exits, fluttering on the wind, lepidopterously: "*Her*."

And in a shift which he would never remember, needed not to do, not stay in chronology, but move, not necessarily a climb or a descent, but a shifting, as if seeing with the eyes behind one's head, the scales finally falling, restoring former powers which had laid dormant so that physical sight could flourish, now awakened as to his spectral self, his other-playful body, his roundness: *Her*.

## CHAPTER 30: Manson's Eyes

Sunflower's smile, he awoke to her smile, he in a pool of shadows, not darkness, just twilight filtering in through the bamboo curtain, and he aswim, yes, he can see the tracks of the Cardinal, those small ferret feet, luminescent, like dots leading to the door, and he knows that he must talk with him, in time, real time, not dream time, Sunflower's smile brings a hardness to his being, he rolls onto his back and remembers her gasping candles....

"Radical Catholics," so the morning's clippings bring to his awareness, "The Catonsville 9"—priests, followers of these Berrigan Brothers—a name fit for a moving company, and as he reads on he chuckles at its appropriateness—"...removed 1-A files, threw them into a heap, set them on fire, and prayed." Movers of papers souls, of prayerful lips, of conscience—what were they? What did they pray? *Did they really believe they were freeing souls as they burned paper?* He had seen a like ritual in many a field set aside for ancestors. Little shrines. Popping out of nowhere, some incense stalks, pictures, incinerated candles, and tidbits of burnt paper: prayers, petitions, incantations, whatever! And now his own brothers of the cloth, ha! Would I have been them? Should have been? Or was murder what I needed? No more hosts, sterile wafers, bloodless wine....he reads on: 250,000 March on Washington, just last month: beads, long-hairs—Sunflower?—somewhere in his brain he shouts, "Be there!"...and more news of moonwalkers and Black Suns—grinning Chicago Cops bagging an uppity nigger: big time, a charismatic Black Panther, one Fred Hampton, in his sleep, drugged, another, Mark Clark—how afraid was Mayor Daley? or was it Nixon?...then white-assholes: notes about Calley—American Hero, fair haired child, who else but to be scapegoat: tagged with script revealing all sins: Torah scroll, and sent into the desert to die, the soul of America?—Hm, Should...*could?*

But he couldn't find Manson, wanted to know more, not know, look into his eyes, ah, now his preoccupation and longing were too, too conscious, he itched to leave this mission, find its meaning, fulfill it—*Kill the Cardinal?* Shit, do they think I'm fucking crazy?...Mandarin, was that what it was for? Did the Cardinal cross Mao? What?

"I'm not going to kill you, your Eminence."

"But, you already have, my brother."

"C'mon, you know what I mean. I don't have such orders, and even if I did...."

"Yes."

"Look, I won't do it. Okay?!"

They both reach for a drink, colas, neither had touched their meal, the heat was more inside them than out.

"Do you think they'll give you written orders?"

Luke's face answers with a student's quizzical frown.

"You think too much like a soldier. Have you really become a soldier?...Foolish Luke! Who do you think sent you here—the US government? The Marines?"

Luke fought a *yes* to any other question.

"Luke," and there was a gathering storm pause: the Earth stills as the clouds mount, each upon the other, penetrating substances so that they become more, greater: thunder, gale, tornado..."Luke, The Master sent you."

The sentence hung, just words out there written in the air, but he rushed at them with swords of disbelief: "No way, Man. Fucking-A, no way. Goddam, motherfucker, fucking with my mind, Man! I'm not buying that. I'm free of that shit. That's Friar Alfred. That's piss-pants Luke as a kid. I'm not into that stuff, not anymore, Man, look I don't dream..." and then his

mouth clamps shut as if locking in what is advancing up from his soul's gut, words which carry images which invoke realities which he does not want to face.

The Cardinal does not speak, just stares: *The Master*.

Twenty-minutes, a flock of birds landing, a baby's first cry, the pluck of a flower...the acceptance, "The Master."

Then it seemed to come easier, easier than ever before: a discussion of The Brooders, of dreaming, of his dream, but more of the Cardinal's dream.

"They gave me Joshua to dream. For them it was all quite simple. They saw me as Yahweh's Warrior but one properly subordinated. Moses' successor, not a Moses. I was for them the one to lead my people after the wandering in the desert to the claiming of a new land, of Canaan. Can you see how the Europeans saw me?" He pauses a half-second, looks at Luke to catch his eyes, then proceeds: "My father was a village shaman, and an old missionary Dom saw me as God's catch. The one to deliver my people from the clutches of darkness—you know how the Europeans think. *Ha!*" The *Ha!*" was sharp, pronounced, not of the laugh, but of the surprise, discovery, "And when I entered The Brooders, I had no idea about the dreaming. Did you? But of course not, who does?" and he kept on, "When Communism became more threatening than paganism, then my dreams were all of Holy Wars. Total conquests. Obliteration of cities, peoples—all! *All!*"...Here, it is *in illo tempore*, that stoppage of profane time and the sucking in of all by the sacred: "My own people I slew. Slew them all for The Lord..." "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." ...I the strong-arm of Yahweh, obedient General to the Almighty Commander...to slaughter my own...Are they not The People of God?"... Luke and the Cardinal knew the suicidal import of that theological query..."Was it not my own flesh? My own body? My own soul?"...Then this man, this human, this set of frail bones with leaden soul, he becomes heated, tears free fall like lava stones, "I was torn inside. But I could not stop the dreaming. Who can? And so I fell into, or it swallowed me, you do understand," their eyes lock, "don't you?" Eyes in common affirmation, "Yes, *mon frere*, I was the wedge. The one who held the door open as the French fell. Held it open for you Americans. I," and he pauses, an air of humility, no, an odor of tortured resignation rises with his words, "I am the reason you Americans are *still* here."

There were moments as solid as brass which passed between them. Luke's whole being was racing: every aspect of his ability to receive, interpret, understand and respond to the Cardinal were in over-drive, truly, the air between them was palpable, like pages in a book...as the Cardinal spoke Luke felt that they were getting closer, not physically, rather closer to the end of a story, an end which he knew he had to reach to begin again.

"Wait, your Eminence, I'm following you but then I'm not."

"It's the dreaming."

"No. No. That doesn't explain anything, that's what needs to be explained!"

Patience. The man has suffered patience before. Luke feels the eros in the man, the fierce welling within which he is forming word by word, smithing, laboring here to form his life inside the furnace called Luke...Luke sees it, sees himself as coals consuming and the Cardinal as iron melting, and the pounding? *Who is pounding?*

"I cannot stop dreaming." Patience laced with frustration, a heavy dose of disappointment, tiredness: "I just *cannot*. The Lord knows that I've tried."

"But isn't The Lord the problem?"

The Cardinal exhales a deep breath of satisfaction, "Yes, yes, Luke, you do understand!"

"Jesus, what did I say?" A saying which shocks him, like electrodes clawing his genitals, abhorrence and dismay, then a touch on his neck: his father's, spectrally chilled: *Blasphemy! Am I to be cursed by my flesh blaspheming?!*

"Luke," and the Cardinal reaches out, touches him, butterfly wings of arms enfold him, wee man with giant spirit embracing vigorous youth, "Luke, we must be strong. For it is The Lord who must die. Hear me, my brother, The Lord, He must die."

Luke couldn't take it, the dank humidity in the air congealed and laid upon him like a glacier of ice, hot ice, burning him, and he floats away from the Cardinal, adrift under his glacier, drifting away, far away, till all in his brain surrender ...but then he dreams.

"The Lord our God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land." It was the Remembrance and the Command: Joshua hears it again this night, speaks it again in the morning to his people, they who are to cross Jordan. Soon the two spies sent out, return, "Truly, the Lord has given all the land into our hands..." and with these spying words Luke slips into the Cardinal's dream, going forward with Joshua, standing under a rock as the man with the drawn sword states, "...as commander of the army of the Lord have I come," and Joshua falls down before Him, it is a holy place, and then the noise, lost in the noise: trumpets of rams' horns, six days of vibrations, "Good, Good, Good Vibrations!" and on the seventh day The Shout—that shout of war, of murder, killing, slaying: "Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses, with the edge of the sword." Luke was within The Shout, lending his voice, finding himself back on The Island: serpentine, and in his boa coil he chokes the breath from children, babies, infants with lips still wet with milk, and it is The Lord of Auschwitz, of Treblinka, so he sees Him, worships Him, Him once Pharaoh, always Cock, pledged to by the cock, circumcised—the totem of the Warrior, he who slaughters all: women, crones, hags, Beauty Queens...all their offspring, slays them at their southern mouths, suckles them with Zyklon B...with this trembling grace Luke is instilled, glad to spy for Joshua, now, finding himself in admiration following this Arm-strong of God, and with him waving his most terrible cock, Phalanx of the Lord, and together, in tribal unity, they impale the women, rape them, butt-fuck them, cock their mouths, it is all blood and come, sperm is the sacred juice of the battle, sperm blended with blood...the cup is passed, from male to male, each stirring it with a penis most tortured, itself of self-birthing, by peeling back its skin, shedding its blood, so it is re-born, not blood of woman, not blood of the hated goddess, no, the blood of male: the sweat of the cock...here Luke's dream begins to swell, gorge upon his cock, feasting upon the crushed skulls and savaged faces of the fallen, all offspring of women, this attack of Joshua's is an attack on the people who still worship the goddess, still give praise to Her for birth, *ah, such blasphemy!* for birth is from the male, so Joshua's cock vigorously ejaculates, and so does he bellow and roar as he checks out and inspects all the dangling swords, bloodied... and so reborn as Warrior, males self-sired, they slaughter all...*all*.

"HE WHO LOVES FATHER OR MOTHER MORE THAN ME IS NOT WORTHY OF ME!"

In the camp at night the Warriors of the Lord meet in circle to jerk-off, not masturbate the flesh, no, for that is sacred, but to beat off the soul: scream in orgasmic delight as they sing praises to their Lord in terms of bodies hacked, breaths stopped, children who died of fright...it is for them the circle of blessing, a recounting of the stories which heal, a passing on of their patrimony, of the pledge made to them by Yahweh, and in their group is Luke: bloodied, circumcised, remembering not only this dream but that of his own, feeling the connection, of the cock and the rib, of the creative force which is his penis, and so he knows why he butt-fucked

them, not just to fling his seed on fallow ground, no, but to probe them, suck them, vacuum them clean of any desire, no matter how dark, no matter how fetid, no matter how shitty, all, yes, it was the culmination of the Warrior act, of the selfless oblation—he offering them one last hope of redemption, offering them a way to save themselves, through giving him their most detested dream—yes, salvation could only be theirs through total surrender, yielding, of every aspect of their femaleness, of their womanly being, yes, *yes!* he praises The Lord for the wondrous power He has endowed males with: cocks which kill and so give back life again!... "Rise up!" for truly, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light!" *Amen.*

Intoxicated. Blissed. Of such insatiable gratitude is his being. *Praise.* And more praise to The Lord. Then, Luke wanders off, near the edge of the camp, by a border of moonlight, hearing voices, one small, one large...the large voice of the Commander, "Sun, stand you still upon Gibeon, and you, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon."—a command of Majesty! The Commander of Majesty!...and Luke, impelled by a desire within his own eyes, seeks the Eyes of the Commander, the Eyes of Him, and resplendent are they! Eyes of Sunlight: no shadows, eyes which need no rest, blaze on and on, eternal Eyes of Fire, Consummation...he sees, oh, he struggles to shield his eyes, feeble eyes, "Eyes why do you seek this death?!" for he is present at a vision most terrible, that of the Eyes without Shadow, Unreflected, Sun without Moon, and it is his own dying, yet he struggles and grasps the eyes of Cardinal Joshua, but there only to see both the Eyes of The Master and the feebleness of himself, yet unlike Luke, Joshua drinks from the Eyes of the Commander, is filled by him, becomes a Warrior being without Shadow, and through his eyes Luke spies the Terror, the look which Obliterates, the savaging of not only his People but of himself, the desecration of his own body...the Cardinal as Brooder, deep in meditation, deep in self-flagellation, no, steepd in horror!...in self-consummation: it is his own body which is the Bread, his own blood which is the Wine...oh, terrible is this sight, *My eyes, my eyes burn out!* Luke implores, seeking a last grasp at Refuge in this vision which he knows is his, is himself, the vision of the Warrior, of the All Male, of the Sacrifice of All...*NO!*...where does that sound come from? Again, *NO!*...and across him spreads a dark veil, verily, a thin slice of the vapor, merely a trail of molecules, but it is sufficient, enabling Luke to yet see, gaze from within the Dark Vapors, and so he beholds the eyes of The Commander and of his General: The Eyes of Manson, *resplendent!*

Encaped, he withdraws, falls back, swoons, a dream—need he no more? For it was all so clearly shown when the Sun was called to obey, and did so!—that to live only under the sun, no moon, in sunlight, even in darkness only would be the night but veiled sunlight, the Moon to be banished, obliterated, Killing to be termed Birthing, Dying the Negation of Living, Murder the Bond of Paternity, Fraternity: The Cock...and in his dream the Dark Vapors meet him at moon's edge, creep upon him, cover the blood: war's menstrual gift, and cloak him, draw him into itself, himself, there now he Adam and she Eve, he now the Sun and she the Moon, he Sky and she Earth...and there are no monks about, no Master, no tendrils of the faint-hearted soul of Killian, no, it is the dreamscape and it is juxtaposed to that of the Cardinal's but it is all Luke's, more, it is not Alfred's, yes, Luke can sense, see this Alfred, like a ghost, over there, miming through the wrenching of the rib, rubbing his penis to claim his creative flood...but Alfred is not him, yet he also sees Luke, himself as soldier, Marine, there, the other side of Alfred, just a shadow, and he jerking himself off into mouths and butts...and the dying, he sees the dying of Her, all women, killed by the seed: it is poison blood, not true blood, not blood which can be drunk, and his hands raise the Chalice—and who was this Jesus they call the Christ?—and in his hands the Chalice is



Cunt and the Wine is Blood and so he dips the Wafer now his Cock...and Luke sees, Luke hears, Luke knows... Adam knows, Eve dreams....

Luke knew before the word came, he had begun to pack, "The Cardinal's dead!"—much weeping and wailing, a wrenching he was not unfamiliar with, not in this land which breeds death at every moment, this moment, wet tears not his, no, not for him the Alien from the New World which seeds dying, only dry tears, impotent tears...but, no, no time for this, and he finishes packing and asks, "Who will say his Mass?" And none were so calm as to answer, but then he knew: The Master is coming, he wants to be gone, doesn't have to, but just didn't want to bother.

On his flight back—call it towards Home?—he caught that space between the dreams which he knew was his to claim, for now he was not gnawed by emptiness, no, he could see The Brooders and their Dreamwell, the solidity of their theological bricks he did not deny—*Could he dare deny The War everywhere about?*...no, and then just on his other side, if it could be called a side, rather something more like a sense, a dimly outlined presence, he not yet having a name for his presence within the Dark Vapors, both these both there, vortexes, and he between them, in a moment of stillness, now Stillness...not without agitation, not without fears, not without peace, as such, the Stillness before the Transformation, moth into butterfly...no, no words, no images, not yet.

What was on his mind and in his heart was that this going back was his choice...no calls had come from the military brass, not The Army of God ("Milites Christi") nor The Army of Man ("Novus Ordo Seclorum"), there had been no issuing of new orders, no, he had ordered himself, Ordination, set his one foot ahead of his other, not called, not Called, just to wander...they wouldn't stop him—*Would they?* he mused...*Could they?*...but it would be back to Hastings for now, to see Mom... but before now (Now? Moment! Eon! Neverending) he had to bookend all that had been, put it somewhere...seeing the Cardinal Joshua, he standing before his People, there with all the arrogance, deadly pride and blasphemous conviction that he was chosen, they The Chosen, The People of God?!—This the primal sin, that transgression of the Warrior: transforming his People into Enemy—father, mother, sister, brother, all his flesh: those not Chosen, they to be Enemy, and such to be Sacrifice, Burnt Offerings, Obliterated, Transgressing with Yahweh and both displaying the shaming of Her, the denigration of Her powers, the condemnation of Her grace, she the Moon, now to be banished from the physical cosmos, dropped from the cosmology of divine reflection, She, captured and stashed away.

Yet now Luke knows that it is so only in the Book of Lies, the Scripture of Betrayal, the Tome of the Warrior..."The Tradition and The Discipline"...for all-time, Eternity, Luke had dreamed it as it has been, "The way things are!" But in this moment, this Stillness—and it is Stillness only because of the borders of Chaos—the way things are, are not as they have been, for he has been within the Dark Vapors, ever so atomically fragranced, yet ever so irradicably transformed—he now knows that He could only be insofar as She permitted...yes, though the Sun call to the Moon to "Die!" it is but a hot-headed curse, She has always been, will always be Moon...yes, *all by permission of Her, by her grace*—She allowing her Son, her Husband, her male consort to rush headlong down and up, across and beyond the path He had convinced Himself he must trod, not listening to Her, not taking Her counsel, but what was it to be but this? He had to break-down to break-through, he had to imitate Her till he believed His Warrior imitation was reality. He had to play with Himself till he found himself but dried sperm in a sweaty palm...blessedly, She had allowed it, She the one not afraid of Death, no, rather, confident of Death, embracer of Death, She whose southern mouth laughs at Death but whose

kiss on lidded eyes respects its power...Was this the feebleness in the Cardinal's eyes? What made him not Joshua? That remnant of his People which was Her? *Her eyes?*

Ah, Luke stirs, pours a *Jack* into a coke—bad habit from a land which sweats and saps the strength—gurgles the sweetness in his throat, swallows and lets it tend to him, tired, *tired* of flesh and bone and dream...only wondering when it was that Cardinal Joshua had known, known that it was he who would kill, he who was indeed Joshua's spy, who came back with accurate news of the promised land, of Yahweh's truth—was it the story of Rahab, did that leak? give the Cardinal a sense that he was open to the feminine, that he allowed women to help him, Was the Cardinal truly touched by the power of Her still remnant—*Had he shuddered?*...would he or me ever truly know? In his heart Luke warmed a spot for the Cardinal, welcomed him, called him to dream with him his new dream, to Brood embraced within the Dark Vapors.

### **CHAPTER 31: Vapor Trail**

It was Christmas of 1969 and another wall-calendar year was coming to an end, to another start, the cycle bore down, yet, Luke was aware that for him it was a jilted cycle, not over the same tracks but something ajar, off-center just a bit—not just tilted as to sight or balance, but jilted as to heart—possibly a spectral cycle with a phasing too unusual for him to discern. *Vapor trail*. But, from another perspective, he was home among the familiar and, well, unchanged. Yeah, somehow he had expected it to, yet not much had changed, no great urban renewal in Hastings or St. Paul or whatnot, old buildings were still old, even his weeks up at the U, there on-campus still seemed like the jazz at The Towers, though the long-hair and generally unkempt nature of things Tie-dyed and Paisley was a cosmetic he found more amusing than not, he never an arbiter of fashion was put out a bit by not being able to get into the beads and buttons: "Peace Now!" buttons, "Mothers Strike For Peace" buttons, well, buttons with every Freedom...Free Love, Free Huey Newton, Free the Milwaukee 14, Jesus, Fucking-A! Free Me, Free You—Insects, the Air...there were buttons for just everything and everyone, sober and silly.

This is how it goes for the several months of just returned. Visiting his mother. Standing at his father's grave. Walking around the campus. Picking up an odd job or two here. Everything familiar, but then not. The Vapors: its jilted perspective. Seeing auras, not knowing what to call them, what to make of them, thinking—just flashbacks to the amusements of acid, peyote and the tricky mushrooms, so, no magic on his part, possibly some remorse, knowing that this is not his father's sight nor His Father's...guilt and displeasure ride their own cone of colors: unnerving colors of puke, puke green...but it could have been a conversation with anyone, many were seeing things, vegetables from the jungle and white-coated tabs having been digested by so many, a common stomach, common indigestion, common adulterations and psychic alterations...yes, his People, well, maybe not a capital P but then some call it that, "Tribe," so say others, "Counterculture"—but Luke didn't care for that academic prankishness, no, "Trust no one under 30!"...yeah, that worked for him, Fuck Authority, *Resist!*, Do Your Own Thing!...it was a groove, a hole: watering, a place resident only in the far-away looks and inside the dreams of those about him, not sleepwalkers like the Hollow-Men of Eliot, no, dream-walkers, yeah, not Brooders, but something, and he liked it, got into it, deeply into it, even came to like granola!

Luke of The People: focusing on getting "involved" as they say, on being "committed," but not as to the glibness of words, not just shouting "Peace Now!" or "Two, four, six, eight we just want to procreate!"...no, his intensity rides his watching, observing, peering: detailing the connections, trailing the energy, emotional, heat, more an anthropologist, an archaeologist, but one who is looking as much for himself as at others. More than just a bit like his old Excessive Self...Luke ceaselessly and till bone-weary attends meetings, rallies, sit-ins, protests, trials of

draft resisters, lectures, sermons, reads endless tracts Pro and Anti, newspapers both Establishment and Underground, flyers and brochures Hippie, Yippie, YAFer and Weatherman...but it is not the old Luke, not the guy clawing for meaning in every little thing and event but rather one trying to grasp how the two-sides are joined, *How did the anti-war movement spring from the war movement?* He knows these are the children of the Warriors who now proclaim themselves anti-warriors? But does it mesh?

A question he wants an answer for, so he is sober, maybe drunk on searching, intoxicated with the raw pain, the exhilarating beauty of the search, but, it is his mind and heart and soul undisturbed by elixirs of any kind...solely Dark Vapors.

Only while at the U does he begin to feel like he fits in, not that he was "home" as he might have liked, just not so much an oddity. Well, sure, he looks odd, as his mother said, "All these Hippies and Radicals sure look odd. What do their mothers think?" Yeah, there on campus, simply the adornment of long-hair, thickening beard, dungarees and boots, hey, even Army fatigues, more often than he had ever worn while in Nam, shit, he could readily disappear into the Youth Scene, inside any Hippie Commune simply because of The Look, which while so different, all at once so common, so bland, so hip normal, Radical Chic. But it was his oddity as peerer, one from behind the veil of Dark Vapors, his eyes which lofted his peculiarity, oddity, yeah, among the Dopers and Rads such a crazy look, such a twisted glance, well, if not engaged by them, he was, well, at least tolerated.

*Crazy look*, twisted glances, he was remembering Manson, and when he peers at eyes it isn't lost on him—how the Student Scene is infiltrated by vets. Yeah, it seemed to make sense, not his experience, but then enough of his to know—remember living in-country: long-hair, lots of dope, fucking a whore whenever one could, and trying to deaden it all through rock and roll, "Rock 'N Roll, Man! It'll cure the soul!"... so it went down here as there, for where else would—could—these vets go? Back home to Hastings? Glencoe? Little Falls? To find what? Long-hair, dope, naw! Just a bunch of ragging by the Legion boys about how THIS NAM AIN'T EVEN A REAL WAR, JUST A DINKY FIREFIGHT. NEVER BEEN DECLARED, HAS IT?...so he travels through the self-anointed counter-culture, through the halls and fields of soul smoldering communes, all around Dinkytown and then on the West Bank at the Draft Resistance Center, yeah, especially there he kept meeting himself, well, parts of himself, guys who'd sit by the wall, propped up by a cig, mostly maryjane, getting stoned, staying stoned, being stoned their connection with The Nam, not rapping all the time, not commenting, no need to be elder statesman, editorialist, just being with the vibes, living by them, being sustained by them, the common energy they shared: hatred of authority, the slave's revolt against the gentle hand of Massah ... and The Music, The Feeling: yeah, when it was late: wee hours of the morning, when Jimi Hendrix and Janis were put to bed, the rolling eeriness of Pink Floyd and The Dark Side of the Moon crawls on shared breaths, when all the wisps of smoke are drawn together to weave a blanket, under this blanket they would speak: The War sucks, Man. They're killing us. And it was clear, the "They" was the government, the officers, the System ... and from this terse, taciturn testimonial, this communiqué gut-sliced from the inside, so the energy flares outward: not of Peace but of War ... yeah, motherfucking warriors, come rise The Weathermen!, come rise Warrior Woman: S.C.U.M.! — yeah, yeah, the Society for Cutting up Men! yeah, yeah, yeah...*All aboard the Yellow Submarine!*...and they roll out in the arms of some blissed out—well, can't call 'em Hippie Chicks no more, naw, like Sister, yeah, call 'em—Sister, just as long as the Free Sex rocks and rolls, it's all right by me!

Children of Warriors. How else to act? This "non-violence" just another twist on the violence, and he hears it from the women, The Sisters: "These draft resisters come home and act like sexist pigs! That's our war, Sisters!"... Oops! Yeah, no more Hippie Chick, like no more Baby, like no more Sweet Sixteen. Luke can see the connection but they are not Sisters of the Dark Vapors, no, S.C.U.M and N.O.W. and the females in the Weathermen are all locked in a Day of Rage, and it appears to be but a rage against not having the tools of violence with which to fight back! All this non-violence being just a ploy, a tactic, nothing Gandhian about it, not what King called them to...can't they see?...*Revolution*—to beat their Words into Ploughshares?!

But then something humbling—more, like sandpaper on the eyeball!—which had happened during Christmas and which his eyes have just begun to see: Christmas...Luke in Church. At the Basilica. Looking at the crèche. *Why?* He hasn't been drinking, hasn't been smoking, hasn't been whoring, hasn't been going to church...yeah, it ain't Luke, not the Semper Fi, no flip-back to any of the familiar Alfreds and Lukes, certainly not at home, *Home*, so why? Just like his going to the communes, sitting in the purple haze of radical conversations, so here he is back sniffing the incense and watching candles suffer complacently...it is the *Vapor*, just that between him and it, this thing others call reality, he knows that only he sees it, senses it, so what could he say? "It's one molecule thick...." *Shit*...and so he knows that he is looking, being lead around and wordlessly told to see as the Vapors see, *see* jiltedly but in this ec-centric to capture a new perspective, then to brood upon it, but he is at a loss...all around him the world gets crazier, every tick, the war escalates, every tock, students are going insane, campuses are tornadoes and firestorms, all is scream and yell and curse... and he is Still.

It is this Stillness which is the crèche. Without a doubt, through the crèche he sees Her. Knows that he has never seen Her before. That no others see Her. She as backdrop. All focused upon the child, the Son, the son: Halo. And yet he knows that it is all about the Mothering of God. This celebration of Light is not so passive, no, it is a celebration of Fire, of her lust and desire, molten, dripping so thickly that she beds down Man, not man Her, not God her, but She god, she in this Mary, woman without husband, she is filled with the Fire, she cradles the Male, all that is Him is within Her, and she is there, cast-off, in a manager, mothering—yes, all that is Her is without and about Him: *Mother of All*. This he can see, exotically see, eccentrically see, jiltedly see...but it trails off with the Vapor...he has no need to speak about it to anyone, just celebrate it—his passage and menses.

So, it's a humbling again! Luke is acutely aware that he did not fully see, *Am I seeing what's happening?* Or still a Child of the Warriors, myself? Then Joe Mulligan—Fucking-A, a Jesuit!—sits down next to him, maybe because I wasn't smoking, not drinking, just a cup of java, Joe with a two-fisted java mug, nothing more, he sits there and starts telling me how he's seen me around, heard me rap: "Ask good questions, solid ones, but are you a doer as much as a thinker?" And he doesn't stop, later Luke knows Joe's been on a recruiting binge, yeah, working the communes and Resistance houses, staring into stoned eyes and pulling out hearts of courage, "Look, we can't stop the War, not in the Big Picture, we just don't have that type of time, so what we can do is throw sand into the machinery, hold them up a bit, give ourselves some time to organize, show other guys that The System is not invulnerable, that one person does make a difference"...and there was hardly a snippet of leftist doggerel or a spice of theological jargon—Could this guy really be a jebbie? Ha.—so Luke is tugged along, finds Father Joe to be making some sense, but not wanting to be with priests again! Yet, the humbleness of the crèche—how blind am I?...So he goes...but as never before searching...this time, trailing Vapors.

## CHAPTER 32: Paper

"Property! We must destroy property, something they value!"

"No! Never, don't you get it? It's the symbol we're after!"

"Fuck your symbols...!"

"Hey, back off you mad-dog sonofabitch Weatherman...!"

It was all Father Joe could do to keep them from attacking each other. Things had really gotten out of hand. *Problem is*, he'd say to his intimates, *is they're not Catholics*. Ha. Out here on the Prairie, all Joe has found are politicians, guys with Leftist raps, some—very, very few—with the passive non-resistance spirituality of Gandhi, but some Red Diaper Babies and scions of America's Protest Movements: spawns of textbook footnotes—Wobblies, Socialist Worker Party, some pre-Stalin Communists, all wrapped within Minnesota's own brand of Populism, not his kin, not the Apocalyptic-eyed Berrigans, the crazed prophets of The Non-Violent Cross, no, there was a sympathetic priest or two, who gave some money, harbored some draft dodgers on their way to Canada, but no East Coast fire-brands, those who burned their draft cards while in the clutches of the dragoons...no, maybe this Luke guy, but he's never said anything Catholic, just has the look....

Days of Rage. The Weathermen. Luke enjoys the Bob Dylan joke as much as anyone, "Don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows!"...but then The Weathermen obviously thought The Movement...*diarrhetic* as they labeled it!...needed not only a Weatherman but some Ass-Kickers too! Their rattling voice increased at each meeting Luke attends, gatherings open to anyone, Luke was not unaware of the lack of security, the foolhardiness of the open perimeter, but he let it go, watched it as sentinel...Father Joe he saw differently, not just his Catholic past, but something in the guy.

"Don't you see the power in the paper?" A statement Luke was sure had drawn dumbfaced responses more than once...Joe there holding a draft card in his hand, "Think about it! Every male...EVERY male no matter whether Joe Jock or a paraplegic or missing a leg or married or what, when 18, he has to register"—he waves the card about, over their heads: Luke sees him with the aspergillum, "Look. Think about what happened to the brothers who burned this—they ended up in federal prison!" Turning towards a testy fire-haired Weatherman whose eyes are mocking Joe's words, "There is no other piece of property which makes them go ape-shit but this!" He sticks it almost on the Weatherman's nose, "THIS is the symbol. Behind it is POWER. Behind it is VIOLENCE. Power and violence, you see clearly when you see how men, your brothers and so did your fathers, OBEY when this card calls. *Greetings!* it says," and Father Joe bends it inside his palm making the card mimic a mouth, "*Greetings!* it intones and men came running, stumbling over themselves to serve it. They fear it. Fear its power. The power to inflict living death—prison time." And the black-robe let it ride for awhile, sink in...Luke admired the passion, the commitment, here was a man who had seen, maybe was seeing, something different, not what everyone else saw, but he was dangerous, they knew he was dangerous, the prison sentences of the Berrigans sat atop his shoulders like the pirate's mimicky parrot...*Fuck!*...Joe himself had been locked up, four times, and was this instant awaiting a penitentiary sentencing of 18 months! 3 fucking years! Slow death by numbers!...no wonder they—feds and radicals—he scares them...then it became like his journey with Tring, before him was the battlefield, but instead of guns, there were words, words from the mouths of males, words which were their swords, swords to defend, blades to attack, but it was One's Self that was attacked and defended, and Luke saw the cocks—Christ, he wanted out of the room!—saw them flick their come from out their mouths, sizzling, hot leaded cocks, cocks spewing hatred, anger,

cowardice...but not Joe, no, not a dangling cock, *strange*, but he knew Joe knew, believed Joe half-saw...but all was blown to smithereens by a screaming voice...THEY KILLED THEM MURDERED THEM JESUS FUCKING CHRIST I CAN'T BELIEVE and he drops the Tribune with its bellowing headline 4 KILLED AT KENT STATE and no one had to read the text, just the picture, Her kneeling next to Him, an American Pieta, Sweetheart Weeping...it was the picture which said, "YOU!"...everyone in the room saw themselves in that picture, not weeping, but being wept upon...  
FUCKINGJESUSTHEYREKILLINGSTUDENTSNEWTHATNIXONWASCRAZYBUTTHI SISTOOFUCKINGCRAZAYMANIMEANIGOTTASPLIT...*gotta split!*

The meeting split, more, it shattered, people ran, not to get a copy of the paper, but to flee the image: War In Ohio, Stabbed In The Heart(land)...The Weathermen remained, two, one man, one woman: "Fucking-A Holy Joe, ain't no need for symbols no more! We needs guns! We'se needs DE-struck-SHUN!"..."Satisfaction Guaranteed!"...so the evening concluded with a small group remaining, its own type of remnant, Father Joe stayed, listened to all the monkey chatter about burning down the Draft Office, about taking employees as hostages, about holding the Office at gun point...and in time it all petered, the fear of the image was too strong, it made their coffee bitter, it locked away their desire to pass a joint, *coitus interruptus, impotentia*, Amen...Yeah, they were a subdued bunch, their wild-eyes tired, but a tiredness born of watchman's fatigue, an incorporeal wrestling with their deepest fear, that of death itself, not just career loss, not just doing time, but the *body on the pavement*... a student passing his Finals in *rigor mortis*...they remained, now but ten, there to work out the details...not caring to fine-tune the message...agreeing not to stay around and get arrested, rather to hit and run, to hit and run again...take down this Draft Office, then that...move around the State...a *Ring of Terror!*—sure Father Joe could let them talk, as long as they finally *did it*...that's all he wants...and Luke was in with them.

Maybe it had been the fear, maybe just the wildness of it all, like in battle you could run by your mother and not notice her, but it had been Jim who busted in with the news, Jim the paper-boy, he who Luke recognized, despite the long beard, despite the headband and beads upon his breast, Wind-chime of Buttons, yeah, Jim-boy—his eyes were filled with stories that Luke knew he had to hear, wanted to hear, he reaches out and touches him as the group begins to break, "It's me, Jim. *Luke*."...But was it the Vapors? Didn't he see him?

### CHAPTER 33: Ham

It was two in the morning before Luke began to see the clash about Jim's hands, colors of the rainbow but in a joust, not sure if it was simply high energy or agitated anger or just his tapping into so many sources—whatever dealing with Kent State had unleashed? Luke was still unsure how to work with the Vapors, how to mix the recipe, so to speak, his own brain hurt when he labored at it, more it was late, and he was wasted, just too tired, and so the spectacle of Jim's hands simply held him in naive fascination.

Jim came back from the kitchen holding two cups. "No more coffee for me, Man!"

"It ain't coffee," conveyed what Jim wanted it to, he holds the cup in invitation, held it as a bridge over the times spent apart.

"What's?"

Jim casually states as he sits down across from Luke, "Peyote."

*Why take this?* Haven't touched any sacred or profane blood since...hell, since the Cardinal. *I don't need this*. Don't want it. But looks at his hands, Man, they're pumping all green. Is it vegetative power? The energy from this plant? "Cactus, isn't it?" Jim smiles a child's

delight. Luke watches Jim down the gooey slick, punch it back like he did in old times with a beer, Done this before? Ha!

Luke sips and gags and spits, "Jesus, Man, this taste like shit!"

"Gotta throw it down, like a boilermaker, Man, just heave and suck!"

Obediently, Luke, entranced by the green energy, follows.

The music was low, something without words, within a heartbeat all sound arrives as colored birds—sometimes flushed out in flocks, others a singular beauty of form: elegant crane whites and pinks, fluttering greens and blues of hummingbird wilding, eagle swoop, glorious black and thump, all the while Luke's rational mind is laboring, wrestling with itself bounding about, racing towards amok, with each incremental thought afraid of its self-knowledge that it is about to be ejected from the game and found sitting in the bleachers...Jim had met him with frightened eyes, but Luke had written it off to the shared terror of Kent State, of the bolts of panic and horror blasting from the picture, the congealing image, but it had stayed too long, not at the center of his eyes but off to the side, always there like a blink.

When he introduced Zinga and their child—he already in bed, sleeping as children do the depths of cherubic bliss—one attached as instantly to angelic peace as to daimonic wrath—Luke could not but notice the agitation, the swirling, the twisting of time and place, a warping which became them, the three: this family, and despite himself he finds Zinga pressing her face against the Vapor...he is jolted, not so much terror as the invasion of privacy, what he once felt was his own, this experience...Does she see him? What is he seeing in her?...Yet, she moves about as if all this is not happening, rather she focuses upon the mundane recitations so common to married people—though she had been quick to reveal, not directly say, that they weren't married, "parents"...she keeps using the word, their only common name. For hours, Luke watched Jim bob and weave, grasp and slip under...what was he holding onto? Her? The child?...Now, all around him was a band of thick darkness, maybe six inches thick, six inches wide, a trail, a gyroscopic line—it moves as he moved, squiggly...serpentine?—was this Jim's source? His glue? Their bond?

"Ham."

She says it such that no jokes come to mind, no allusions to food, rather a stake into the ground, with magisterial authority. "I call him Ham because while in my womb I began to see with his eyes...eyes which let me see how a woman should live, how a black woman should live, how a White Man's Nigger should live..." and her voice dissipates in proportion as the heat from her body roasts the room and all in it. Luke is sweating profusely, but Jim is ice, cold, frigid, solid, congealed heat..."I told her it was a stupid name. Kids will call him Porky Pig or Ham and Eggs," turns to her with a paternally dismissive hand, "He'll grow up to hate the name, you wait and see!"

"Ham," and as the sound and echo form despite his conscious effort—an effort slumbering away, cactus pricked—the reading comes sailing back like a refrain, words in The Master's voice, "Cursed be Canaan, a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." A dream he had never liked, always driven to nausea, once asking The Master about *why?*—"Ham saw his father, Noah, naked. How do you interpret that?" The young friar had read and so repeated the standard interpretations that, "It was a sin of disrespect. Disobedience. He was not to go into his father's tent. Some say shame, that he shamed his father." The Master drew his hands into a prayerful grasp, "True. But look deeper," he felt confident that Friar Alfred should look deeper. "What does his father do in his tent?" Alfred was perplexed, The Master respected his innocence but knew it as the guise which must be stricken. "Noah procreates in his tent. And Ham seeks to

usurp his father's paternal power. This is not only a sin but blasphemy! For the son is the seed, he did not create himself. Can you see how Ham is defying The Father and laying a claim to a power which is only Yahweh's?" Alfred's mystified look only drew The Master ever forth, "Ham must learn that we are all slaves. That Yahweh is the only true Master. We are never free. Do you grasp that my young Thomist? Our sonship is an enslavement." And as is not uncommon when a great insight is bequeathed, the receiver focuses on an issue which reduces it all to trivia. "But then why was Ham made black?" Sternly, "You're being distracted! That is an inference from the word Canaan. It's a racial interpretation—what you mustn't miss is that Ham saw what his brothers would *never* see...and Noah did not slay him. He was like Abraham. He did not slay Ham. In fact Ham bore Noah's descendants. What does that mean?" Quick to appear the ever-perceptive apprentice, Alfred quips, "Yahweh is a forgiving father! That this story presages the coming of Jesus, the son who frees us from slavery?!" This blurt and re-energizing of the story towards the Christ takes The Master by surprise yet instantly reveals how far the young friar has yet to dream. "Yes, that could be inferred. But take the story as it is, in its own setting, on its own terms." He pauses, then, proceeds, "Ham entered the tent and he sees Noah. But what does the story not tell? What can only be known through the dream?" He peers through the friar, drawing a draught from the dreaming-well, even here in just a one-on-one The Master evokes the dreaming...it is why he is Master. "Ham sees his mother. Also naked. Was not Sarah present on Moriah? Was it not her voice which was termed angelic?...Dream on this, my son. See as Ham saw."

It had been the first time Luke had found the dream to be but what was not said in The Book. Yes, by the time of this conversation he had begun to dream Eve's Dream—at least as The Brooders dreamt it Her dream—one of yearning, absolute, deep, so much a without, an emptiness that it was best described as a craving, searing desire, yes, the word had been his dream word, remembered by Friar Alfred, forgotten by Luke-not-Alfred, the word—*cannibalism*. And here the seed, so it comes now, now the peyote, his not desiring to dream but to forget, hop onto a freight train of forgetfulness, to take him into momentary pleasures, vivid Pointillist landscapes, deep-watered emotions, cold and hot, fiery, thundering, yet all pleasure...he had willed pleasure before he entered Peyote, but it was not just the psychedelic of detachments past, no, it was a guide, a key to other doors...and it is to Eve that he comes dreaming, finding her with waterfall of babbling golden hair, fluid hair, streams...but as he approaches she turns and all is blood upon her face, running blood, rivulets, cascades, falls, all down and almost nullifying her form, yes, vivid blood, crimson of the psychedelic hue, intense, around him like a living thing, all the air, and he is breathing the blood, encloded by it, consuming it, being it...the scene twists and beside him is Zinga, she now Zinga but totally white, blazoning, white of the alabaster cool and smooth, he fears to touch her, to touch the beauty, the power of her line, and from her eyes are diamond-stares, wondrous looks, eyes which light up all about, and through her eyes he sees the essence of all things, the heart beat of plants, the song of rocks, the dance of hope...and it is a yearning, all yearning, but it is him yearning, and once again he feels that he is because of her, *somehow he is her desire*, Him from Her, a tension which is strange, uncommon to his memory, for it is the awareness as of the Story Untold, he now the emptiness, the obliteration, in himself the air about the skin, the void about the fullness, the withdrawal which defines power, inward, like the form, like line, what falls from an uncupped hand.

When he awoke or stopped dreaming or whatever, but with a heightened sense of clock reality, he gets-up and goes into the kitchen, Jim is brewing another pot of coffee. Luke knows



Jim knows he's there, but Jim just stands immobile, statuesque with only fingers moving, swirling the cup, two creams, two sugars: *Jim*.

"Beautiful kid."

"If beauty is the source of pain, yes."

"Whoa! My philosopher roommate returns, Ha!"

"Are these still the times for jokes?...I thought Nam would have shown you the cruelty of the source."

"Or the source as cruelty. *No?*"

He turns and hands Luke an empty cup. Luke steps up and pours himself plain.

"So, we've plundered life and learned all the truths!"

"Been plundered, don't you think?"

"She been that hard on you?"

"Another joke?"

"Shit, you're alive, god-dam it, that counts for something these days."

"But isn't that the curse? That we have to live?!"

"Fucking-A, Man, you've got a wife, a kid...."

"And dope. Its a triumvirate. Dope. The Holy Trinity. Or maybe the Unholy Trinity.

(Pause) Ya know Luke, at times I feel like Abraham...but just before walking...shit!" He slurps his brew and instantly prepares another.

Zinga enters.

"It's 3 a.m. Aren't you coming to bed?" A question asked not as in *Quaestiones Disputates* but as of one lost, looking for the road.

"Yeah, coming."

There was no black band around them, no steely thrust from her eyes, just a babe in a crib so quiet, two folks folding themselves into a common wrap. He hardly heard them crash into sleep, no dreams from them came to entertain him.

"Ham." The word was fraught with childish humor. Just a ham-hock floated through his mind, a cut off body part, ready to be baked, skewered and put on the spit. Yet it then became the child, a piglet in a blanket...What did he see? That which was not written down? But must have been passed on by the oral tradition? What was heard when it was not spoken? Ah, the clarity of the air now left unpsychedelic. Peyote had washed him out, beat and pounded upon him, driven him up and down, in and out of his senses, and so he is again plain, clear, things just came together like line art, geometry, two points, one straight line, three lines, a triangle, many, varied, even just three is All Complexity, yet it is all Line and so Simple...She was not before Adam laid down, but could this be? She but his rib, even if from his cock...but if in him and so from him then had to be in him when Adam was created? She had to be at least *in potentia*! Hmm. And if Adam was from Yahweh, was what was in him of Her yet part of Him?...Even if just as forgetfulness, if as obliteration, as if Nothing, the Emptiness...Stillness...so it comes, and the child Isaac, and the child Ham condemned and cursed by their father, fulfilling a need in their Father...even if not an Action, not the slaying, not the impotency of seed...*is that it?* The Master had baffled him about Ham's generating offspring for Noah. What Noah had cursed in Ham yet lived on? Was this what Zinga tapped into?...Luke stayed awake wondering till the child woke chattering the code which stirred his parents.

### **CHAPTER 34: The File Cabinet**

As they gathered in preparation Luke begins to sense that he is part of a cartoon. It was all just so incredibly weird-funny, not Ha-Ha but almost silly. Here were ten people making to

attack the government, *The U-S of A!*—to slay with a philosophical sword a Moloch of atomic power. The image of David with slingshot just couldn't gain serious entry to his mind, rather that of a play did, actors behind the screen—high-school theater: "Our Town."

"We agreed, no hammers."

"Fuck Off!" flew on a rigid finger. Father Joe backs off, it was too late. He could only control those who wanted to be controlled, the Weathermen were on their own. How to detail to a bug-eyed Chairman Mao/Marx/Lenin/Kim Il Sung/Uncle Ho worshipping dialectician that one could only become nonviolent if he had dealt with his violence? Shouldn't it be more clear to these gimpy Nietzscheans that nonviolence was a way of dealing with violence, not its avoidance, not its parrying, not a whimpering but a gusto, the macho of macho, going one beyond The Duke, more strut in one's stroke?...Ah, for Joe the Cross was the most violent of blows, St. George slaying the Dragon, slicing the serpent, Satan...but lost was this tongue among those for whom the dialectic, conflict, The Clash, yes, even the Apocalypse was a linear event, historical, something they thought they could effect, produce: A plus B equal C...ah, if only they had ever been slain through prayer....

Luke had agreed to ride with Jim and Father Joe. Jim, his bud, thinking about old times, maybe he should take a run of *Jack* and some *Hamms*? Naw, that would be just for show, beside Joe didn't and Luke felt he shouldn't..was it Playland and the adventure of Pirate's Cove? "Get real, Man," hammered through his head.

Their trip would take just half-an-hour. Out and up to Anoka. The other seven were spread out in three other towns: four teams, North, South, East and West—lending itself to a nice graphic, a box around the Twin Cities, something that would look good on TV. It had been Joe's selection, Luke wondered if he had marked the four winds...or anchored it in some other sacred symbolism? Didn't want to ask. He and Joe had not slipped into their shared priestly world, *incognito*, Luke was just riding. Yeah, riding here, observing Joe, that's why I'm here, gotta be..."Little Red Riding Hood!"

Jim had cased the Draft Board, drawn a map, sketched a timeline, and arranged for all the paraphernalia: flashlights, screwdrivers, tape, a hand torch to break the glass, a glass scratcher, whatever. When they drew into the alley, it was as quiet and moon-clear as a small town can be. But, luckily, it was a moon now and then hidden by thick clouds, a July blustery night, a bit cold, the clash of fronts foreboding rain, so now very moist and they perspired...under this moon-dim they climbed a fence, boosted themselves up onto a roof, leaned over and jimmed a window—old wood, ancient screws yearning to be free—and one by one they threw a leg then an arm then all of themselves into the room. When they gathered by Jim's light he directed them out the door by pointing with the beam. All enter the hallway, Jim tapes, scratches, torches and pops a glass door panel, all are inside.

For Jim it is orderly conduct. He proceeds to one of the six file cabinets, jams the lock with a driver and then pops it out. The papers he gathers without examination and drops into a plastic garbage bag. He knows what he has to do...moves expertly, mentally checking off his list of To Dos.

For Luke it was still funny-weird. Not psychedelic. Certainly not Nam. But he did feel like he was on stage acting. Simply, he follows Joe.

For Holy Joe it is magical, maybe for a non-doper it was what dope does, whatever, Luke could see his skin change, actually enlarge, become filled, swelled by some power, some energy source, his eyes, they became ferret eyes but like ferret lighthouses, thrusting out a searching beam, and when he opens his file cabinet it is bodies, bodies and their parts, blood gurgling to

the floor, sounds of dead men's eyes closing...Luke is amazed, feels Tring at his backside, there watching as Joe engages The Enemy, grabs a cluster of files as if strangling a demon, lust in his eyes, slayer lust, and his hair flames, brightens the room...Luke knows Joe is truly mad, holy mad, sacral, remembers the phrase, "Holy Nonviolence," and it all makes sense, for him the paper is soul, the souls of many, for him to be here is to be the agent of Resurrection, of bestowing the saving life...yeah, Joe is at this moment priest as Luke had seen it but by severe glimpses in the seminary, there mostly among the very newly ordained or the very old, seemingly never the others in between, just the extremes—was it a vision which just enticed? Enticed and captured?...and then Enticed and released?...Thoughts which yelled for a life of their own, but which do not live in Luke's hands: the files he stashes are simply files, he is aware of the slumping weight of his bag.

It was over in a snap, click, fillip, twenty minutes tops. Driving back down to the City Jim actually slipped into bored, as if timing out from a shift at the factory. Luke thought it would be drama, but it was a One Act Play...which at its core was—he had to admit—a tad comedic, a blush vaudevillian. There was a humor in grown men risking their lives to snatch some paper. *Didn't they have copies?* Wouldn't those whose files were destroyed just come back and register again? I mean the Fear of not registering—didn't the government have Fear on its side? So, why am I here? To watch a renegade priest encounter the technological treasure trove of his god? Was he here to really see Joe ordained? Did that really matter? Luke liked Joe, actually knew inside that he admired him, but Joe's trip was just that, a head-trip, a soul-trip which Luke didn't want to take...Jim flips on—of all things!—Gregorian Chant...*Fucking-A!* it's the monks from The Towers, in sonorous praise, male worship...just comedy, Man, just slapstick comedy!

In time, they had shifted down to laughter, a coffee stop and release into idle chatter, hearing a moaning Nashville country wail of "He done me wrong!"...and when Jim bolts up and hurries back to the car, Luke and Joe don't give it a moment's note, just call for refills and kick back one more level of chatter...so, Joe was about to probe into Luke's psyche when the flashing lights arrived like the displaced voice of the morning greeter, "Benedicamus Domino!"...before Luke or Joe could utter, "Deo Gratias!" they were looking up gunpoint and being embraced by steely bracelets of Law and Order.

In the Hennepin County jail signs could have been posted, "Sauna," and no one would have laughed. The air was like belly-jelly. The mattress he laid upon was as much a sponge of broken dreams as one which exhaled moisture. Jesus, a fucker could choke on this shit! But there were more serious distractions: What did they do with Joe? Where was Jim? What happened to the others? Alone in the holding cell, Luke begins to like this peculiar tragic-comedy. Begins to feel the weight of the night: serious, odd, peculiar, frightful, quite jilted. Senses the presence of an old, well, not foe or friend, maybe attendant—the eyes of the walls pierce him, the arms of the wall strain to strangle him, the ceiling and floor plot and conspire to squash him...it was pure blood-pounding hate, Warrior Hate, the hatred of the captured, of The Enemy, Satan, how the monastic cell hated and Alfred hated...he now Enemy, and the room flares like the Draft Board, but here came other monks, smoldering monks, ghostly apparitions, monks of the Sword of the Gun of the Grenade of the Missile Lock....yeah, he thrilled at it, but yet he was tempered, protected—the Vapors, both allowing him to see, read these fading symbols on the wall, the symbols of this forgotten tongue, the tongue which Lies...ah, the virgin violence of the place—Holy of Holies of Sacral Violence!—this all in one night? He laughs at himself, shouldn't I be beset by terror?...*Come! Come! Come you all, bright and fiery bastards, take your best shot!!*...the Vapors! He is humbled by his own buffoonery, sees himself as he knows the Cager

wants him to be, yeah, they have locked onto his hatred, touched the scars of the Cardinal on his breasts, yes, but it is short-lived, the Vapors protect him, this he knows, knows not how, knows he must wait, calm down, watch the fire, respect it...a dousing fear for Joe slaps at him. *JOE!* he yells, out the bars, down the hall, "JOE!"...knowing that Joe must be in torture...no, maybe rapture? Give it a rest, yeah, "Shut the fucking hell up you lousy cocksucking motherfucker!" Ah, the call of Compline! The nightly benediction of the incarcerated...and so Luke finds a not uncommon sleep.

In the morning Joe and Luke are brought into an interrogation room. No cuffs. No chains. Even offered coffee. Two uniformed officers and one self-identified prosecutor enter as their sunrise escorts leave. "This can be simple," says the prosecutor, "Just plead guilty and you'll get off with eighteen months." Neither Luke nor Joe speak; not surprised?...Need I ask to see an attorney? Or is it the comedic repartee? "And what if we don't plead?" asks Luke. "Five years, minimum," said with his best death-penalty tone. Joe calmly asserts, "Not guilty." Luke, to his own surprise, turns on Joe and remarks, "Is anyone not guilty?" But in a quicker breath Luke is one voice with Joe, "Not guilty, Man. That's it. Case closed." But in his mind he can't believe that this is really happening. Jail! For Christ-sake, motherfucking jail, a cage...what a fucking bore! Yet where is he to go? Wasn't doing much out there, was I? Just floating around. Maybe the Vapors mean for me to be here?...A shred of fatigue falls across his eyes, a weary sigh.

"Okay. Send them back." That's how it was supposed to go, but Luke never got back to his former cell. Rather, he was intercepted by someone he took to be a lawyer or another prosecutor, a man who said to Luke—an instant amusement—"Jennings. I'm Colonel Faddington. Come with me."...Christ, it is all a Farce! But, wait! The tone of a Semper Fi?! Now, it was becoming a bit more of a black comedy than Luke cared to act in...shit, Luke could hear the music, the canned laughter: "I Love Lucy!"—*Fucking-A, Man!*

The next room was upper-bracket bureaucratic: spotless rug, plump couch and decorator drapes on the window. *Control Center*: a ponderous oaken desk but a tad off center. Luke was directed to go in by himself, the Colonel pulling back for a moment and soft-voicing a command to someone unseen. In a minute he's back, pulls out a pack, taps one and offers to Luke. "No thanks."

Before they engage in conversation, a light knuckle-rap-a-tap signals the entry of another player: it's Jim. JIM! Luke is really glad to see him, he looks fine, starts thinking about Zinga and Ham, begins to feel like he has to get Jim free, bust him out, do his time..."Is this the guy?" asked not of Jim but of Luke. "Guy?" "Yes, the one who organized the operation?" Lie? Would it help? Get him off? Lessen the deal? "Naw, he was just a hanger-on, Man."

And then trying for images of reprieve, "Look, he's just one of those airheaded seminarian-types. An idealist. Too much maryjane, Man, I talked this Hippie fool into this stuff. He didn't want to go, ya know, not risk his ass...has a wife and kid." Hoping that the wife and kid bit would evoke some sympathy, but all the Colonel does is laugh, a lusty guffaw, and with it he waves Jim away.

"Jennings, you're one screwy Marine. Did you think you could just leave your assignment...like you dropped out of The Towers?" His question revealed layers of knowledge, Luke knew it was linked to his dossier, that this Colonel was not in Minneapolis just on holiday...shit, what has been going down?

"At least your friend has loyalty." Luke hears them...*betrayal* sits down, it broods, "Reel 777—roll it!"...*Fucking-A, Jim burned them!* The Colonel can see that his code has been deciphered. "Yes, but don't get too upset, he's quite a practical lad, rests his loyalty upon the

diplomatic trade, certain negotiations, don't you see?" But Luke's perplexed look forces the Colonel to preach it loud and clear. "Your friend got busted on a big dope deal. He's been one of the major conduits into this region for years. Look, you didn't know. We know that. But you helped us. We didn't expect you to show up. But he had so many contacts in The Company—not that he knew that—but he got tied into the heroin trade, and, it went, I think he thought you were part of that." "Jesus," is all Luke can utter, not a prayer, not a curse, more like "Eureka!" a word of discovery, but one muted, of a discovery one doesn't want to make.

It began to drop. Jim must have thought Luke had come back as a spy. A friendly. One burrowing in on behalf of those in the military who had become partners in the Golden Triangle, Luke had heard about all that, but it never crossed his mind. Jim must've given him the peyote hoping for a leak. But, wait I found Jim, he didn't find me! Shit, he must've been more shocked to see me than I was to see him? Hmmm. But Jim a snitch?! Christ, this is too fucked up. Wish I could talk with him.

"Look," the Colonel brings him back to jailed reality, "Pay attention, Jennings. My mission here has little to do with your friend. I just wanted to see what type of guy you were Jennings." He pauses, surveys Luke, pierces him, but withdraws with a frustrated, perplexed sigh. "Hell, I can never figure you Black Ops guys!" Then in hurried fashion he hands Luke a small manila envelope, Department of the Defense stamp, "Top Secret" red-stamped, hands it, pulls back into a salute—mockery? a distant drum?—and Luke with trained reaction stands and salutes, *Theater of the Absurd!*

An empty room, no cuffs on, one unopened envelope, now opened—simply an Honorable Discharge. Rank of Major! *Fucking-A, Major Luke Jennings, U.S.M.C.* Jesus! Someone tidying up the paperwork! Man, I should frame this! Sits down, spreads and stretches his legs, leans back, almost dozes, he is nowhere, wanting nothing, just on the other side of all this craziness. Five years! What a circus...but this time without a rap the door opens...it's Jim, manacled, leg irons, a prison guard, uniformed, shuts the door as he exits, just one plus one.

"Man, look, we'll get out of this."

Lies, is he gonna lie to me?

"I appreciate your trying to take the blame, but..." Yeah, his dark band, gyrating as he speaks, his feelings—Jesus! two serpents, no, twin-headed, biting itself, venomous.

"Look motherfucker I know about your deal...you fucking dopehead. Why didn't you stop with booze? What possessed you to become a snowman?"

The flow of honest lying: "Who told you?...Shit, who cares. You're gonna take a fall, Luke. I didn't expect you to show up...why were you so stupid as to get involved? I thought you'd come to hate these Hippies and half-cocked Radicals?"

"Was it for Zinga? Ham?"

Their names work like voodoo magic, Jim quivers and shakes, his chains clink and rub metal—"Zinga? That bitch. I hate that bitch. Do you know why she won't marry me? Because I bet the kid's not mine. Shit, I wouldn't marry that nigger's ass if I had to..." and venom just seethes, venom spiced with pain, late hours of great misunderstandings..."Did this for them? *Fucking-A, Man, I did it so I can get away from them! Drop her some bag money and split. You think you know my deal? Well, asshole, you don't. I'm gonna live a life you'll only dream of...*" but then he closed down, like a coal mine disaster, all tunnels of communication blocked, foul gas only leaking.

"The charade's over. Take your slave props and get the fuck outta here." Not shouted, not even angry, just dismissal. *Luke doesn't like Jim one bit.* In a wink, Jim is gone, out of the room, out of his life, out of his mind..."Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!"

*What's next?* Need something to eat. Do I wait here? Fuck, I could use some sleep. Go call down the hall? Hell, just walk down. So, he enters the corridor, sees the EXIT sign, and a wall sign with arrow BOOKING. He follows the logic of the walls and floor. To the sergeant staffing Booking he asks, in his craziest falsetto voice ever, "Yoo-hoo! Can I leave?" Half-expecting a boot in the butt he steadies himself by holding the desk's edge. "Jennings?"...softly inquired. "Yeah." Another envelope, manila, but this time larger, no stamps, just plain. "Here's your stuff." And as the monastery porter was so trained to do, he gently informs, "You can leave whenever you want." Yeah, there was an amused edge to his "whenever."

So, Luke's out of jail, leaning against a North Country granite balustrade of Justice, and taking out his minutiae: wallet, pocket watch, belt, loose change...and yet *another letter*. This time not manila, just long and white, no name, no return address. Curious: high quality linen stock, with watermark, but Luke doesn't notice this. A short note, handwritten, not signed: "One Condition: Kiss Your Mom But Leave Minnesota Tomorrow. Don't return until you hear from us." And indeed, just like in the movies, Humphrey Bogart gets a plane ticket, this time he and Ingrid are gonna make it, kick the other Scandinavian asshole in the butt and fly off with the babe ...yeah, a one way ticket to San Diego. "San Diego," he mutters to himself, "Why the fuck San Diego?"

## **PART FOUR: THE BODYWANDERER**

### **CHAPTER 35: The Beach**

Luke came to like the ABA's three-point shot, showboating on the playground—"From downtown!"—now, another dazzler to add, almost as deadly as his own Sweet Spot just inside that line, from there a swish with net swaying like a Go-Go dancer's hips, hmm, it opened the inside, the paint, this he liked even more, had been too, too often frustrated by the zone, collapsing, collapsing universe of hands and feet, grunts and shoves...yeah, the ABA had a weird ball, but then what wasn't weird? Name changing all about: Cassius to Ali, Lew to Kareem, hordes of Swahili tags, Muslim hyphenations, these on the courts, but slam dunking made the players all the same: "Big Man drops the bomb!" He laughs and renames himself "Honkey Tonk!" Yeah, California was great, all outside, no cave dwelling, no time in the shade, just blaring eyeball days, everything lit up, clean, shaved and cleaned like bikini legs—what was there to not like?

*Not like himself?* Naw, just can't sit still, this year rioting up and down my arm just as those years did, *cool!*, riot, but out here, San Diego, actually a small town, a speck, a slip one-mile wide, running from coast to foothills, a curious spot, a slice, just rimming the North County, so slender that it didn't appear on many general State maps, yeah, AnoMar, a California name, no, a "Southern" California name, but it fit him, at least his spot, Sea Year, feeling that he's been out to sea, how else to account for all the ups and downs, the swells and crashes, the sudden maelstroms and the consequent wiping out of what was just there, just a moment ago?

The scholar in him often teased him—shit, tortured!—about the storyline, how to capture the ebb and flow, which were the significant events, what was the overall meaning? No longer stabbing himself with booze or dope to stem the tide of painful memories, rather he let the sun say something. And it said, "Clear." The day is clear. In Southern California, especially AnoMar,

there is no weather, just paradise...so no weatherman and no Dylan tune...but it wouldn't go away, the absurdity, that is, Violence and Dope pledged eternal fidelity, and as such the Weathermen boosted the Avatar of Psychedelics, one Timothy Leary, from jail, then the dope-of-dopers flees the country, turns-around and rats on his Liberators...*ain't that THE Sixties' Parable?*...Or, a harbinger of the political vision, moral character and spiritual courage of the Children of the Warrior? *Maryjane's Children*...yeah, yeah, cynicism, but despite it all, Luke ponders—*Shouldn't the clouds of the Sixties yield to a clear view?*

Clear, not as in superficial, not as in unblemished skin, not the prancing of the Playmate babes at the beach, shit, he liked them, drooled like every other red-blooded American jackal, but it was clear as in see-everything, the sunlight like a pervasive spotlight, no shadows, but this did not really mean no shadows for, as Luke knows so well, everything is its opposite, and only in the land which claims no weather is there weather, which claims no clouds are there clouds, which claims no shadow is there the shadow...and from beneath the shadow, so his Brooder training had instilled, was the Shade, that medium for the dream, that which is the other side which makes this side possible, yeah, maybe only here he could see the Sixties, here which was, on its face, anything but the Sixties, so much The Dream that it was, truly, The Nightmare.

Often he'd go stand at sundown on a decaying jut of land, favoring it because it was symbolic of how the surface was not a clear indicator of the underground, yeah, you can participate but you don't necessarily understand—he yells—You can stand witness but not know what you're witnessing to...then picks up a rock or two and throws them, not angrily, just launching back into the Ocean, a bit of timeless Space Age humor, being in two places at the same time, that's what humans can do—time travel through thought, space travel through taking a rock which is here and putting it there, still being one with the rock—*Man on the Moon*—always was!...feeling the act of throwing, never forgetting the act of throwing, never ever not throwing...and he himself the Ocean never ever stopped....

In time Lieutenant Calley was found guilty of murdering during wartime. Manson was sentenced to death for murdering during peacetime. The war which had never ended was touted as ending, again, but it didn't...the Weathermen—earnest children of the affluent as they were—bombed the Senate bathroom...at last, *scatologically correct political action!* Luke savors the image, an image incensing his memory of the time, maybe the Smell of the Times...and he wonders about his generation, knowing from Prof. Sweeney's class on "The Literature of the Lost Generation" how aptly inept any generational title actually is, yet, how should The Sixties be remembered? How would he remember it? The Generation which did not want to procreate—all Love as Sex and all Free so in bondage to condoms and pills and, now, AMA approved abortion needles..."Trust no one over 30!"...what will they do when 31?..."Will you still need me, will you still feed me when I'm 64?"...hmm, some contradictions there...growth, maturity...*ineffable stupidity?*

It was his body which would guide him, a body held as his flesh came to be, as the instrument of his transformation, and so he begins to touch himself, no, not self-abuse—such a term!...not because it isn't accurate but because of how it had been applied, and it was for him to apply it anew, hmm, not new as from the old, rather it was the Vapors, so his sight was skewed, jilted again...Yes, in the sun he comes closer to himself, was forced to look down upon himself and so gaze upon his layers. Did some lecher throw the word Adonis over him? Probably. Did others stand in awe at his bronze fluidity? Sure, on the court, just a breechcloth tethering modesty, and he gliding here, floating there, glinting them to blink as the sun bounces and frolics within his muscular dance. Yet he found so much more to ponder—his numerous imperfections

of moles and scars, a waterfall of freckles on his back, the thicker set of his right as compared to his left foot, add the blemish on his left eyelid, and back-hair that laughed as cows licked...but all of him, together it was all of him, and *the whole universe had travailed to bring him forth!*

There on the beach it had struck him. All creation had groaned so that he could be there, it wanted him, desired him, yearned for him, enjoyed him, rejoiced in him...ah, the tyranny of the past lashed out at him, hours in Confession admitting to the weakness of the flesh, to its corruptness, to the fact that it had betrayed itself even in thought...here on the beach they live as one: body warm and body cold...a cloud over the sun and the chilly blue finger of death delighted...a foot in the sand and who but the poet could deny that all was but decay?...the look about and seeing, seeing them all, all in their forms: old, young, wrinkled new and wrinkled old, gimpy, broken, furious and mad...but which was not in his body...but wait! *wait!* The Beach—is this what it is about, that they had forgotten the beach, or at least walked away, not standing where water meets land, where air surrenders and captures, where sight is skyless but yet truly horizoned....Did *they* mean to send him to The Beach?

### **CHAPTER 36: The Last Hero**

News from home was like hearing noises at the end of a tunnel, not a train tunnel but like that twisted copper horn old timers used before hearing aids, information settling to noise and clatter at the thinning neck, only drops getting through, it seemed like he was hard of hearing, well, maybe not just as interested in hearing, but there were somethings he wanted to know...moments when Rian flashed, when Jim hung like a picture on the wall, but not them, they didn't come, Father Joe did. "The Minnesota Eight"...so he reads, that's what they were called, some clippings from his mother, at his request, she not knowing why, just glad to keep in touch with her wayward—*Sweet Jesus protect him!*—rather, wandering son. "Five years!" Wow, Nixon was shooting his silver bullet, driving the stake into the bloodless vampire of Resistance, Luke could see the faces on them all, yeah, faces like the dead, like the whores in Saigon: eyes fixed, not seeing, staring into the not just unknown but the unknowable dread...but he knew it as just another twist in their journey...yet, still unanswered was, Why had he been with them?

*Who sent him this?* Been awhile since this manila envelope stuff, as expected, sure, no name, no return address, a copy of "Hundred Flowers"—Minnesota's leading underground newspaper falls out, lead article, "If you don't suck cock, you can't be a true revolutionary." Someone had red-lined it. Pauses a moment, anything's possible, maybe it's a fake, like those funny newspapers at the State Fair, or maybe the final statement, the summing up—it makes sense to him, on their own terms, coming back around full term—the Warrior Culture reveals itself without pretense, no immodesty, as the true Sexual Warrior: the gay, the homosexual — what else but love without women, complete auto-eroticism, was this not how the Father had created Adam, out of His own stuff, not from Her?...One-hundred Flowers: Mao's Cultural Revolution, wasn't this where Luke should have gone? All his Mandarin studies? Even as a spy in LA: Chinatown, would've made sense, would've fit in with all the Purgation, Purification, Confessions or The Revolution—or was there any turnings? new twists? Or Mao just like the Pope, a crusader, an evangelical, just man-made with no pretense about god-made, just a less imaginative theology, hmmm, did they fear I'd convert? OSO to MAO?...Sure they beat up on Fags, and wasn't Jesus a fag? Sweet on Saint John and all that? Ha, the old rumor mill at the seminary had choked on that one! But what else but this flowering of maleness, this final culmination of the war in the hero who lives only by the cock, for the cock, in the cock, through the cock...?



But it was the other story that caught him, tied it together with this one, a copy of the *Minneapolis Star* which he picked up now and then at the International Kiosk on the pier: papers from around the globe, and so he knew that Minnesota was still in the world, not only his dreams, and it was about paper again, this time The Pentagon Papers...toilet paper trail, so he reads, paper with crap on it, stinking all the way back to World War Two...am I being surprised by this? And who is this guy Ellsberg? A plant? A spy? Just a wisp of a body, with a Mafioso sidekick, "Ant-toon-eee" Russo...is everything just Hollywood scripting?

Luke goes to the beach.

*Cock and paper.* The fact of these two things in his life doesn't elude him, won't let him lie in the sun and free the ocean breeze to empty his mind, no, cock and paper, all around him, paper-thin wafers which were body, "Hic est enim corpus meum," he had often tripped over that, feeling it like paper dissolving, not flesh—but then who had ever eaten flesh?...still, draft cards and disembodied souls, yet souls nevertheless, now the shameless simplicity of guys just toting their cocks in public and calling it a Revolution, shit, it's just a clarification, an expose...well, it's not my concern...but hell it ain't, asshole! So, what does this guy Ellsberg do? Does he know he's tracing down the history of cock? Was he frightened one night by all the hard-faced dicks which replaced the pages in McNamara's grand study?—ah, ever the fool, thank god for the Fool!...sending his Whiz Kid troop to paper a justification for his war and only popping out this jaybird, this Ellsberg guy, the one, so it says, who read the whole study...would he see it like sucking cock? the whole cock? all the paper which was the cock of war? hmmm, probably not...but he'd have to pay, Luke was sure about this—they were going to get this Ellsberg guy. For the embarrassing Hippie-Weirdo-Faggot-Freaks like the "Minnesota Eight," Nixon would lock them up, let the System ream their assholes! But for this Ellsberg guy...Luke stares at his picture, the sun is cruel upon the ink, yeah, he *doesn't know*, that's why he's a hero: The Last Hero...because he was their hero—All American Kid—and he's truly—*Fuck, he's a true heart!*— trying to save them...Saviors here and Saviors there!...Luke folds both newspapers neatly, stashes one inside the other, gets up off his blanket and walks to the trash bin.

*Is it really that easy?* Consider it all paper: constructed of paper—Constitutions, Martial Decrees, Acts of War, Declarations of Peace...all paper—are humans becoming paper? feeling like paper?...Yeah, it was supposed to be the Word, something breathed, something heard by common ear, but they turned it into paper, a book, The Book, and as book to be read by just one, not needing other's eyes or ears or heartbeats...it was a thundering insight—paper which became the reality, more treasured than people, to live not by the Word but by Holy Script, to live not by loyalty and patriotism but by possessing a draft card: *sacramentum* of The Paper Generation...the collision, unfortunately, in his head wasn't paper-thin!

No. *No*, and he presses his pulse, this is his heritage, yes, we are heartbeat, movement, thump and pound, and if not thump and pound then we are dead, this is the beach: thump and pound, even if just microscopically so it will be macroscopically...thump and pound...do I know this as the pulsation from within the Dark Vapors? What Dark Vapors? *Am I such a fool?*...Yeah, I'm a fool, face it, capital F *Fool*—tricked and tricking, laughing into the pain...yeah, it's over, you know that a Father cannot create a Son from within himself, no use sucking one's own penis!...yeah...*yeah*, and Luke lays upon the sand, a wind blows, moist laden sun, fire and sky...it whirls about him, a swirling of sand, a storm of dust.

## **CHAPTER 37: Disease**

Even on the beach could Luke have so tricked himself as not to believe that they would reach him, that his brethren among The Brooders had not held on to the tails of his fleeing coat?

That for them The Beach was truly the End, not just another launching area for new conquests, discoveries? The Pacific not really pacifying?!...Yes, Catholicism as he had known it, it in its deeply Jansenistic, crucified Celtic roots, in its tangles in the Northern European psyche, such Catholicism had indeed all but died by the Mississippi and but dallied at the foothills of the Rockies, never truly making it across the Great Divide, not here, ironically, in the land of the Sun-god, but was he as stupid to think that their invisibility meant a lack of presence? Had he forgotten all he had known about their dreaming?...*It would seem so.*

Not to be denied, angry at his insulting forgetfulness, enraged by this pretense of Dark Vapors, their steely Brooder hands reach out...for him...the King most Anguished lends out his crown and seething headaches flag him, sap him, pound him so that the surf is not heard, only felt within, for him the Son most Flaileed sends his most trusty floggers and his body screams with muscle cramps of toes curling this way and that, of calves like buckling copper plates, of a neck like wrought iron, twisted, so contorted that his head looks like Giacometti's iron-tortured-iron-screaming-iron-terrified statue of St. John the Baptist in the nave at The Towers, all his body: bowels like liquid, blood like fire, a pulse which races, then drops dead, chills, *Sweet Jesus the chills!* as if ice cubes were raining, thundering from an Arctic volcano, each and everyone sticking to him like velcro...and then Her, Madam, Madonna, Mother and Maiden, She of the Innocence Blush, it is her digits as iron tongs that squeeze him, make him jerk into fetal recoil fearing that to unfold would find his testes but sand dripping down...Her face comes to him at these moments, moments of her punishment for his betrayal...his usurpation of Her Darkly Vapors...*ha!* in his pain he cannot laugh, it is imprisonment in the psychedelic and Luke believes that he is truly mad: "Mind over Matter"—oh, how he wishes it could be, but what is his body doing? Now still the chalk-board for their dreaming...he is fouled, filthy, cannot control his bowels, stench, all around his room, even his shower stall, just too, too many times, it smells like an unkept toilet bowl...if he could only walk, only stand—Why am I dying, *now?* Did they slip me something? Jim drug me?... or is it Justice? Yahweh's Vengeance?...but can I believe that?...only his absolute fatigue, deep battering, bruises and weariness forgive him, permit him an escape: blackout—darkness, yet but to dream but oh yes not to feel, not at least for the moment

....

And Luke dreams of the wandering in the desert, forty years of absolute madness, no watering hole for his thirst, wild winds which swirl and reach to the sky like pillars of fire, only to become mounds of dust, oh, how he envies the skeletons! Yes, he is in bondage, years and years in the pit, excrement upon his head, did he not wish to so wallow, but did he not step back? now he must step forward—his head into the toilet bowl, a stinking toilet bowl, a bowl of piss and shit—*How strong is your love for Me?*—and what of these passing Saints, these with thorns pressed through their eye-balls? These with rocks crammed into their flesh, pebbles drilled into joints so that as they move they are perpetually suffering—*Is your love for Me this strong?—Of every torture what is its reward but crucifixion?—Will you not be beside Me?...*tarry here and suffer with Me—so he took his flesh and crucified it, drove a nail through the palm of his hand but, coward that he was, he could not sustain it and he fainted, and upon consciousness he knew that he would be denied the Resurrection...*You did not suffer for Me!*

Ah, the intensity of the suffering, it is so difficult to describe, for dreaming is like submerging and with each further drop there is exponential psychic pressure, and this pressure cannot describe the pain, that pain which is eternal, howling from the Ages, set up at the moment of birth, from the birth of Adam ..but it is here in this dream that Luke is fully dis-eased, taken from a sense of just being and throttled, throttled with the clear vision of the final punishment,

the eternal pain—that of separation from woman, that of abandonment of his body, for without woman he cannot be man, cannot be creator—*Am I this jealous?*—who would ask the question? All My creative power I give to you, yes, truly, but if I need woman to be creative, if she is anvil to my pound, if she is tinder to my spark, what is this creativity you give me?...such questions mandate unquenchable pains!...questions not to be thought, not to be dreamed!...so Luke suffers greatly in his flesh, in time, on his bed, but more in his soul, here where he had once fallen while in the monastery and so from that moment feared the touch, intuited that The Father wanted Warrior sons, those who would find rebirth in slaying, in being slain, who would seek life's goal as the reward of suicide...and so, at this moment, this is pounded through him: mind, body, soul, flesh, breath, sweat, fart, spit...

*I am not dead.* So they have come. Is this what you found, Master, at the Cardinal's feet? My signature? My departure without fear of you? My not needing you anymore, not needing for closure, not needing...you no longer my patron, my father...one to Discipline and transmit the Tradition. Yes, now I know that I was yours because I gave you my body. This the primal sin. *The buggery.* For it is my body! Not yours. Not any Father's. *My body,* do you hear! Yes, you can plague it, roust up the last remnants of your army—put me at dis-ease. Yes, you are clever, and You have lived within me, but only because I had ceased to live within myself. Hear me Master! This I know you do. All you of the common body, the One, ah, I pity your abandonment, rejection. The Father did *not* want you—he *expelled* you. She was just an excuse! Abraham didn't want *you*, not fit even for sacrifice! Jesus, well, Jesus, he was never yours, he rose, didn't he? His own abandonment...can't you see? can't you feel?...but of course not...what does the ovum speak about before the sperm courts? and what does the sperm know before it pierces and is accepted? This body is but ovum. This body is but sperm. Both material and spiritual versions. I know this now. I augured my puke. Faced all you could give, have given—my own vomit in my own face...ad I was to rejoice that you let me lick myself clean!...Ha! Ha and ha, again! I am other than you want me to be...at least this is my sustaining hope.

After a lunar day of such suffering, of such molting, of such misery, of such spent and puke and wallowing in the fluids of himself, it ends, abruptly, completely, whipped, exhausted but alive, small mirth almost to giggle of being alive, *survivor*, Luke totters towards the shower...and bathes four times.

In the Yellow Pages he finds what he expects, an endless listings of folks involved in body-work, here in AnoMar alone there were fifteen listings: Rolfing, Swedish massage, Shiatsu, herbal baths, metaphysical massages—hmm!—but his finger ends at just one place, gets stuck there, arrives at the appropriate address: "Holistic Physical Therapy." Sounds straight enough, not too wacko—he had spent more than enough time with advocates of every form of vegetative miracle: *Take some garlic*, one said, *Drink soy milk*, said another, *Don't mix* the four basic food groups, chew each one separately, and of course, *Don't eat blood red meat*...well, he had successfully avoided them, at least as to practice if not as to lecture, and now he just wants some straight out muscle work, some strong hands on his back...Jesus, I ache...someone to attach the bones back to the ligaments—Luke was confident that he is internally deformed—someone, he grins, who knows that the neck bone is connected to the chin bone, like at The Towers, the trainer: a physical therapist, did a lot for Luke's occasionally trick knee, so he jots down the address, within walking distance, and is out the door.

*Laura waits.*

## CHAPTER 38: Laura

When Luke met Laura he was embarrassed. Not that he said anything inappropriate or that he stumbled over words or feelings, rather that despite his aching body, despite the messages from his every corporeal part screaming for some relief from tension, some reordering of his diseased parts, yes, though he was the blind man begging but for the Nazarene's spit, despite all this there lingered in his mind the shadow of shame around the word "Massage"...*Massage* had meant to him a dark art steeped in the erotic airs of prostitution. His Dad had once worked on a Grand Jury where several underlings of the pornography world were being investigated and all Luke's young mind could remember was his father's exasperated disgust, "Massage parlors! Massage parlors! Legitimate businesses, that's what they say! God help us from Massage parlors!"

Now here he was, waiting for a massage. Not that he hadn't ever been massaged, yeah, ya know, athletic trainers, pungent lineament, slaps and hot presses, yeah, he could just quietly whisper, "Sore neck" or explain, "I see you do physical therapy. I've this old basketball injury"...but that wasn't why he was here, this he knew, he had to find a touch as counterpoint to The Brooders' touch, find his body, *trust someone*, yeah, it was more than pressing the flesh, loosening and rubbing and rolling a rack of muscles, no, he knew that he had come not just for a massage but for a message, for it to be drummed from his body, yeah, this he knows...and it is a moment of throw-back, here in the waiting room, waiting as in the sanctuary, just as fearful, just as uncertain, just as terrible...he senses that he is *here to shudder*.

"Hi! I'm Laura. Why don't you come on back?"

So it begins. But she watching him rise and flush like a waterfall of exploding watermelons, and she has to laugh, this she has seen before, but normally it's a trickle, maybe a reddening of the ears, most often a slight facial pink, yet with many a ritualistic wringing of the hands, ones she saves through a handshake, not too strong, not wanting to scare them even more: *Men!* with their male bodies, as if she was going to skin them alive, not soothe them and massage them to the edge of sleep...so it begins—*Incipit!*

"Have you been to a physical therapist, before?"

She knows this is the safe question, like a salesman with his open-ended query, getting the customer to tell you what he wants to buy, so Laura takes a yellow-pad, not that she really wants to write down much but that he needs it, needs the security, the distance, she can tell that this one is a long-distance caller, maybe even satellite transmitted, probably wondering whether he's made a mistake or not!

"Yeah." Luke shifts in his seat, someone inside his head yells, "She's gonna make you naked!" But he knows that, he came here of his Free Will—*You've heard of Free Will, right?!*

"Yeah. For college ball, ya know, the trainer, learned it in the Navy, not a medic, but ya know he had a license and...."

"Is there a specific ailment?"

*Lady*, Man, do you really want to hear? Where do you want me to start? When I was a zygote, I.. "Yeah, here," he jokes jabbing himself in the chest, then running his hand down and across his whole body.... "all of me."

She smiles, male exaggeration, little boy calling for attention: "So nothing's that deeply injured?"

"No."

"Fine. I'll leave and you just get undressed and under the sheet, on your stomach," she points to the massage table—as if there was any other place to hide!— "drop your head into the

face-piece...just adjust the towels and make yourself comfortable...when I come back in I'll do some diagnosis—nothing invasive. That's okay with you?"

*No, it isn't.* Can't I just mail my parts in? "Yeah. Sure. Okay."

He's been many places, but somehow this is the queerest, spooky, for he is naked under the thin sheet, not only naked but blind-eyed, head plopped through a ring and eyes staring at the floor..."Again"...the admonition from *The Island*, but here he is, *shit-faced vulnerable!* back-exposed...and Her all about...yet, despite his manic mind, his body begins to relax.

Just settling down...he hears her draw the sliding-door. He hears the click of the button as she starts the tape recorder. He hears the first strains of music: nature stuff, waterfalls, but then he could only hear her breathing. He did not look. Just knew that she was close. What was she doing? He was bracing for her first touch, telling himself that it would be cold, that her hands would chill him and he could justify his goosebumps and wiggling by saying, "Cold hands!" But she doesn't touch him, how was she diagnosing?

"Is it okay for you if I burn a little incense?"

"Okay," a muffled grunt.

She didn't ask about the candle, the lights had dimmed but he could smell the candle, he fought off Sunflower's smile, her missing smile, gutted candles...

Laura picks up his feet. Holds them at the ankles, one each per hand, holds them and slightly bounces them up and down as if weighing them, as if they were fish she were buying, then she pushes his legs as far forward as possible before he grunts, "You can just say *Stop*", how did she know he wasn't going to talk, just suffer? Then she walks her hands softly and gently down from his ankles through his calves up his hamstrings, just stopping before his butt—Did she see him tense like quick setting cement?

For a moment, but seemingly for quite some time for Luke, she stands next to him, he does not see her wave her arms over him but he senses that she is doing something, her breathing conveys light exertion—mumbling prayers?—then he feels her forearm across his shoulder blades, her whole forearm, with each minute gaining in weight and pressure as it rolls down his spine, so much so that she releases only after forcing him to yell, "Stop!"...Jesus, what a strange bitch! What have I shit-faced fallen into now?

But Luke's confusion and simmering anger is tapped and released as her hands fall upon his head—this is so much like a docking that Luke doesn't instantly conjure up the image of priestly ordination, but it is a laying on of hands, and as Laura locks her hands around his head, thumbs docked and anchoring the web of her fingers spread wide, Luke finds himself falling, yes, all the bones in his body are falling into the bag of his flesh, he can sense that, though blind-eyed he sees her grasping his head—and through this image her power comes at him, slapping like a wave, now he remembering that she wasn't that big, I mean not a Brunhilda, not a manly woman, yet, she is tall, meaning Luke didn't have to step back a pace to see her eyes, no, she was tall and fairly average, and he noticed that she was plain faced, not made-up, but it had seemed to go with the office, the spartan physicality of it, that is, and he now wonders why he hadn't asked her, "Do you think you're strong enough to work a body my size or should I go to a male masseur?" But he hadn't. Why?—an answer which comes as she grasps his head, not just a cradle, but a power-lock, a real engagement, like a wrestler's headlock, head in a vise, secure, conveying that the other is in control, there was little doubt that Laura was in control...and his spine she whips, cracking it and when it cracks his organs bounce and jounce, but, *ah, how good it feels*, she lays his head back onto the headrest and rolls two fists down either side of his spine... it is a rolling which causes Luke to cry, yes, he cries out, "Oh my God!" real fast and several

times but it was the tears in his eyes which were his true shock, he was crying, no, he was wailing tears, flinging them this way and that, oh, he tries to bury his head deeply into the headrest, twisting this way and that, drying his tears as fast as they fall, but she says nothing, just continues...and he had not been aware that she was in the small of his back, yes, "in" was how he felt her, that she had disappeared from the room and the only place she was present was in the small of his back, there present as a most intense pain, not stabbing and hurtful but as low, bellowing, widespread pain, one that couldn't be voiced, only felt, but one that soon turned to numbness, he felt nothing—*where is she?*—and all up and down his back he is numb, she must be working him, yes, her breathing, like wind against the shutters, small clatters, and it is as if his head is detached, just lying there, content, feeling sleepy, eyes getting heavy, and there is Sunflower, and her smile, *her smile!*

### **CHAPTER 39: Hands**

On his way out he had simply said, "Thanks," as he wrote a check for thirty-dollars. He didn't want to ask about her diagnosis, and she did not volunteer. It didn't seem strange, rather, it seemed right. He had come to her, he was the asker, and if he didn't ask, well, she shouldn't talk, just be mute. Luke had a deep need to control what had just happened...Laura understood.

Back in his apartment Luke went buck naked. Walked around feeling his body parts, checking that, for sure, they were all linked back together. "Christ, I feel great!" he booms as he prances and postures in front of the full-length mirror screwed onto his bedroom door. "Just great!" And off he went into the tub, his always absolutely favorite respite: a deep soaking in a hot tub, not always easy at six-five, lots of body parts falling this way and that, fighting gravity, yet he had rented this place just because it had this ancient cargo ship size bathtub—one of those cast-iron frames with gryphon feet, and it appearing to be a beast—the first time he saw it he thought of a huge belly, as if it were a trophy cast in stone by some giant who had slain and cleaved the mythical beast—yeah, it was for him, held his whole body, allowed him to be a submersible, "Yellow Submarine! Yellow Submarine! We all live in a Yellow Submarine!"

As he dries himself he thinks about her, forgetting her name now, trying hard, laughing at himself, "Me, forgetting some chick's name!" But despite the name he remembers her, remembers her inside his body, under his skin, not knowing how much she meant to be there or whether it was just his being in such a state of need for a touch, but, yeah, she was there...did she crawl in under his skin when he was asleep? Is that how Yahweh had tricked Adam? Had Eve crawled in while he was slumbering? Not that she was from him, no, rather just hiding behind a rib, biding her time...Luke knows that he wants to see her again. Wants to ask about the diagnosis. Yeah, really wants to ask about what she did while he slept. Was she Circe? He laughs. The mythic humor in it unsettles him.

But he waits a week. That seemed "normal." A proper amount of time. Calls back and says, "I'd like an appointment with Claudia." "There's no Claudia here." Christ! Slaps his head, "Well, look I was there last week, Jennings..." "Just a sec." And then she comes on, "Hi, this is Laura. Can I help you." So, it's set, he goes.

She smiles, and waves him back.

Five-ten maybe eight, nine. He's noticing. Dirty blonde, long like he likes it, but knotted up now. A bit thick in the shoulders: Dutch? Polish? Trying to get an angle on her face, not so much does he see the eyes, hazel, a bit of green, but they are wide, open, inviting eyes, and a nice nose and chin, likes her smile, but it is her hands he is scoping, trying to discern what they know, how they know.

"Do you feel better?"

"Yeah. Good. I mean," he stops...should he be direct, why not, hell!..."Look, tell me what you saw. Ya know, your diagnosis."

"Oh," as if to catch a moment of her own so that she can figure out what he is willing to hear, "Oh, you have a, let's see, a very *interesting* body." He laughs. She laughs. He laughed because it sounded like biology class, "Today, we're going to dissect a very interesting creature!" Hers was an echo to his.

Picking up Laura gets a bit clinical. "We do a lot of injury work here." And as if this new emigrant needed a local explanation, "The defense industry. Douglas Aircraft and those guys. We've the Navy, Marines. All types. And I've seen my share of accidents—mangled bones and all that—and, but," she coughs, "you weren't in some kind of peculiar accident, were you?"

*Lady*, let me tell you about The Island...and while I'm at it about the seminary...and why not throw in some draft raids...something about The Father, too..."Peculiar, maybe, but not an accident, no."

She looks down at her hands, he looks at her hands, they look too small to have done what he thought they had done... maybe they are magical!

"What are you open to?" Like setting free a bird, a boundless question.

"Hell, anything!" And he half-strangles a laugh, immediately embarrassed by the foolish young boy sound of the phrase, but it got loose. She raises a weak smile.

Her eyes, the green glints, they swell, almost bulge, ready to explode, "Was it an astral accident?" Delivered on a breeze, so as not to bruise him.

"Astral? You mean spiritual?" She nods yes.

"Well, yeah, maybe, what are you getting at?"

"Been in California long?" asked like a cop giving a ticket, authoritative, pointing to something else.

"A bit over a year, yeah," he's unsure about where this is going.

"California's not just a place, you know, it's a state of soul. Ever thought about that?"

He wants to spar, jump up and punch her with a knock-out word, but simmers before his ego gets too wildly out of control, she flinches as she reads what his body is saying, *Me think? Shit, bitch, I think about everything! That's the fucking story, Amen!*

With concern: "Sorry, didn't mean to offend. (Pause.) But let me ask, why did you come here?"

Here meaning you or this room or this state or just America, maybe I should be from another planet? "I wanted to hit the beach." Glib.

"Oh," as if checking off on her chart: "Beach-boy."

Then the fire starts in on him, as if his lying was a trigger, he finds his flesh going goosebump wild, a rash raising hell at his crotch, he can't stop himself, stands and scratches, and then the itch just takes over him like bees on a honeycomb...God, he's almost dancing...the ole Irish Jig!...and she is out of the room and then back in a quicker moment, back with something in a steaming cup, "Here. Here." She grabs his left shoulder, strongly, with authority, "Drink this, right now, all of it, don't mind the heat." And it's like swallowing hot coals, whatever it is, it stings his tongue, immediately what it touches goes numb and the fluid flows down him as if running a course it knows by memory and at each marker it sets off a wave of calmness and chilling relief...soon he is seated, sweating like a cloudless summer day and he having run five hard games in a row and the air so hot he can't breathe, and over him she throws a cloud, it being a big towel, brings it down and under him, she kneeling now wiping his brow, blowing coolly upon him, whispering in a lilting sing-song, "You're okay, Luke. You're okay."

As he sits and gathers himself, wipes his own brow, straightens up, she knows he doesn't want to leave but doesn't know what to say, so she chats, picking up on their round of questions. "You see California's not just a physical border. It's not just the end of the land. It's more, more, let's look at it as the end of the dream, the American Dream. Can you see that?" But she knows he can't answer, not that he doesn't have the thoughts but that the potion will keep him below calm, so she continues this peculiar dialogue-with-a-mute: "Many look at California as the beach. You said that. Did you come here for escape? Most do. They're escaping personal problems, financial problems...but what's more serious is most are escaping spiritual problems, they just don't know that. You do understand that, *right?*" He looks at her like a sleepy puppy, she laughs, "I got you at a disadvantage, don't I? Let's see, the beach, you said, for many its sand and surf, just fun in the sun, and they become airheads. Crazies. Or dope clouds. Like being at the beach means you don't have to take responsibility," she muses for a moment, "When you're here long enough it will come to you—folks back East, well, they look westward. They don't see themselves as living on the beach. For them the Atlantic is an ocean, body of water, field of commerce, great sea battles. But the Pacific. Folks out here look westward, too, not eastward. They look out...what would you see, nothingness? Emptiness? Just clouds? Like Aristophanes' Cloud-cuckoo-land?" She chuckles, it's a sweet sound, no clicking, but like a snapping twig. Luke is totally zonked, zoned into a calmness but even there he knows that she is magnificent, is amazed at her, wants to shout "Hooray!" but just communes with the essence of rockness.

Then in a jerky and abrupt switch she glances at the clock on the wall, "Oh, the first half-hour's gone." She quickly slides the door and exits, but just as quickly pokes her head back in, "Jump on the board. You'll be fine." By the time she returns Luke has conquered the lethargy in his bones and muscles and caught the first layer of sleep, almost dozed off by the time the sliding-door creaks.

She fingers the back of his neck, slowly and gently lifting his head, turning it slightly this way and that, and he knows that she wants him to trust her, to let himself fall, his brain, his mind, all his thought patterns into the cup of her hands, into the strength of her arms. Despite himself all his energy is resistant. Not fearful, just not cooperative, corroded, rusty, not inviting. But then she snaps his spine, again, this whipping—*how?*—is lost as a flood of warmth flows over him. Not a complete and instant relaxation but the systemic softening like a tire slowly exhaling from a road puncture. She notices his movements, feels his clutch slip and new gears engage. In like motion the wave of his released energy flows over her, but this was more like the shock of an ocean wave, she all at once gasping for a quick breath, yet totally refreshed and startled, all at once herself at another level of awareness...a shade falls upon her back, she is alert, determined, seasoned, when she connects like this it comes, she knows, but it is what she risks, the exposure in being a body-worker—a servant of servants.

In his mind he watches himself floating, being a log of thick timber, slowly, almost imperceptibly but inevitably moving away from the jam. As he drifts he yields himself to being moved by her as by the river's current.

Luke does not look at Laura. He had no need to open his eyes for he is seeing her through her touch. It is as if his full body skin were one huge eyelid, and as she touches him it lifts and she appears, all around him. She migrates through him and he seeps through her, shuddering, close, warm within her.

Upon his face she rhythmically circles his eyes and dances about his jaw, stretching his face as if putty. And indeed he is faceless and all his faces. "Where can I hide?" screams from behind an ear and for a deep moment a terrible cold, harsh and brightness blinding light makes



him shudder. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" is all he can utter...and he hears her laugh, a distant chuckle, somewhat a giggle and he knows that he is in her clutches, deeply clutched..."Oh, beware, beware my children," so The Master had so often pronounced, "of the witch. Be aware, yes, The Witch. She desires you!" Only now does Luke understand that sage admonition...but he can't move, for he has no eyes, she has stolen his eyes! circled and touched in incantation and rendered him a blind-man—"Stupid fool!" again The Master he hears...oh, he *shudders*—dreadfully, inside abandonment, without her.

When Luke does look she has stopped to add drops of ointment to her hands but he knows it is the blood of unbaptized children. "What power she has!" He is amazed at her strength, how her simple touch has paralyzed him...how he is, amazingly, like the unprotesting amphibian about to be dissected. As she steps back towards him he can't bear to look at her. What strategy for escape can he quickly concoct? This frustrates him, for he finds himself at once armed to the teeth with fear and at the same time gripping the sides of the table with fists so vise-tight that monsoon winds couldn't shake him loose.

"Just relax," Laura says, "listen to the music. *Let go.*" And she is The Beach, fairy winds, and so comes the sound of harps and Celtic Wee-folk music mingling with her slightest of musk incense, and in just such a dramatic turnaround he is falling, does fall another level away from himself, away from his flesh and body and towards...towards?...her, The Beach, the spirit-land called California?

When Laura raises his legs it is more a pluck than a lift. For she holds them as if they are separate organs, ones that can be removed and then replaced. She rests one upon her shoulder and rubs downward. Out of him she draws music. A chaotic, scrambled jazz like sound but one that she moves into rhythm as muscles yield and tendons vibrate towards a light melody, a throaty timbre.

Luke wakes on a slightly submerged ledge of consciousness to find himself legless. She has transformed his legs into two enormous penises. Neither laughter nor terror strike him, rather he shudders. For she is touching him such that she is becoming him. Her arms she locks with fingers entwined and she becomes all cunny. Upon him she rises and falls and Luke is at once all spermatic come, a shower of ejaculatory burst, he seems himself explode like the Fourth of July, yet she is steadfast, moving down and upon his thighs, rising to his calves, rotating to cover front and back, she is fluid and flexing, herself her breathing he hears, indeed, it runs small echoes through his bones...and she, so it appears to him, will never stop. Does she not realize that he has run out of ammo? What is she doing? For she continues onto his other leg...what is she digging for? What does she know that he has which he doesn't know?

Just as he is about to roar, "ENOUGH!" Laura shifts to his feet. Oh, the ungodly pleasure of her foot rubbings! He finds himself leaking all over her. Yes, he is afraid to look for he knows that there is blood and crushed bones a full mess on her tunic, for he is being totally undone.

Then, upon his back, hard fist kneading and rolling up and down his spine. He flinches and yields renegade titters, all the same while coughing as hard she presses, breathing hard herself, whispering about chakras and kundalini energy because he knows that she is turning him into electrical spark and snap, more stirring his heat to a nuclear pitch, actually ripping up and re-connecting his cosmic nodes so that she will ever be able to communicate with him.

*Mother!*...Laura is ending her work, this labor on a body. Yet in this wandering she has found herself drawing a new map. When she first touched him she had seen the line, at that instant almost invisible because no redder than his rubbed-ruddy cheek skin. But as she encircled his eyes, she knew that it would make her blind, knew but slapped herself to be courageous.

Once, truly only once before in all these seven years of body-work had she found a line and followed it as it grew in all dimensions as she worked a body. Back then it had taken her to the edge of blindness—her lack of courage? Unpreparedness—and then just disappeared. She wondered so, so often about it, though having no one to discuss and explore it with she resigned herself, years ago, to simply wait, patiently wait. Often she had questioned whether it had been lost because it was a woman, a close woman friend, who upon turning upon her back had broken contact with Laura.

Back then, a hesitant, timid and broken conversation informed her that her friend was not connected to her experience. Now, it is a man. This Luke who has come to her only twice yet it seems that she has been working on his body all her life...can I stop? A fear seeps into her, a dark shadow of fear, she trembles, and Luke feels it, responds as if to an earthquake tremor: snappy, scared, "What's happening?"...and without an answer she is out of the room, leaving him without a response, not even another question, no longer in conversation...Has my time expired? Does she have another client waiting? This is all he could ask himself, yet he is relieved, he didn't know how it would end, *if* it would end...so the broken moments are fine by him. In unmarked time, Luke rises, towels himself, and dresses.

Outside sits the receptionist. No other clients are waiting. She smiles as she accepts his check. Luke begins to ask but then stops himself. He doesn't want to know. *Fuck!* Of course I want to know, but I don't want her to know I know...and the giddiness of it all strikes at him...he is six, just in first grade, and Sister Martha Mary has told each boy to take the hand of the girl in the line next to them, it is the Feast of the Blessed Virgin and Mary is to be crowned Queen of the May...how would he ever forget the thrill, the touch, the light-headedness of Rochelle Ann's hand?

#### **CHAPTER 40: Lunch**

Luke called for an appointment the next day. "She's out sick today." Hmm. Why do I feel relieved? But he knew it was inevitable—the avoidance. "She's with a patient." "Okay, I'll call later." "She'll call you back." She never does. Now Luke is nervous, he thought it was just him, his attraction, that she was like his first drink, that of *Jack*, something which burned his throat and scared the bejessus out of him—who can ever forget their first hangover-in-hell?!—but something he knew he would come back to, despite his oaths, despite his tendered promises at Mary's feet...so it is, again, *She doesn't want to see me!* To say he is crushed is to describe only how others see him, as if he had been run over, something fallen upon him, for he moves slowly, almost going backwards with each step forward, tottering, and it is a day, two, then a week...he decides to drop by—her clients do that, I'm sure.

"Hi." More strangled than she'd like.

The receptionist's desk, it hides her, gives her an island to place between them, he in the Waiting Room, standing at the sliding glass window, locked out, locked in, he peering, she flitting away, coughs a hand to her lips, clears her throat, looks down as she writes on a pad, tears off and hands him, he accepts without taking his eyes from her, she is strong, professional, experienced, "You do need a man's hands. Here, I told Steve you'd call." ...Dismissed. "Take this note to the Principal's office!" The wafer of Salvation—another tab of paper. Is she forgiven?

"No."

Not "No, thanks." Not a refusal of her offer, but a refusal of her intention, of her cowardice, of her thinking that this is someone she can turn away from, maybe from others, who

knows?... sure, this chick has some power, more like an eagle—Luke does not offer her release from his eyes.

His "No" holds them for minutes. Even if others were looking they would not have noticed, but he had chosen noon time, knowing that she'd have to go out for lunch, no clients waiting.

"No?" she utters in desperate flight.

"No." Quiet. With an edge of invitation.

"Oh." Awareness. Discovery. A fragrance of relief, eagle circling the nest.

How did he get her to leave? She couldn't tell, didn't argue with herself, just saw his "No" torch her message of regret, her note of dismissal, her fear of herself. In one part of her mind she says, "It's just lunch. Just have lunch. Just half-an-hour. You've others scheduled."

When they would recall this day they always laughed at the turmoil they had caused. She who never missed an appointment, this day sent the somewhat balmy receptionist—a proudly self-described Groovy Surfer Girl!—into a panic. Police were called. Who was this Luke Jennings guy? AnoRam was a small town, local police, one young Lieutenant with a long-time crush on Laura, so her home was checked, his apartment watched, his car on the street, license plates run through the DMV..."It's just not like Laura. Not at all. She's so responsible!"

*The Beach.* They went from lunch at the beach to walking along the beach to finding The Beach. When they had sat down at "The Telephone Company" for lunch both had proceeded to witness to the carnivore gene in the human species. They didn't talk except to the waitress. Ordered burgers and fries, she with her eyes saying "Be fair! Sometimes one needs protein!" and he just not paying attention to the fare, she becoming his fare, she knowing this and in response ordering a common plate, both to come at each other fully armed, in this case, fully stomached.

Burger and fries...then a chocolate shake...even coffee and pecan pie ala mode...would they ever leave, and so start? Now fully provisioned, victuals stored, they get up and walk the block to the beach, along the way he reaches for her hand, she likes the wind in her hair, takes it...and their speechlessness both know is the calm before the storm, the stillness which is the vortex's funnel.

It is when they take off their sandals and the water hits their feet that they alight upon a common tongue, "Cold!" both shout as they hop and skip back away from the ocean's edge. They laugh. "Cold, because it has sucked all the warmth inside it," she says as her eyes swing from the far heart of the Ocean to his.

"My, my, what a deep thought. And I thought you could only dig such things from outta my back!"

"If you only knew what was in your back," almost a warning, an instruction on a label.

"You're in my back, that I'm sure of."

"Do you really think that?" Sincerity. Wide-eyed. A defenseless yearning.

"No, I'm lying. All I am is a lie. Fooled ya, didn't I."

"That was too thin, Luke. Try again."

They walk. He kicks the water. Splashes fall back upon them. She starts to prance about, wiggle and dance a bit, throws her sandals aside and calls to him, "Come and swim in the Ocean, if you dare!"

And so they are both off, fully clothed, but are they? Wet. Cold. She diving under. He not so wild. Watching the sea. Knowing its treachery. All at once he is overwhelmed by a fear of losing her, of seeing her swept under, Sweet Ophelia with flowers draining from her hair, and he yells...nervous, angry, "Laura, be careful. Let's go back!" But she is not to be seen until striking

as a shark—she at his feet, using the buoyancy of the water to rise up with his legs in her arms and tripping him into an awkward fall, his arms flailing wildly, trying to grasp a block of air, a lock of water to hold onto...she submerges him—he drowns.

Dead men all about him, the watery grave of those who could not walk upon the water, so he chats with them, "She drowned me too!"...but they kick him out, and he rises like an angry typhoon spitting water everywhere, he now Poseidon, armed with a Trident poised to spear her...and it is his arms which capture her, wrap around her, pull her close to his flesh but closer to his soul, a heart beating like a smelting furnace here in the dip of cold, and her fullness surprises him, feeling her chest against his, a deep press of flesh, he now realizing that she straps down, *My, what a pleasant surprise!*...but the waves douse his fire, not the lock of their eyes...who from the shore would know? That here from the water we had come? Years and years ago. Beings as free as light when in the water, cradled and nurtured by the waves, but so much fire, so much fire to be spread that we had to land, crawl up onto the land, there to find kindling for the fire, greater forests of discovery...but, oh, how we have forgotten the Embrace, for that is what the Ocean is, itself the Embrace of all male and female energy, embracing the land as shore, embracing the wind as wave, embracing the sun in kisses of wetness, droplets ascending to become clouds, clouds to dance and cavort with the sun's rays, and all to become two again in the rain...yes, there Luke and Laura stand, embracing, so wet that they are one, magically, One, feeling no weight, just floating, fires floating upon the foam, fires surfing the waves crashing onto the beach.

It was an afternoon of just being together. It was also an afternoon of holding back, both could sense this. *Yet what was the rush?* Take your time. Both allow the conversation to drift to personal histories, he telling her the general things: about being East Coast Catholic and the Nuns—a few stories she found hard to believe, especially Sister Johanna punching a hole in classroom wall!...then to the seminary, he taking time not to make it sound too pious, just anticipating her question and saying, "It wasn't for me. Didn't know exactly why. But I had to leave." She said she knew and told him about her own journey...young Methodist girl who became a Lutheran and then an Episcopalian migrating during the war—"Yes, I supported The Resistance" —to the Quakers and in recent years, several in an ashram in Tagore...he picks back up with a bit of his Vatican years, she being impressed by the languages he knows, then talking about parents, both giving only the good report card, both knowing that this was just Preface and Introduction, and he wanting to tell her about the war, so he does, not what he did but that he did serve but within the next breath quickly trying to align with her anti-war sentiment by talking about the draft raiders in Minnesota, not saying he was one, just a supporter...and then he kids her about quoting Aristophanes, "Do you always quote the Greeks to your clients?!" She, then, explaining about her Dad as a Professor of Classical Literature and her mom, an artist, shocking him with two years of study at a Protestant seminary, PSR in Berkeley, "Berserkley, I've heard it called," and they laugh easily about parallel experiences with communes and wildings, both hinting about their psychedelic use, he telling her that he has taken a vacation from *Jack*—this basically true, so he convinces himself—and she being serious about herbs and healing, and "Why did you go into physical therapy?"

*The Question.* This question. He thought it mostly an occupational query, but it truly began the day, was the magistrate's key to the city gate.

It was asked and immediately followed with, "Do you really like massaging bodies?"...asked with an air of "I like getting one...but giving one, ugh!"

"I like helping people."

"Yeah, but..."

"But so do whores?"

"Naw," jolted, "nothing like that, I..."

"Still hate the body? Your body?"

"Wait," a choker tightens around his neck, he was walking them towards his apartment, now, he's not ready, takes her the long way. "Wait. Let's not get metaphysical!"

"Why not? You," and she pauses, gives him a look which is like holding a mirror up to himself, "You certainly aren't physical."

"Wait..."

"You asked. So, I'm going to tell you. Give your diagnosis." They stop. Are not holding hands. She is squarely in front of him, delivering with her whole being, "You have no body." That was it. Simply said. She waiting...

His answer is a furrowed brow, the afternoon had gone well, he had been compelled to find her, found her and knew she was exciting, had fun, played, now, this...some warmed over Hippie bullshit, some Eastern negativity?

She reads him and continues, forcefully, confidently, with concern: "You didn't have to tell me about the abuses. You left because of the abuses, didn't you?" He stares with empty words.

"Okay. Don't talk. See how accurate I am." She rubs her hands, rubs her face, sits down, he remains standing, then he follows, it is the edge of a small park, grass and flowers, a few kids swinging and running about, "Your Salvation was premised upon surrendering your body. Let's see, that's offering, or breaking, isn't that what the priests do, break the host to show how Christ was broken on the cross? I think that's right." He's just listening, trying to hide behind the fog, not be seen. "The body is the enemy. That's because the body comes from Eve. Even though her body is from Adam—let's talk about that another time!—she is the mother of everyone and through her comes bodies." Wanting some response she chides him, "You can speak without raising your hand, you know." He smirks, sarcasm. "I touched your body and saw a thousands serpents," the word shocks him, he recoils, she perceives that there is more here, but not today, she'll just give him her understanding, not ask him to respond, "As I understand it, and you have to go to other cultures, not just the West, and not just the East, I mean to peasant cultures, what some call animism, to see a shaman, when you do you see how the serpent lives." And then with words that hold together as a discourse spoken often and before, "The serpent is male energy. That's why it so revealing that Eve was tempted by the Serpent. What's she was tempted by is a type of male energy which the West has forsaken. It's a male energy which the sons of Adam and the children of Yahweh do not listen to because it is the type of male energy which is male because and as it is in conversation with the female. Remember, the serpent talked to Eve, not Adam." The furrows in Luke's brow are near depthless, it is as if she isn't here, that he is dreaming his Brooder dream.

"When I touch men—and women too, but that's for later—I often find the simple serpent. What I mean is there's just one. It's just there at the base of their spine and it rises sexually, only sexually. For these guys a massage is an erotic experience, one they want to end in a hand-job or a blow-job." He doesn't flinch, is processing. She passes into humor, "I'm sure they go home and have great sex with their wives!" She pauses. "But that's not what you're about. Not that you're not sexy," she blushes, he can't see her, she recovers, "but what you're about is something else. See, I see it in the many serpents. What this means to me is that you've tried to use every part of your body to break through to the feminine." She really wants to see his response, he is darkly

brooding, eyes closed. "All your life, isn't this true, Luke, you've loved Mary. Isn't that true?" She wants an answer, "Goddamn it, say something!" The nastiness of her tone and the stench of bile jerk him back to her level, he clears his throat, runs his hands through his hair, looks at her, it is the looking at a stranger, but one, one thinks, he's met before, he surrenders a "You got me!" toned, "Yeah."

He was so much into himself, so deeply brooding that he was stone-cold knocked out when she jumped up and flipped out, "That's why we...this *can't* work!" And she storms away, moving quickly, long strides, body parts flung here and there, and with the instinct of the hunter Luke is behind her, stalking, careful not to step on her shadow...Did she mean to end up at his place? But there they both stopped. In front of his pad. Her enamored cop sat and noticed, was instantly dejected, revved his engine and left. But they did not enter. Did not lock arm in arm as lovers do. Did not give anyone observing the sense that they were going upstairs for some hot-fudge afternoon delights! No, they were two lighthouses miles apart, flashing messages to each others, "Don't come close to my rocks!" "Stay away from my reefs!" "Wait until the tide comes in!" "Squall on the horizon!"

"What?" is how he opens it, not referencing anything in particular.

"Look," she grabs his left bicep, hard grip on hard flesh, "Contact!"..."Look, I can't go through this, again." He wants to know what again means, but doesn't want to side-track her. "Guys like you," said quickly but for him it is a slow chant, so slow that it is an echo more distant than a freight train tooting from Mars, yet it has been coming for centuries, aeons, the clumping together of all the brutes, "Guys like you just tear me apart. And I don't mean funny. Look, I see what you've done to your body. You don't have one. And, and...shit, you want mine!"

"Hold on a minute!"

"No. Listen. You're a good guy, I know that. I'm sure you're just a deep well of wonderfulness. Treat women swell. Send flowers. Candy. Write poems. I know. I know," tiredness, fatigue, too many children suckling at her breasts, "I know your good intentions. But you're going to tear me up, or some woman, for god's sake, some woman who will love you ever the more for doing it, some poor Sister not even knowing that you're stealing her body!...Luke, look, it is all metaphysical, or spiritual or whatever you want to call it. You're going to find out what I'm saying. I'm just saying that I can't be the one, *not again*."

Quick to pound in a stake, "Can't or don't want?"

She smiles at his skill, much suffering to drive him this far, so relentless. "Can't." Pauses. Steps backwards. Tries to distract, "Where are we?" Meaning the place, the street.

Almost gleefully he blurts, "Believe it or not this is where I live," as he points up the stairs towards his apartment. "So, why not come in...for some coffee?"

To herself: Can't Can't *CANT!*...oh, Lord, don't let me do this again...still my want, kill my desire...turn down this fire!..."Okay. Some coffee."

He knows it is her want which is dragging her up the steps. Curiously, he feels proud of himself, ego stroked, she wants him! "Hot damn!" But then he knows that he wants her, but what is this their want?

So after the silence they share: door unlocked, chairs turned towards the window, he perking coffee, she out of the bathroom, he settles in and starts talking about The Brooders and about dreaming...he can't see her, not that he couldn't sit up and look but his Story has no eyes for her, not this Story, and then he goes into The Island, tells her about the serpent...and about the killing...she is quiet, only the scraping of cup against saucer reveals her existence, but he is not

ready for the Cardinal, not the whores of Saigon, not Jim and Zinga, not going back to Rian...could she sense Rian?

"Luke," his name comes out of the air like a fast fly-by hummingbird, it startles him, "Luke, would you think me crazy if I told you I knew all this?"

"All?"

"Let's see, not in detail. But when I asked you about any peculiar ailments or accidents, what I was probing for was your spiritual journey. Because it's what your body says. Look," and she sits up and leans on a chair-arm to speak with him: no horror in her eyes, no judgments, just two writers, writers on the wind. "Look, you're like a jigsaw puzzle which has all the pieces. I've met guys—and women—who have like one part of the puzzle. And they're looking for others with what they hope are matching parts. It's very painful—for them, and for me. Let's see, how to say this? Maybe I'm a puzzle piece or maybe for them I'm a puzzle put-together-er. Something. I've asked many wise and high spirit people about this but they keep telling me that only I can answer my own question." A weary sigh, "Lots of help, that, eh?!"

"So how does this go down with you working on bodies? Or my body?"

"I know that I can give these people something. Like your body, I can read it. To a degree. And, usually, I can send them off to someone else. Get them to where they go into therapy or counseling or go to an ashram, sometimes, even back to the synagogue."

"Like a way station attendant?"

"Something like that."

"But not me?"

It takes a moment. "I don't want to but I guess I had better." Much to his surprise rather than more talk, she stands and begins to unbutton her blouse. Before he can squeak or peep or clap his hands she is breast-naked before him, his eyes saluting her, squealing delight like the kids around the Good Humor truck, and she kneels and leans forward to kiss him, her breasts press against his chest and his hands run amok with anticipation but clamp-up, tight and frigid, stiffened by a maddening hesitancy...he waits....

It was a kiss so soft but so tender that the image of them at the beach's edge rose in his mind, and she is like the Ocean, moist and penetrating him wave upon wave, becoming a surfer into his heart, a heart beating madly, racing up and down on the sands, yet like a fire at night crackling off sparks, they catch on fire and he holds her in his hands, she in her breasts like warm loaves of bread and his kiss of them turns his tongue into butter, runny and slobbering butter, for he is gobbling her, licking her, and kissing her without map, no directions, here and there, pulling her onto him, embracing her with an ever increasing clench of his arms, almost waiting to hear her ribs crack and shatter, it is her who he wants to puddle in his hands and form into an idol to worship, to carry around with himself, *forever*...but she slips away, like the receding tide, drawn by moon forces, and into his bedroom with a trail of clothes, hers and now his, both upon the sheets—forsaken was the discipline of the monastery: *four square with Hospital corners!*—and he finds her just so delicious...this the word which careens around his mind, the word which describes his feeling, her flesh with a curve of plumpness, appearing so healthy, strong arms but with a fluid strength, he likes her look, lingers on the flow of her lines, not caring to note the imperfections bewailed in weekly glamour magazines, no, his mind is besotted with one thought, one hungering thought—her deliciousness...and he craved to feast upon her.

As he came to her, and Laura could see it as his coming from a long way, way back on the metaphysical plain, astral geography, to herself came the voice, "Caution. You said never again. You know what is going to happen!" And, indeed, she does, and it does. Luke is upon her

as if she were a banquet spread, one with exotic hors d'oeuvres, gourmet entrees, and lascivious deserts. But she loves it, she can't deny that it has been too long, even she must have some satisfaction! And she does enjoy his enjoyment, accepts his taking, as she knows she has been trained, as all women have been trained, accepts his taking as a form of giving...ah, his cock is firm, mighty, a kingly serpent, hooded and hissing, threatening, ready to strike with death to save its life, spitting...and she is upon him, taking from him what she knows is her right, that of his cock which he can't keep, which is hers, taking it and making it part of herself, ah, if he only knew or could...but she is lit by common fire, they flare together, upon her he is all Fierceness and Comet Eyes...his breath is Billowing Smoke and his thighs the Hammer of Desire...yes, they are rip and saw, poke and pull, grasp and clench, their stares lock: liquid desire drops and sprinkles each upon the other...there is no time, no place...with all their effort they seek to pass through the body of the other, press so hard that they enter front-side and exit backside... all around the house is electric snap, the charge from a great gathering of static, dry lightning...crackling.

They did not sleep, no nods or dozes, but they were lessened and loose, joined by that energy of mutual accomplishment, as after winning a game—he looks at her like a member of his team, she at him more like a child about to go off to school...both know that they will depart...he doesn't want to ask her to stay, *not yet*...she doesn't want to stay, *maybe never*. "Should be going," as she checks her watch, he laughs as if this pseudo-ritual act could really free her from him, but he says, "Yeah, I guess gotta." So they dress, first shower, separately, both feeling that that's a bit odd, but both knowing that this first closeness also ports the first distancing...and before the cloak of too much embarrassment, too much need to talk about it, explain it, plumb its meaning, before all that, each wants to savor the moment, save them, needs some time alone...he is pleased, satisfied, and in humble admittance before the tribunal of his own soul—*amazed*, he finds her amazing...possibly this enchantment, this splashing in the first puddles of a long awaited Spring rain, possibly just because Luke is who Luke is, well, possibly that is why he missed the forlorn and off-to-sea good-bye in Laura's eyes.

#### **CHAPTER 41: The Lie of Dying**

Only his mother could have gotten him to leave California, she of that other world, more other now since Laura, a world of not only past times and chronology but of dream and future, Minnesota was America, and he didn't care to slip back into America, alien that he was now, true Californian, denizen of the altered state called AnoMar, but he goes, she is ill, his brother telephones and Luke is on the plane that night, no good-byes, too filled with love and desire for Laura to think that a mere fifteen hundred miles or so means anything except the pleasure of longing for her.

Luke's keen language skills have kept him employed, over a year now as a proof-reader at a Court Reporting firm, straightening out the convoluted transcription when sounds are put into words, rapid talk, run-on sentences, dangling participles—his task was not to correct but to clarify, make notes for amplification, and discern linkages, he made handsome bonuses for his transcript summary skills. So, now he packs a pile of transcripts in a knapsack, flings it over his back, and calls for a taxi to the airport.

Flying has become connected in his mind with transitions, it was the flight to The Island which pivoted his life...like stop-juke-fake-left-fake-right-dip-and-rise-for-a-slam-dunk—yeah, up in the air he had met Tring, Tring who like a magician—Black Magic, to be sure!—had drawn out all that was Asiatic in Luke's bones, bones he didn't know he had, and flying like Hawkeye over the battle, yeah, the first flight and then soaring over Saigon...true, flying had



shown him things—how he was but a pawn on a gigantic chessboard, how everything on the Earth was just globularly connected, how the barriers of history, geography, time zones, astrological points, all markers just melted as distance from hard ground, *terra firma* blossomed...yeah, up high the rocks send a different message, reveal themselves as the nodes in one humongous brain—the Earth itself, and rocks as transcripts, as the transcribers of all events, putting it down in stone...if only we knew how to read the text!

This time he knew that he was flying into his mother's dying, whether she died now—and Gene had said that it was a "series" of mild heart-attacks, *a series*—well, he knew it was inevitable, because one thing that the sudden death of his father had revealed was how parents are the future being transformed, that whether they liked it or not they are sign, symbol and the reality of what it means to be human, that is, to pass on, pass over, be transformed, resurrected...ah, if he only had understood this, back then!...Man, I'm not dying, not that way...but as she dies will I see my mother? Fully her? *Her?*

Laura wasn't on his mind, no, the pivot eastward and the ordination of sonship moved her to the side, but she was on his soul, for he hungered for her, one part of himself re-lived and relished their union—thrills and pleasures shot across and sated zones of his gray matter...ah, he'd see an attractive woman but only think of Laura, catch the practiced smile of the stewardess and but fall into Laura's kisses, watch clouds form and see her flesh: billowy and pillowy, the clouds gave him the feel of her, she under him like damp sweating cumuli rushing to rain, falling over him like they do mountaintops...he naps, drinks two more *Jacks*, shakes off the touch of jet lag, lands in Minneapolis' Lindbergh field reading an LA Times review of "Jesus Christ, Superstar"—Pure American Dream Theology. Amen!

Gene being the perfectionist he was, left Luke a car rental reservation. "The rest of us will be with Momma. Who knows when you will land? With this weather you could be hours late and we'd all prefer, let me think, that's not what I mean Luke, but we want to be with Momma." Not an, "Is that okay?" or any request for his consent or approval, no, they knew he could handle everything, yet the real issue was talking with him, no one in the family had had a butt-kicking sit-down with Luke since he had come home from the seminary...no, totally reverse, they had let Dad handle things and then trickle down what was important, but with Dad gone, no one stepped up. Luke understood...was relieved; the last thing he wanted was to plunge back into justifications to his siblings.

"... so I'm not going to die." Said as simple summary, but more as an obverted question, "Is it okay that I'm not going to die?" Mom was embarrassed. She had always been a model of health but since Dad had passed she's been weak and sickly...the doctors told her she was depressed...she said that she needed to pray more.

"Mom, I almost died just a bit ago." Why'd he say that? Is that how he really saw his lunar day of disease?

"Luke!" A word asking for explanation, freighted with concern: Was he in danger? Or, God forbid, drugs? His statement unhinged her Pandora box of fears about this peculiar child of hers.

"I'm okay. Okay. Okay, now." Reassurance, but words which are prelude, *Why did I come?* Sure, Mom's dying, but what part of her dying am I?

To inject some motherly medicine Luke quickly blurts, "I'm in love!" Eyes brighter, curiosity stimulating her pulse, Mother is all attuned. Luke shifts in his chair, leans forward towards her, looks directly at her, smiles.

Ha, the shift in her energy is almost comic. "Yeah, Laura, that's her name. She's a physical therapist. Never been married, I know you were gonna ask! And I'm just crazy about her, bonkers!"

Would she pull out the list? *Catholic? What does her father do? Does she drink? Is she "progressive"?*—mother's favorite term for Women Libbers—a question in fear of not having grandchildren. She wouldn't ask about sex and the pill, but, yeah, my job, Can you support a wife?—naturally, as fated to her maternal soul, the phrase will emerge: *wife?* But she throws him a curve ball.

"Do you make her happy?"

What to say? Never put it that way, hmmm, she makes me happy, but of course she's happy, why wouldn't she be? But the question jilts him, kicks him off his center, says to the Sun, do you make the Moon happy? Answer: Sure, who wouldn't be happy sharing my light? So, for him it was the only answer, for her, something else, "I guess so."

"That's a stupid answer." Then a pause, searching for another phrase. "You know I'm not progressive but that certainly is a male answer." Could she hide the contempt and disappointment networking her response?

"Gees," and his sitting back tells her she hadn't. But it was okay, this is why she wanted to talk with Luke before she did die, even if she lived another fifty years!

"Luke, you're so unlike your Dad I can't believe you've become so like him!"

"What?" Small boy being told that he's too short for the ride—his brothers strand him at the gate.

Mrs. Jennings props herself up, reaches and drinks the remaining water in her cup. She places her hands, folded, in her lap, prim Catholic School protocol.

"Luke," and she knows that she won't stop talking till she says it all, "Luke, your father never made me happy." She doesn't pause to harvest and integrate his reactions. "He was a good man. And I believe I made him happy. I'd say very happy. But that's why I was not happy. He had such a simple world. Everything followed rules. Rules which were sent down by God and interpreted by priests. Now, you're old enough to know all the rules for sex"...Luke's face had remained passive as she began and it was still in that mode as the never discussed S word took its place before them, nothing during his flight could have prepared him for this..."and you know that your father and I followed the rules. I doubt if he ever had an impure thought, not that he was perfect, but I don't think he ever committed a Mortal Sin." She fills her cup and quickly drains it. "But after your father died I had to face my Mortal Sin." His eyes grow large, as if to take in the wingspan of the confession, his face is fixed, immobile. "It's true, I confess to a Mortal Sin. But it's not what you might be thinking." Pause. Arranging for the final steps. "I sinned by never loving myself. I hope you understand what I'm trying to say. When your father passed I was empty. Really empty. The doctors said I was depressed, and they gave me an army of pills—which I never took, of course. But I knew it wasn't something a pill could fix. I just realized that I had spent my whole life loving your Dad. That I had given him my body and my soul." Pause. "It's true, when he died he took me to the grave with him." Pause. "I had to face the fact that I was very bitter." Her eyes steeled, "That I actually hated your father." Luke pales. "I hated your father for not loving me." And she cannot stem the tears though she does not move, not an iota...tears flow down in silent procession, tears following ancient dry beds now replenished, tears rolling to flashflood, tears from which flowers drink. "You *must* understand this." She says must in the way that linked Luke with his Dad but also conveys to Luke that this is her death-message, that this was something he had to understand so that he could be Luke, not

his Dad, not husband like his father had been, it was must of hope and trust, of proffered treasure and drink from the chalice of their common blood.

"Is this why you're sick?" As soon as he says it he worries about it. What am I saying? But as if it were the precisely correct answer, his Mom says, "Exactly."

Luke leaves his chair, sits on the edge of the bed, takes his Mother's hands in his, "Do you think Dad loved me?" A shifting in centers, towards him, away from her, the plaintive query of The Prodigal.

Unawares, she slips her hands out from his and folds his in hers. "Luke, the only way your father loved me was through you kids. He could only love himself. Can you understand this?" Luke shifts, a weariness slaps at him, he sighs, says, "But you are in me."

"Exactly."

"Why is this so?"

"You know." Stern. Slapping him in the face—*Liar! Liar! Pants on fire!*

"Jesus!" he stammers, once, twice, not a prayer: "Jesus! Jesus!"

Was it a Death-Bed Confession? Did she need him to play priest? Though he wasn't. Or was he? After that day he visits his mother twice. The doctors are amazed at the speed of her recovery. Some were saying it proved that she couldn't've had a heart-attack, just fatigue, a breakdown from the depression. *Whatever*. She does not talk with him, again, not directly, that is, always calling a brother or sister to her side when Luke visits.

He was perplexed— his mother who had never forwarded what Luke would consider a truly serious question about The Faith, his mother who had never seemed anything but happy!...his mother who had faced death—at least this is how he could frame it—faced death and saw something...did those statues and pictures at rest in her bedroom finally speak to her? Now that her husband is dead, does she commune with Mother Mary gazing upon her crucified son— Did she dream his resurrection? Did she peer behind the patina and find the secret message, the message for mothers, for the women who wait and stand-by...did she hear that She had permitted it?...or did she share the mystery of how men function in the life of women? *Whatever...how would he ever know?* This mother steps into his life, steps in when he didn't even know she was there, steps in as if she had been waiting all this time for her turn to speak, just steps in and plants a pin on the map of his life and say, "Here!"—"You are here...and you need to go There!" But where is *There*?

Luke couldn't allow himself to wonder if a male version of Laura had entered his mother's life, if not in body at least in soul?...no, he thought that she had somehow found her own Jesus—a link with her salvation, through this sickness. And he calls to mind the lessons about the martyrs' suffering, how such suffering brought them to a fuller understanding of God... *Women!* He had never expected his mother to baffle him, to leave him fascinated—mull on one thing, maybe forever, that if I am not like my Dad than I must be like her!... *Women!*

Luke is really glad that his Mom is getting better, but he can't stay here, doesn't want to stay any longer, so he prepares to leave Hastings, his Mother and all Minnesota tied up in a tidy bundle...but there is one last loose string—Rian.

## **CHAPTER 42: Mobius**

Of the three women in his life: his mother, Laura, and Rian, only Rian remained to be positioned so that he could move forward. His mother was certainly his past, and even in this her dying, her way of doing it, well, maybe it is the way women from her generation had to speak to their men, speak to them through their sons. Maybe that's why so many of the Old Testament stories are just about men, with the women on the side. Maybe it was as much the style for the

women as for the men: meaning—and things were getting a bit crazy here for Luke—meaning that what he had sensed about Her was true, that strange sense he had carried around with himself since back, back when?...shit, just a bit ago, seems like psychological ages, well, that She allowed it to happen, isn't that it?—Sarah allowed it to happen, Eve allowed it to happen, Mary allowed it to happen: the slaying of their sons, more, the obliteration of themselves...was their allowance a demonstration of their power? The irascible power with which men could deal with only by ignoring it, deluding themselves that they had obliterated it? Whatever! These women were sign, symbol and reality of something else, of some other power, lodged in them or lodged in their males or both?...*Whew!* Maybe nothing's falling into place! More to the fact: everything is moving crazily in no relation whatsoever to anything else!...*Maybe.*

Rian was not as easy to find as he had expected. It was almost three years now, and she certainly had graduated. So, he calls the Alumni Office at St. Clare's because he knows that they maintain a strong network of contacts. He was surprised to find that she had not graduated when she should have, and, in fact, had just completed her degree last month. More, she was living at home, in Luverne—couldn't be!—yet, though he prodded the clerk to check further, all they had on file was her family's address and phone.

When Luke called he didn't know what to say since he hadn't ever met her folks. Did they know about him? Was I that important for her? This question opens a nervous can of worms: Will she see me? Want to see me?...So, it is *Hello* and this is *Father Mark McGuier* calling. Yes, we are contacting all the recent graduates to invite them to a Renewal Weekend, and I'm calling for Rian, is she there...oh, in the Cities...he jots it down, and the street address, he jots it down, phone number, *Thank you and God bless you!*

Luke drives directly to the address. He parks, rolls down the window: cold, frigid, sees the number, doesn't move—Frosty The Snowman, racing heart-beat melting him, double-checks the street and the number, triple and quadruple checks. A sign staked into the front-yard snow bank reads, "The Women's Counseling Center." With a sigh, he's out and moving, slowly, slow enough to be flash-frozen, become Icicle-Man, but he is moving, Ice-Snail, before the End of Time at the front door. Knocks, and as he enters, as dreaded, he can feel the flock of eyes upon him, hovering above, peering from behind—much like the way Tring's eyes had worked—*scanning*: his person was being scanned...so he wasn't that surprised when he asked the woman behind the only desk in the room about Rian and she both eyed him and spoke with a tongue laced with suspicion, a disgusting-hygiene tone of "Don't touch me, scumbag!" This person, certainly not a "secretary," that for sure he knew, just this woman giving him an address and when he asks for Rian's phone number this woman laughs, one of those "Are you stupid?" laughs, and sends him on his way saying, "At Mother Earth they don't use phones."

The address was within walking distance but, again, Luke drives, feels more like he is a tank moving slowly upon its target. Actually, he needs something tangible to hold onto, something to run towards in case he wants a quick escape, even a reason for leaving early, "Got to return my brother's car." *Escape.* The word instantly came to him as he took the slip of paper with Rian's address. It came with brass band blaring when the woman had said *Mother Earth* and Luke knew without asking that it was a commune. Rian. Rian—had he expected her to not change? To be unchanged? Remain the Sweet Young Thang! he had known...he bites his tongue, knows he is allowing a mist of false sentimentality to float over him...why am I romanticizing her? Making amends for the Saigon Trollops? Ha, he laughs at the French Literature behind his own thoughts. Jesus, for a moment he is a paralytic—scared, really, truly doesn't know why he has come, feels like the moth about to kiss the flame: waffling on exhilaration spiked expiration.

Sitting at curbside, across the street from the commune, he sees women of all sorts: sloppy and floppy, blue-collar working-class chic, high heeled Glamour girls, women carrying placards, women pulling kids by the hand, young and old...it is a veritable river of women, and then he sees himself as spy, as man-outside-across-the-street-in-car and on her belly *Semper Fi Woman!* crawls and wiggles up under his trunk, slaps on the plastique and is safely back when the explosion rocks the neighborhood...few worry—"Just another man!" is hollered up and down the street, "Just another man!"

What am I going to say? "You betrayed me!"...How many nights had he gone over that last night? He seeing her breasts and in her every movement seeing the fingers, the lips, the breaths, the desires, the pure lust of all the other men who had been near her, been with her, had touched her! Why had he not been able to tell her that? If he had just stayed around and told her, fought with her...but he knows that the Luke at The Towers was not that type of guy. *Am I that type of guy, now?*

As he walks across the street Luke summons up Laura's image: the woman he loves! *Laura, I need to get all this in order.* So that I can be with you without thinking backwards. Help me, babe. And he pulls upon the strength of her embrace, the wild eyes which swam in maternal fluid with him there under the waves...Jesus, he is hot with her...and as he takes the steps, he does so two at a time, arriving at the front door with a hop.

"Rian. Sure. C'mon in." No hostility. Just like at a boarding house. Waiting for her to ring a bell and bellow up the stairway, "Rian, your date's here!" But that's not how it goes. He simply walks in and stands in the hallway. The house is a low buzz. He doesn't see as many people as he hears. He unsnaps the top of his jacket, loosens his scarf, stuffs his gloves into his pockets...suddenly sees himself as not at The Beach, rather in Minnesota, back in America, and a wave of guilt hits him like sleet, sharp, hard, he wipes his face, his breathing quickens...wants to escape, he bends his head backwards to see his tank...*can't see it!*

"Luke?" The turn-key from the ages: woman asking man the question of nomenclature—he who was designated by Yahweh to be the name-giver, the question of paternity, of fidelity—calling out in the dark. As he hears it, a cacophony of *Yeses* is heard as the many Lukes within Luke respond to her, it is all a whirl and whiz of confusion, and no single word can escape, he simply coughs and is aware of the increased temperature about his skin...he is blushing, appears sunburned.

"Luke." As if she were answering her own question, his name—one, two steps down further. He shuffles his feet, drops his eyes, sighs, then throws back his broad shoulders and holds out his arms in greeting, "I'm Luke...if you want me to be!"

They embrace and he picks her up and swings her full circle around, no kisses, just a long hug...*if I let her go will I ever see her again?* Do I want her to see me?—Escape? She grabs his right arm and pulls him along with her into a large living room, flouncy and naked junk-yard dead furniture sprawling here and there, the room looks like a wrestling team has just left, but Luke's eyes focus only on her...Rian draws the sliding wooden-doors shut, they glide, creak and rattle a bit, but all becomes quite private. They sit, each in the comfortable lock of an end of the same couch.

"I knew you were coming." She looks into his eyes, deeply—*To see if it's me?*—waves of chestnut hair: a sorrel waterfall, still long and sensuous, she as fetching as ever, a denim shirt—and Luke can't help but remember her half-naked and he fights his blood-pumping cock, "You knew?"

"Right, believe it or not," and she doesn't pause for his response, "Katherine threw the *I Ching* last week and she said you'd be coming." She's excited, definitely excited, not exactly the way he had anticipated, but, great, he falls into her excitement..."Yeah," to draw her out more, "But I didn't know why, why are you here?"

So, unexpectedly also, talk about his mother provides the segue. Luke catches Rian up on the topics of his years, holding off on details, on analysis and landing only on California as "a new start," and then he says, "Your turn."

Later on, Luke would return to this Minnesota visit, return to ponder and wonder about it in terms of women—how they all conspired in his life at just the same time. From out of seemingly nowhere his mother had spoken so forthrightly, passionately—it had truly disturbed him, not only her message but the energy behind it, he felt that he didn't know her, had, somehow, *missed* her...but he passed it off to a brush with Death. Then Rian, she was to come at him with like memorable passion, truth-speaking and disturbing insight. But this day he is not remembering, he is living, confronting, pushing himself towards the borders of the Dream he had grown up in, one at once Catholic and yet also American, but mostly Catholic today, yes, he is vividly present to Friar Alfred and Luke-not-Alfred, both he carries upon his shoulders, in his eyes, touches with his hands...this Rian, she who was all that the Good Wife was to be: helpmate in this world and to the next, partner in mutual Suffering, Discipline, Prayer and Redemption. She who had come to him just like Her, out of nowhere, his four year old eyes staring at the statues and pictures of Mary in his Mother's room...*Rian was supposed to be Her.*

Before he could ask, Rian jumps right back to that night, "The past is only useful if it helps us live more fully today." Then she pauses. Luke wants to say, "Yeah," but he wasn't sure that he understood her intent, he did understand her words. "Shoot," was delivered with a sling of bravado, as if he was open to anything, but it too aptly described how he sensed she was going to speak—*Shoot him!*

"You were the last man I was with," but his eyes couldn't let her get away without an explanation, "I mean man in a special sense, you know, maybe you don't—let me jump," and she shifts and rights herself, a sense of their difference fills the room, she looks at him and suddenly realizes that this is not how she had expected things would go—what had she expected? "Let me jump back and forth a bit. I don't know where you were in all that went down but—did you know that Jim got busted?" *She doesn't know I had been back in town?* "No, tell me," not sounding too surprised, just enough, How could she not have known? For sure, I was in and out within months. But this is a small town? "He was doing draft raids. Did you hear about that? A group called the *Minnesota Eight.*"

"No."

"Golly, it was a big deal here, back in the Summer of 70. Right after Kent State...but what I want to ask is if you knew where he was?"

"How the hell would I know that?" came across a bit defensive...what is she getting at?

"I just thought, maybe, he had contacted you." She shifts her arms and lifts her legs up on the couch. Luke can't stop his thoughts, "dirty thoughts," about what it would be like to be with her, *now*, now that he knows how to be with a woman like her, an experienced sexual partner.

"Rian, what do you know about me?"

"You?" as if the question were being asked about a complete stranger.

"Yeah."

"That you went off to the Army, and I did hear that you came back okay." So she did know I was here? "And that you left. I ran into your sister Charlene once, during Christmas shopping and she said you had gone to California...graduate school or something."

"Marines...I was a Marine." Always a Marine, *Semper Fi Luke!*

Then an unhappy air seeps across and swells the room, both know that they are not who the other remembers, that neither knows where to start, that it could all end, simply, directly, forcefully with just one saying, "Gotta go." But neither leaves, all planes of ontological being totter but hold pattern.

For five minutes, Luke and Rian just sit and stare at each other, soft stares, soft but penetrating, water stares, pooling in places to become drink for the other. "Look, I'm not really sure why I looked you up. I came back because I thought my Mom was dying—Dad died three, almost four years now, did you know that?"

"No," a no as kiss—she did not know his father but knew his father in him, it was a strong bond, so his dying was a wound and her No was a kiss upon that wound.

"Right, when he died I didn't know that I had killed him."

"Good grief!" Shock and thundering perplexity.

He holds her off, "Look, my life's nothing if not a spiritual journey, and I don't mean the Catholic stuff we were raised on. I mean we're all involved in killing and healing, in slaying and giving birth. Believe it or not now I know that I found this in the Marines! There I was a true novice, not just Friar Alfred, but an initiate, one who really plunges his hands into the blood of the sacrifice...and it gave me a perspective, well, not just then..." and he tells her about Tring and the Cardinal, it does not elude him that he is running on and on and that she might think him a tad deranged but he feels compelled to tell her—it's almost an hour's monologue, Sunflower's smile, yes, "Objection sustained!"..."and I'm back here, yeah, I was with Jim on those raids. Hard to believe? But everything from those years is so, well, what? "compressed"? is that how to say it, maybe just "fucked" but then, somehow, these raids are connected to Jim doing drugs, dealing drugs...I mean, this was hard, I liked him, at one time I'd say even envied him, he was so daring and far ahead of everyone else on things like the war and race relations...so I'm out in California and I'm on the beach one day thinking about you, how it all started with you, this I know, your lovely body," and he feels himself move again, feels himself coming alive, hunter's blood, looks at her, *Is the door locked?* runs a quick fantasy of having her on the floor, god I'd loved to fuck her!..."and I've come to see it as a violation, not in terms of sin, I'm not into that anymore, but in terms of being born," and here the fingers of Laura race up and around his back, pressing on him, making him feel good, releasing that longing he has for her, and instead of his lust so he sees Rian as someone he wants to have love him, not love only him, but simply to share his love, and he starts hearing himself talk about his mother..."And she said, *I hated your father for not loving me*, and I think that this is what made me come and see you, because I was hating you for not loving me, but what was really happening was that I wasn't allowing you to love me...I only loved you." And then Luke stops, full stop, brakes grabbing and holding—no more words.

"God, Luke the world is so screwy!" and Rian half-stands, pivots and swings herself right next to him, plops down at his side, in facial space, "So, goddam screwy, it's just wonderful!"

Okay! *Okay!* Go with it! Steady. Listen. His heart pounds. Slight lines of sweat form on his brow. He blots it with his shirtsleeve. She is happy, that's for sure. She's just a firm flow of happy energy.

"You see by *the last man I was with...* what I was trying to say is that, oh, hell's bells, look, this commune *Mother Earth*," and she waves an arm as if drawing all in the house into this room, "this place, it's filled with people who are searching to find the male and female inside themselves." He's listening. "When I was with you I was only a woman. I was something for men. I wanted you to touch me, and when you touched me I was happy." She places her left hand on his cheek, "You're very special, Luke. I remember, feel it whenever I just need it, your fire. The heat of your desire, your eyes. We only petted, as they say, but we burned, didn't we?!"

"Rian!" He rips and throws her name loose as if it were a cat clawing his face, "Rian!" and with it he bolts up from the couch, "God, woman, I'm on fire now!"...she chuckles as she watches him turn away from her, struggling with the hot coals in his pants!

Coyly: "I've some water here to douse your fire."

Hypnotically, he turns knowing her intent...she did not have to spread her legs or open her mouth, he knew, "But it is deep water...so come back here and talk with me. Get that thing leashed!"

They both laugh. Luke hikes his trousers, readjusts himself and sits down. For an instant they are in complete communication, wordlessness, the merging of eyes, hands which sign and signal, then it flashes that they have trekked down many of the same valleys, handled many of the same questions, upended and searched under many of the same rocks—boulders!

He goes back and details at length his time as Friar Alfred. He plays out every hour on The Island. He unfolds The Brooders' Dreaming. And comes to Laura.

As deep runs to deep, so Rian takes him back to that night and positions it within the events on campus with the Progressives. It is then a short hop, skip and jump to Thorn, the Sisters and The Round. From there she describes her desire to live as Mother of All. This now her identity. She not wanting a singular relationship, not in terms of being fixed and anchored, but in terms of a commitment for change, for transformation.

"Mother of All"...the phrase sounds pleasant on Luke's tongue, and he wonders what Laura will think of it, he knows he will tell her, is eager to get back and talk with her.

"Mother Earth is not without fathers. We're just waiting for the men to get together as Father Sky...but everything takes time, or unfolds in its own time...that's something I think you understand, now, isn't it?"

"Yeah," one word corking a long history of Purpose, Manifest Destiny, Progress, Calling, "Yeah. No more straight lines! *Heilsgeschichte* as the German theologians would say!"

"Luke," the word is tender, spoken with her deepest breath, seductive, entrancing. "Luke," and she takes his hands in hers, they are no longer visiting, what was not covered as to chronology...would never be covered, what was not clarified would remain forever unclarified, all the ambiguities still to be plumbed and righted would remain ever in their own fog...the reason for their getting together was just gathering its strength, strength to makes its appearance, to boldly call attention to itself, neither could have known otherwise, neither could have resisted, neither could be less than the desire they had always been for the other.

"Luke," and it was his name called as the Announcing Archangel had called, "Behold!"...and the power which swept them was greater than each, but only so great as they yielded and merged their desires.

"Luke," and she holds his hand, he follows, up to her bedroom, small, quite neat, but nothing of detail does he note: not the candles, not the incense, no images of Sunflower, just a smell of Rian, this her den, her heart, all around is her mystery—angles and nooks he is not there



to investigate and discover..no, it is "Luke" and in his soul he cries, "Rian!" and there is not a shred of doubt that they are in a world alone, just two, here within Mother Earth.

If ever more beautiful a daughter of the moon were to be found, Luke would attest to its impossibility. For Rian was a grace, what other word could even approach her and yet be so impoverished? She like fluid: at once water, at once fire, at once the air all about him. Her form was ungraspable. Yes, elegant, this she was, like the shimmering elegance of light at dawn, she comes to him like the mist, a flash of shadow, and her nutty-brown tresses are like scent: a scent trailing on a thousands strands, each for him to hold onto and explore...ah, it is for him this moment in her beauty that he knows her as Mother of All...that this time he sees upon her flesh the desire of the ages, the jealousies of the Sun and all suns, how incensed must they all be, for she is moonlight, fetchingly enshadowed, they reach for her but find only their own reflection!...Could they not understand that this is her gift?!

She had dropped her clothes in one magical move. Here now before him but pure radiance. As she reaches to him she is both scalding hot and freezing cold, her touches upon his skin are cold, fingers of ice and they chill him and as they chill she breathes and they begin to melt, it is this tension of cold and hot which binds them, and he upon her with hands of lock and free, it is himself as iron man and hero freeing from the dragon, yes, he hurriedly undresses and they meet in an embrace which is instant penetration, she leg-locked upon him and he within her in a swift motion of dance, there slowly rocking back and forth, back and forth, releasing the messengers of pleasures, messengers running far and wide, calling upon every part of their being to participate, to run and join the feast!

They fall together onto the bed, falling with the abandon of a ball dropped from a great height, an object relishing the simple act of being in action, they together, rolling this way and that, kissing, locked in a deep northern kiss and a deep southern kiss, *kissing*, and he lays upon his back and she up on him, she all movement, slight hip swerves, the swaying of her breasts...he can hear the music, the music of enticement, how she entices the world of men, the armies of males, lures as she cups and holds up her breasts, offering them to him with Harlot shimmers, Vestal Virgin yearnings, and he feels a thousand spectral cocks bond with his and he is this army of males: young boys and old crones, lusty bucks and crazed middle-agers, all these he laughs up his body and into his cock, "Go, boys!" he hoots and yells...and she showers him with drops of giggling, some muffled, some withheld, others just jumping from her...and he draws her close, they slow down, fall side by side, stay glued, pasted in desire and sweat, he looking at her, loving her, she at him but more a desiring...then she abruptly stops, rolls off him, backside to him, staring out the window.

"What?"

No sound.

"Jesus!" and he rolls away and over to the opposite edge of the bed, is about to get up when her left hand falls upon his hip.

"We're back to where we were."

He wants to say, "So, what's so bad about that?" but as he turns to look at her he can't see her, Dark Vapors, how long has it been? This which he had just come to think a delusion, something from drugs: a flashback, maybe from The Island? Now, he knows its source, it is Her, Rian is Her—are The Brooders in the room?

"What shall we do?" asked with the nervousness of the lost.

"What do you want to do?" comes quickly, riding Innocence.

Without hesitation, "I want to see you."

And both know that see means true visibility, rawness, all the perfection and imperfections, yet, Luke does not know what more to say.

And then the words, "Give me the Mother within you," whispered words, butterfly words landing on his ears, was he trained to respond? Primed? Someone off-stage reading his lines, for to his amazement he whispers back, "Give me the Father within you."

Magical words. Not trickery. Not the old way about thinking about magic, no, magic as flipping the sides, as revelation, as turning things upside down on their heads or butt, whatever, magical as the discovery of latent powers, as the discovery of dry beds with deep water.

And so he responds, imaging himself as her, opening himself to be ridden by her, she now the cock and plunging in and out of him, he now whose body is milk, and holding himself to be drunk, these her kisses upon him, biting his teats, tugging and petting him, he filling with maidenhood, and seeing himself as the ground upon which her wet seed falls...and his eyes open to permit her entrance, she leaping with her cock and swooping in, about and around as if riding a wild missile..."Fuck me!" this he says, says it like he wants to hear her say it, calls to her like the call of acceptance which drives him crazy when with women, now all the whores of Saigon are his flesh, his cunt, all Sunflower his smile, he knows that he is smiling Her smile...oh, his body works and works, laboring, cracking, smashing and grinding itself into fine powder, powder to mix with her blood and water and make anew...he might have fainted, loses consciousness, is lost in a strange, unknown world of dreaming, but dreams....

She had known it was coming, that her male was there, knew that her quest to be Mother of All necessitated her finding her fathering power, this as catalyst to her birthing, finding it so that she could share it with men, but all the Sisters knew that this meant that men would have to find their mothering power...but what males were even talking about these things? All the radical, anti-war males were off struggling with their fathering power—at least as they themselves saw it. Few knew that the war was truly about mothering.

So, all that had come to her was the question, Ask the Question. Then wait and see. And Katherine's *I Ching* reading had told her to be prepared...she had been following Katherine's spiritual guidance through the *I Ching* for several years, now, and it had proven sound and true to her...but she had been terribly perplexed by last week's reading: Number 37, *Chia Jen*, translated as The Family or The Clan, there was so much that was traditional, with women subordinating, submitting, but Katherine held firm and Rian had meditated long and hard on several lines:

"The perseverance of the woman furthers."

and

"She must not follow her whims, She must attend to the food, Perseverance brings good fortune."

The food was the past, and as food is eaten in the present so it creates the future. Perseverance was her clarion call to be faithful to the Tradition she grew up in and not follow whimsical, easy, but most often false, new prophets and voices. But Perseverance! It was one of the old Roman Catholic cardinal virtues! She had heard more about it than she cared to from the Nuns, who for them it was a tool of slavery. But Perseverance it was to be, and Rian had waited.

But who would have thought Luke? Yet as soon as she saw Luke, she said, *Who else?* He the Tradition, they together the Tradition...now she can feel her clitoris growing and swelling, sucking up his cock, engorging with it, cannibal frenzy, and she looks upon him with amazing eyes, eyes which from his side slip out of the Dark Vapors and come to look at her at him, eyelid quavering, and she feeling that she has never seen a man's face before, seen it this way, seeing it yield, submit, subordinate itself, Luke's face is plastic, it moves and she reads the tears he shed

at his father's grave, she reads the kisses he gave his mother in departing: adoring, golden kisses...and then without reckoning she is upon him with a savaging fury, her hands at him like a child stealing chocolates, ripping from his chest and body every small pleasure available, ripping them, cramming them into her mouth, she gathers him like booty, her kisses snatch the gold from his heart, and there is laughter, haughty, pirate laughter, the sneering laughter of the plunderer...and who could stop her? how could she be expected to control this? she now from out the Vapors, there to see the male in clear light, the male looking at her and saluting her, greeting her, and this male—*Fool!*—offering that of himself which is treasure...so who could blame her for plundering?...truly, it is Rian's right to ride the waves on the pirate's prow, she the Captain and Master of the Seas, for how could she be father unless she understood every facet of fathering? including its abandoning, its obliteration of Her?...then she dismounts and sets herself up on all fours, this time pushing her cock back into him, pushing it with her butt muscles, she now working like a frenzied pile driver, pounding backward onto him, pushing all with her butt, pushing and he being driven into the air, solidly impacted and stomped into the astral ground...oh, she breaks and wears herself down with the fury of this violent energy, this plundering intimacy...and him, what is he doing? Good piece of cunt that he is. *Fuck bucket!* She drools desire and disdain. She rolls on her back and grabs two fistfuls of his hair and plunges him into her pussy, yet there to suck her cock, her clit, lick and lick and suck it, "Eat me, baby!" she screams and she is jerking off all over his mouth, squirting and spewing her come, and he lapping it up like the sorry little bitch that he is!....and at some indefinable moment, they both stop, almost in one motion, and collapse upon the bed, exhausted, weary—they briefly sleep.

Awake, Luke glances up at the ceiling and realizes that he doesn't want to be anywhere but here. "Laura" is a faint echo, but not a name for this lifetime, no, he wants to be *here*, has been trying to get here for his whole life. Yes, he knows that this is the touch, what causes him to shudder, but he hadn't shuddered, didn't, no, the touch in the sanctuary, it was calling for him to be Mother, it needed so much to become Mother, and Her, Madonna, her touch had been for his Fathering...but how could he have understood it? Did any of The Brooders even vaguely understand—*The Master?*

She turns and looks at him. "Are we really this stupid?"

He understands, "We had to carry it to its end."

And as they roll into a loose embrace, a voice: "So, is this the end?" Who said that? And it is with this insight that each was the summing up so that each could go forth, as such they looked upon each other, it is a freeing look, knowing no restrictions, one of playfulness, and he touches her face, fingertips the drop and fall of her forehead to nose to lips and around her chin, fingertips like sonar probes, drawing back information, forming images, he knows that this is the face of Her—isn't every face?—that's what it says, *look upon me I am woman*, look upon me and I am your mother, sister, niece, daughter and as you desire me you desire all of us: *Mother of All*...and he watches his hands draw magic colors from her eyes, colors which rise to a life of their own and form patterns of beauty and intrigue, colors of seduction, all colors, flowing smooth and rough, drenching them with cold freeze and steaming mineral waters...yes, her looks are dancing with his, watching his face form as child and boy in wonder, as intense young man with desperate earnestness, as bewildered spouse who has seen so much of woman and knows he know so little, and as old man who is again boyish with innocence and yearning...all these but petals on the flower of lust...she sees the serpent in him, sees it as a flame, winding, twisting, flowing down his left arm and around her breasts, she plays with his serpent, winds it around her head like bandanna, flaunts it like scarf of carefreeness, and lets it slink and curl around her legs,

knowing that it seeks her nest, there entering her, him in his every serpent part, with his every point of flame: his eyes, his tongue, his fingers, his cock...he is entwined around her and within her, she who to him is all exploration, a gateway to a thousand dreams, finding upon her breasts the connection with his tongue, grasping that she is all his points of connection and penetration, his tongue her clit, her tongue his penis, fingers plying and pleasuring at every gate: front and back, north and south...yes, what they know is what they are becoming, know it as they become it, it as they entwined, awed, the complete serpent, the consuming fire: the serpent biting its own tail, consuming itself, Love Consuming, Self-Love which is Other-Love...all that was Catechism question and answer, all that was theological point and riposte, all that was doctrinal delineation: all now but hay in the fire...for Rian and Luke find their selves within each other as they are each other, one body, coupled, communion, commingling...it is all cup and blood: cup of body and blood of tears: the water of human laughter, the wine of human sorrow, all taken as both drift off, happily.

In the morning, although he knew that not many men were up and about in Mother Earth, he was self-conscious despite his best effort. Quickly he asks her to dress and breakfast at Al's. Once there the press of bodies, eyes, arms and whispered conversations serve them well. He taps out his love for her with his fingers on her palms. She blows a morning song of praise and glory upon the back of his hand as she holds it and kisses it. This they execute in minute spaces, *communiqués at Al's*. Afterwards, they stroll around campus. The snow is banked high, over Luke's head, and clouds have set a low ceiling, more snow was imminent and the effect was one of a high school stage, as if the buildings were just props, they wandering about with an audience listening—spectral, angels?

"We were always just for the ending. I guess that's true?"

"I guess."

She starts to cry. He blurts, "Don't," then retreats, "Don't or you'll freeze your face!" They laugh. He wants to cry. They walk for an hour in silence, leaning against each other, snow begins to fall, renegade winds begin to whip the trees, old snow flutters to the ground, they head for his car, it will be a real blustery Minnesota snow...and so it ends.

Luke knew she didn't want him to get out of the car. Not walk her up the stairs and kiss her good-bye on the stoop as if ending a B movie romance. So, he just looks at her. Her who is spectral Spring, will always be his Spring, flowering, she inside of whom is his seed, eternal seed, she who is ever within him, always a special person, part of himself. She knows that she will not have to call, that he will always be thinking of her, that the child she bears will always be themselves as newborn love.

### **CHAPTER 43: Snow**

There is a poem in everyone. The Reverend Cleophas R. Schneider, O.S.B., poet laureate of The Towers, and, self-proclaimed, of the worldwide Benedictine Order—a rather rakish in appearance, though not in action, curious monk, he always with something on his head: tam o'shanter, French beret, during Christmastide: a Dickensian Stovepipe Hat, come spring a Bowler—who was this priest? poet of mystical love!—yes, in his later years wearing....sleeping with, so it was rumored...doffed by a Sherpa's hat, making him look like his head was squeezed between buns: a sausage of sorts, with the winter making his nose red-cherry: a spot of ketchup...but it was during the war, so Luke heard, when he wore, from Tet on, the conical hat of the Vietnamese peasant, so then many no longer thought him just peculiar, rather, upon "academic review" just shelving him in a basement scholarly alcove, declaring him eccentric and "a bit touched in the head,"...teaching career had ended—by hat!... ah, Luke remembers him

well, having always thought him a complete weirdo, knowing his soul later as incarnated in all the Hippie—weren't they simply "Benedictines without a Monastery?" wandering mendicants? Such thoughts would play with his memories...but now, a poem, maybe only one in one's whole life, just one good one—"Heart," so The Phas, as he was both respectfully and snidely named, would always say, not pound, no, his hands were too delicate for pounding, it was his tongue, it gave a certain cardiac beat as he said, "Heart. When the words have Heart, then you have a poem!" Luke had liked that, he not being given to iambic pentameter and all such foolishness—Heart, now, Luke's heart.

But how to say that this is a poem only because his life had Ended? His life as Catholic: Holy, Roman, Apostolic. Ended by Her, her, Rian. How to celebrate Laura by revealing her as the flower sprouting atop a corpse? But a corpse dead only in that other world, on that other plane, a corpse, being body, corpus, now alive on Laura's plane. Oh, it has become so clear, clear here in Minnesota, Minnesota banks of snow looking like dunes at The Beach...curious, wherever one is, there it is!

*Dear Laura.* No, sounds stupid, distant. Sweetheart: but have we claimed that word?, Dad's word, Mom's ears. Hmm. Laura. Yeah, he scrawls it lavishly, with his best hand at the flying, leaping, longing L and a rush of the aura, striking him as he writes that she is an aura, ha! insight, discovery, should I play with that idea? He pauses. Then stands, heads for the kitchen and returns with another huge mug of coffee.

Laura:

Laura: my love? Hmm. My...no, just leave it.

*Laura:*

Did you ever think why snow disappears? All other weather is right there in the Now. Rain falls. It does not remain. Maybe it pools. Maybe it runs-off into streams and rivers. Wind blows. Clouds move on. Sunshine disappears with the night. But snow remains. Why? So that it can disappear. Now, I'm not a great writer, and I don't want this letter to confuse you. We have never shared written words. I know they can strangle and lie and betray. So if you have any doubts about meanings or find yourself reading things into this—especially things you don't like, just know that this is my Heart speaking. Maybe it will show the poverty of my heart! That's the risk of words.

As snow accumulates and as it disappears it shows us the layers of life. It's really humbling, when you stop and think about it. Snow covers over and hides, so it can lead to illusion or delusion. It is ever-changing. Either piling up snowflake by snowflake or melting as soon as it hits the ground. It shifts and changes. You walk in it and can celebrate—either your life or death! *Either*...it's just beautiful and wondrous or treacherous and colder than the morgue's freezer. So, at once the betrayer and at once the revealer.

So, you grew up in California, and what I just said is all mish-mash! *Southern*, sorry, I do know the difference—I think. And you don't know snow. But you ARE snow! How's that for a poetic image? (Amusing, I hope.)

What am I saying? Well, at the high abstract end: all my life's been like rain or clear weather. Things which are just in the Now. Catholic doctrine and beliefs fell like rain, to nourish life, to clear away the dust and grime, to wash the sky so that the Sun could shine brighter. See, for the true believer—and I guess I have to admit that I am one!—the day is clear. And that's what I found in AnoMar at the beach. The same type of clear. And what I saw was just the Now.

Okay. Okay. Boy, I'm getting this fouled up! See, The Beach. Put it in capitals. That's when I met you. You are also The Beach. And you were right when you said I didn't have a

body. At the beach, no one has a body! They're all just ideas and ideals: Beauty, Youthfulness, Unblemished...should I say Immaculate! *Ha*.

In the snow people don't have bodies, either. They layer themselves with clothes. Things to make them look Beautiful, etc., not just warm. The Snow and The Beach—not much different.

See, here comes the hard part. You touched me and made me live, not just in the Now but in the Past and in the Future. Not at first. After the first massage—is that the right word? Look let me explain this later, but let me call what you do "bodywandering"—you'll be amused by where this came from, later.

After your first bodywandering, all I wanted to do was fuck you. Screaming. Mad. An on-the-beach or up-in-the-attic-during-a-snowstorm FUCK! No two ways about it. If there ever was flesh I wanted to plunder it was yours...and in some ways—ah, Confession. Can I ever get away from Confession?!—that's what I did. I mean when we first made love...bad word, as I see it now, not love, but had sex. Fucked. Hope this doesn't offend you. Remember I'm just trying to get to my Heart...I'm just bursting back here. Bursting to see you and be with you again.

You see, your bodywandering enabled me to deal with my Past. I mean, I guess it made me not just bolt and run when you said I had no body. I mean, that's kinda weird isn't it?! Telling someone they have no body. But if you hadn't told me that, well, I wouldn't have been able to go into my Past. Go there. Not be afraid. Well, I was afraid. Yes. But to go back and find my body.

I've had an experience here—we'll talk about that when together. I don't think I can find words for it. Not yet. An experience which, I think, gave me back my body. Put an End to my Catholic casting off of my body. Isn't that what I was taught? I mean I think about it and right from the first Catechism class the whole emphasis is on dying and going to heaven. About this life as a Vale of Tears. About being born in Original Sin. Darkness. Blackness. Dead at birth. Everyone born stillborn! Man, I get angry just writing this.

But I think this is what you were talking about. Look, I love you but I was so crazed eye-blinded by you that all you were saying seemed like blabbering. Or me just taking notes in class for later interpretation. But, as stupid as I was, when I came back here, something my Mom said—and that's for later, too—and something another woman said, well, it made everything you said make sense. So, this is how you're Snow. And The Beach, too.

Snow, on The Beach

You have no body!

This the Baptismal chant.

No body but Christ's.

This flesh not yours but His.

Corrupted you are.

Filth.

C'mon, let's call it what it is: Crap!

Not just dust, but dung, and only He can make it Real.

Breathe life into it.

You child of woman, have no body.

She not a body-maker.

She but a dung keeper.

Dung ball.

Rain, the Baptismal Water.

Rain from God The Father.

Not His Tears  
Only His Words.  
Words which wash clean.  
Wash away the blood of Her  
Of Mother  
And Snow.  
Not Snow White.  
Not Immaculate. Not really.  
Only Snow as illusion and delusion.  
Snow as blanket, obscuring.  
Snow to cover only the grave.  
Cold-blue frozen bodies but sinless  
Only in Death.  
But the Sun shouts, The souls are free!  
Free in Him.  
But you, bodywanderer.  
Snow, on The Beach.  
Your rain is your touch.  
Your touch is the revealing snow.  
You wander and bodies are yours and mine.  
You touch me and all the serpents  
like jumbled bones  
scurry and join together  
into one fire  
to melt the snow, evaporate the rain,  
dry the mud, burn the sun  
Yes. One fire.  
Creation.  
Moonset and Sunrise at The Beach.

Hell! Clear as mud, eh! But I'm trying. See, someone once called me a bodywanderer. I didn't know what it meant. But now I do, I think. But it's not like they thought. No. My body has been wandering. Trying to find, well, my body! You made me see, no, feel that. Look this is not sounding like my heart. My heart is on fire. It's beating, pumping fire. Oh, fuck it all, I just want to be with you!! SOON.

Look, I'll explain it all when we get together, but my Catholic life is over. It ended here. I found my Mother and my Father—in a way I know you'll understand. The best part is that I can deal with my past, now. And move into a future through a new present. A bit abstract there. Here it is: you wander my body and so my body is yours, and as yours I can wander your body and so find it as mine. Male and Female. It's in both of us, isn't it? A greater range than sex and fuck...I guess, and here's some Greek!—it's Eros. In its broadest meaning. Shuddering Energy. Fire both cold and hot, and even warm...*Flame!*

God, I'm just amazed at how much I can't seem to say. So, let me just say: I don't want your body. I want mine. Let's find each together.

Love,  
Luke

He re-reads the letter. Doesn't want to send it. Why? Feels guilty at not being straight out about Rian. Not sure if she is the End. Thinking, as he reads, that maybe he should stay. Maybe Laura was there just so he could come back and be with Rian? His flesh and bones go into meltdown as he flashbacks on Rian ...*Shuddering Energy!* Christ!

He lets the letter sit. Drinks some more coffee. Makes some toast. It's past midnight. In the darkness the snow is even more mischievous. More treacherous. He struggles with a frantic, erupting, skin-itching urge to go out and throw himself, buck naked, into a snow bank. Christ! he swears as the sweats trickle and pool upon his flesh.

He sits. Slumps. California: The Beach. AnoMar. Is it real? Is Laura real. Or just an aura? He dozes.

There are no Dark Vapors. This he sees. Watches Him as he conjures them up, just blowing dust. Trying to baffle Her eyes. A bully kicking sand at the beach. Yeah, it is a beach. He the wind. She the water. Both together making land. He blows and the land is submerged. She rises in moon-glide and the land is bared. Playful. It appears all playful. And then he sees it. The Brooding. The imitation. First, it is comedic. She laughs. He is amusing parody. But then it is tragic. His creatures. Sand-castle and sand-people. From them he hides the Moon. Casting only Sun Shadows. And She retreats into the Shade. Barely reflected. Distant. And when the child asks, He says, "Penis." Grabs it and jerks out Flames. Sends them flying. Splattering. And the child giggles and laughs. Imitates him. Is ecstatic!...But knowing more, knowing deeper, knowing better, knowing that there is more than just the hand, the hand jerk, He lays him down, blows dust and so hides Her from him, "Play!" he shouts and the child plays, finding his Flame, hot and sizzling at water's edge, watching it turn water into steam and into clouds, and from out the Dark Vapors does she arise: *playmate*, His gift to him, plaything, amusement...*in imitatio Dei*.

Luke wakes. Slowly. Almost not aware that he has dozed. Revisits his dream as if it is an argument, a storyline he had been cogitating, not dreaming. And he knows that it is Laura. Has to be. For what could he give to Rian more than he has given?

In the morning, Luke mails the letter. It will take three days, this he knows.

#### **CHAPTER 44: Ouroboros**

Standing at her door, standing there—to remain eternal guard, be vigilant?—wait for dragons to prove one's worthiness? *Why wasn't she home?* She told him, with a tone of never-changing, that, "I'm always home on Sunday."

It had taken him some time to find her place, up in the hills, past some ranches—AnoMar was famous for stabling and studding horses, especially for the Del Mar Racetrack: hills for bucking stallions and broken dreams. It was an old house, maybe thirty years, with no distinctive architectural flair, just very homey, even from the outside he could sense this...just the curtains on the window said "Welcome Home!" But she wasn't there.

Could she possibly be at work? An emergency? So, he drives down the hill, a bit faster than he'd admit, and wends around the ponds in central AnoMar till he finds her building, but he didn't have to drive up to the door to know that no one was there, not a car in the parking lot, not a light on in any office, not a human face in sight.

Back at his apartment, Luke's deep into a muddy brooding, not dreaming, being irked, pissed off—the residue of Darkness from his trip is thick about him—angry at her, God!—but he can't call her a bitch, no matter what, he bites his tongue, yeah, yeah, *Jack* you're calling, smoky dope you're calling, but I ain't coming! So fuck off!



He can't move. Doesn't know whether he should distract himself with cooking, always an ordeal, or watch the Boob Tube... Aw, shit!... he wants to play ball, run up and down the court and slam the goddam rim, break it to pieces! So he does. Grabs his BB ball, laces up his sneakers, and heads for the Y.

*God is Good!* God is Good! So he laughs to himself, twenty guys on the hardwood, two games in progress, lots of high energy, and he's taken early—guys know him. Not a legend, but he gets respect. And it isn't long before they know he is crazy tonight, just a non-stop running and ramming and jamming...Whooooeee!...and there is anger and trash talking and lots of sideways glances flashing murderous intent and he is taking as much as he is giving, he's relishing the slaps to his arms, the grips and pinches on his hips, the forearms against his back, and the hip banging, blocking out, moving out..."Yo goddam muddafucking whiteass honkey muddafucker!" and the guy takes a swing at him, Luke is at the ready, not The Island, but his heart is pumping Cain's Oil, yeah, he knows this guy, they're familiars, but they sure are royally pissed!...four guys have to jump on them to pry them apart.

Sweat sodden, dripping, wiping his face on saturated jersey, Luke's a sight to avoid if you've just pressed your best suit...and so as he stands at his door, reaching up high for his second key, off to the side, his next door neighbor haltingly approaches, wishes she had a stick, a stick so she could pin the tiny envelope at its end and say, "Here, take this!"...and run away before the smell or the sweat monster comes and gobbles her up.

"Jesus!" he swears as he plops down on his couch, it hungrily sucking, like a babe at teat, "I should've thought she might've left a message!" And so it is there, a note, a message, and he waits a minute, holds it up to the light: a foreboding chill strikes directly from the envelope to his heart...God, he knows it's bad news. *Bad news, Man!*

Luke,

Got your letter. Liked it. Away for two weeks.

Laura.

Oh, Man! Does he want for The Brooders, for their chains and artifacts of torture, oh, if this weapon of hers wasn't so devastating!...yeah, he knows the cruelty of the unspoken, he knows death by inference and interpretation—ah, shit! she's killing me!

*Cold.* The note was just so cold. Like dead-man's fingers. She reaches out and says, "Not enough!" Tells me there is no passion. No words of longing. Not even lust. Goddam, why didn't she say, "Sorry, but I don't love you." Why this dishonesty? This treating him like he's of no consequence, someone to whom she could just drop a note, like to her cleaners or the paperboy: "Away for two weeks"....*Jesus, I hate her!*

Darkness. He sees it all about him. Thick Vapors. Yeah, I see them. Hey, Doctor Mindfuck, I see'em!...Ah, the temptations, no, Temptations—always a capital letter, and he sneers at himself, is divided within himself, several Lukes, some yet unborn...and, oh, he sees the Temptation: Anthony in the Desert, Jesus on the Mountaintop, Yahweh with Her in The Garden... NO! screams through his head, NO! he is talking to himself, tromping about the apartment, I DON'T WANT TO GO BACKWARDS...He strains every muscle in his body, stretches every fiber, intensifies every sense—I don't want to go backwards, not into the Tomb! *The note:* he reads the note again. Okay. Take it easy. Just take it as a note. No big thing. No capital letters, no looking at this from those fucking Vapors, she's a person, alive, has many feelings, can misunderstand things, doesn't know what happened back in Minnesota...oh, he aches to be with her, to talk with her, to babble on and have her laugh at his orations, "Can't you

ever explain anything without putting it into historical perspective?"...God, am I a Lost Soul, I even love her frustrations and sarcasm!

He realizes it is definitely Choice, yeah, another capital, but here deserved. His to Choose, just as Yahweh Chose: Chose to ignore Her, Chose to delude Himself that She just wasn't, Chose to obliterate Her...now, it's my Choice. And I Choose to just choose, to wait, sitting so as to balance the scale, not tip it only my way, wait and be receptive...what did I learn with Rian? Did I want to be the obliterated woman? No, shit no! Did I want to let her steal my body? Hell, no! So, why Big Guy are you falling back into that crap?...Damn, and he sees that it was either everything or nothing, that everything had had to count, "Nothing is trivial!"...but, yeah, that can really get fucked-up, I mean, sometimes all we are is trivia, just thimble-cups, just dots...yeah, humility, okay, pump it up: Humility...what is that? Degradation? No, it's allowing the other to know you...so it sinks in, not by reason, not by force of logic, but like a bird flying to Alaska who just drops by his windowsill and poses there for him to admire, so it comes—she wants to know me, maybe, maybe she doesn't even know this...*maybe?*...but, maybe, I'm just to be here, waiting, open—for the Sun to set and the Moon to rise?

*Two weeks.* Like a flash. It could have ground on like two sidereal years, it could've punished him with a thousand trials and condemnations, hangings and tortures for The Faith or his lack thereof...but it didn't, he just went to work, worked prodigiously, kept himself balanced, thought about her, but did not worry, in counterpoint, he became receptacle, and even if she only pitched some long-distance copper coins of affection and love, well, he'd just take them, accept them, store them up.

Two o'clock in the a.m., ringing phone, he reaches over knowing it's her.

"Can you come over?" she asks, asks knowing that he'll be there. No mention of the time. What does he care about time?

In the thick darkness of the morning, a darkness turned murky by the pitching moonlight shivering off leaves, hundreds of thousands of leaves, slightly swaying, giving him a sense that he is inside a gigantic pot and all about him is swirling, it is magical, the word comes to him—her house, lights, dim and of course candles, they saturate the air with the softest of light, quivering light, light which dances with shadows, yet it is all warm, the effect just warm...warm as cozy, as if as you walk up the house will embrace you.

"Hi!" and she kisses him, forcefully, hard, and stands hugging him, her best bear hug.

"Glad to see me?" a hint of nervous humor.

"Bet I am." Nothing special, like seeing an old friend, no spark, yet.

Coffee for him, some crippled Chinese word for her tea—he pronounces it, boasts...Hell, I know every word for Chinese tea! Some Sanskrit. Impressed? She smiles. Hell, he's just glad to be there. No matter what.

He thought he'd handle this cautiously, ask about her travel, but it's Laura who takes charge, has called this meeting.

"I had to go away. Where is not important. But," and she looks at him like if he gives the correct response he can go onto the next question, "But, do you know why I left?"

"Actually, no. Was I supposed to?"

"It would've helped."

*Oh, God, what did I miss now?*

"So you left and I was supposed to know you were leaving? Wait! This is a trap. This is one of those, "Men don't talk about their feelings" traps. Like you were feeling and I missed it." He gets up and pours another cup. She's listening, intently.

"Look, I don't want to get defensive. I miss things. You miss things. But let me ask, Did you miss the fact that I'm madly, insanely, absolutely bonkers in love with you?"

"No," with an irrepressible smile.

"Did you, by any chance, possibly mis-read me?"

"Go on."

"That's not an answer. But, okay. Did you read me, interpret my actions because of someone else, some other guy you knew...or *know*?"

"That's why I called."

*Oh, the demons, goddam them!* Luke was, like a surgeon, aware of the delicate cut he made with the present tense: "know"—Translation: Is there someone else, now? He shudders. But stabs at taking control, holding onto some ground.

"Someone else, *now*?"

"Now?" She laughs. A laugh which clearly states that she understands his anxiety, sixth grade Luke asking Stephanie Woodruff to his first dance, fear of rejection, a worse fear than remembered at Rian's Betrayal. God, his guts are dragging on the floor!

"Yeah." Strong, chin jutted forward, *Hit me, if you're man enough!*

"No, Luke. There hasn't been a *now* for quite some time...that's part of the problem."

Relief, six innings of hard-ball and he welcomes the relief, score tied, at least not behind.

"Okay. So...where's this going?"

"Luke, come with me." Laura stands and holds her right hand out, he takes it. She leads him into her bedroom. A large room, part living room, part loft, with fireplace, and lots of small pane windows in irregular stacks, positioned, it was immediately clear, to capture light, now moonlight, flooding the room with moonlight, casting patterns here and there, making the room appear alive, moving, almost like flying through the clouds...and her bed, an old four-poster with canopy and fine lace. "Wow!" he murmurs and she smiles...then moves him towards some artwork. Two expertly framed pieces..."Do you know these?" One was an oil of the first-ever picture of the Earth from outer space, title: "Earthrise." the second an original piece, a collage of sorts, and running across it the words of John Lennon's *Imagine*..."Yeah, I'm familiar with them. Why?"

"Why?"

Stupid question! "Okay, they're your special meditation images?"

Then she slays him, absolutely, one-hundred percent slashes him in two as she spins him about and he sees— *Rian!*...He staggers backwards, trips and falls on his backside, worse he knows that there is fright in his eyes—what can she be thinking?

"Luke, are you okay?" Quickly to his side, suppressing a chuckle at his awkwardness, it's clear to him that she doesn't know.

"Where'd you get that?" He points, not at a picture of Rian, but her presence.

"You mean the Ouroboros? That's what I want to talk about. It's a Jungian thing, actually. At least the Jungians re-discovered it. It's the snake biting its tail. What does it mean to you?"

*Hold it, lady!* I'm innocent until proven guilty. You know, this is America!

But he blurts out, child babbling, "It scares the hell out of me!"

He stands, standing, waiting to slay some dragons...or be burned to cinders.

While he's struggling for a calm breath, Laura is busy removing the three pieces from the wall and lining them up on the small couch set before her fireplace...the warmth of the embers still stir the room.

"Luke," and it's a bit more like hearing a teacher call his name than he likes, "Luke, this is my life." Pause. Glances over at him. An invitation? "To understand me, and what I want out of life, you have to understand these three things."

"Just three?" he lofts back with a tinge of sarcasm.

"Don't," she whispers, says again, hands palms up at HALT!..."Please, don't."

Okay! Okay! Hold your terrified tongue. *Listen to her!*

"A bit like interpreting the Holy Trinity," he squeezes out a weak smile, "I'm a bit out of my league here. These are yours, why don't you explain?"

Laura accepts his invitation, this is what she wanted to do, had tried with one guy, A True Love, back some years, a soul-mate, so she had hoped, but she hadn't gotten far before he just said, "You're just too intense! *Too intense!*" and fled.

"Here," and she points to the Earthrise shot. "I live out here," and she touches the frame, "Far away from the Earth as you know it...or as I knew it. Do you know what I mean?"

Christ, *lady*, answer your own questions, I can't read your mind!

"Err, hmmm," he's calling on every resource in his cerebral library, in several languages, cross-referenced to exotic and arcane imagery and feelings, "Let's see, well, this Earth shot. On the surface it's simple. People have never seen the Earth this way."

As an aside she comments, not pedantically, actually, taken with the tiny but seminal fact—"Gag's Eyes, that's what I call it, Seeing with Gag's Eyes. *Yuri Gagarin*, ya know, he was the son of a carpenter, did you know that?"

Then, back on to Luke track: "I mean you have to realize that what we call Earth is a fantasy. All the lines on maps—fantastic creations. And isn't this what this Lennon song is about?" Luke's on a roll, and her face is receiving, he feels he's communicating. "Yeah, he talks about no religion and no money and all that. Some might say a bit utopian, but if you're in a spaceship you'd wonder why Earth people don't grasp that they're all one family, have the same history, breathe the same air," he looks to her for affirmation, "*Right?*"

"Intellectually, a Grade A, but..."

"But," he almost moans.

"But how does it make you *feel?*"

Okay! Okay! Oh, God, do I have to tell her about Rian? Aw, shit, I knew it, knew it!...*Janis, wail for me!*

"Look. Sit down." He sits, two chairs, both rockers, both facing the glowing fireplace...Laura drops a log on the fire before sitting down.

"If a guy said to you *Give me the Mother within you*—what would you think, what would you do?"

Without missing a beat, Laura says: "I'd show him this picture," she points to the Earthrise shot.

"Huh?" Her response confuses him, the connection is not clear.

"That's what this picture says. That the Mother is within you. You and me."

"Okay."

"Let's see, what if I said that the trees are your lungs. Not just produce oxygen for your lungs, but are your lungs. Can you feel that?"

"Yeah. I think so." *Yeah, I can feel that!*

"So how would you live? I mean how would you treat trees?"

I don't know, *I fuck flowers!* Did I tell you about Sunflower? Did I? Must've. You blabber-mouth! "Confession is good for the soul." Ha! Fuck trees? No, hold on, this is what you

want, here is the dragon, here is the touch..."Well, logically it would mean that you'd treat them like you treat yourself, your own body."

"And practically. Day by day, how would you do this?"

"Got me there! Am I supposed to say I wouldn't chop down a tree?" Teasing the logic he grins and says, "No, Ma'am, I didn't chop down that cherry tree!"

She doesn't want to but a laugh escapes. He's got a feral imagination!

"Luke," her tone is serious, concerned, calls him back to the high risk she is taking, "Luke, when I first touched your body. Actually, just held my hands over your body, I saw it writhe, not just with pain but with flames, like a million hearts all throbbing, seeking somehow to express themselves. When I first touched you, I was," and here she begins to bleed, old astral wound, *Lover's Gash*, "I went orgasmic." She flushes, feels the thump, feels his cock throb within her, strains not to just gush and flow away.

Her heat flares hotter than the fireplace, Luke has to shield his astral eyes, his spiritual heart. "Wow!" is all he could get out...it wasn't the word *orgasmic*, no, it was her eyes, fire fingers which reached out and wrapped themselves around his being, not just his head, no, his being, and they thrilled him, juiced him, hot-wired his erotic network, she cold-stoned almost fried him!

"Wow!" and up he shot as if embers had actually skyrocketed from off the logs and set him afire. "Wow!" and "Whoa!" as he stands behind the rocker, grips it hard, holds it steady. "Whoa!"

Laura rocks, steadily, calmly, a glow is about her—fireplace aura? moonlight halo?...her inner self? Luke feels like they have quantum jumped to an astral plane, really, truly...he is fascinated, locked in while at once terrified by the blatant mystery of the moment.

"Coffee. Can I get another cup?" She nods.

"Want something?"

"Just water."

Okay, now you have a Choice. Go back in? Leave her on her astral plane? Escape this bucolic den of witchery? What the fuck is going on, Man? You're sweating like a pig, Man. Is it worth all this? *Was she that good a fuck, Man?*...Choice: he chooses to stay here, touch her Tree.

Laura has her water, and rocks. He sips his cup, and walks about. He is cranked.

"Trees are like women you know." She found this an odd beginning, her hopes sank a bit.

"Look, The Tree of Knowledge in the Garden...and the Serpent. I learned all the Traditional interpretations, exegesis, glosses, commentaries, blah-blah. But I just had this experience"—the Archangel unsheathes his Flaming Sword!—"well, back in Minnesota, see there is this woman in my life"...he is looking out the window at the moon, he wants to be faithful to Rian, he loves Rian, it doesn't matter what Laura says or does, he can look back and if she's gone, so be it! *Rian, I love you. Love me, now, here!*..."her name is Rian. We dated in college. She was my first love. Love, I mean, in the physical sense. I touched her...and she drove me crazy!" Oh, Moon, am I mad? "But I ended up hating her. Like Adam hated Eve, or maybe Yahweh hated Eve, I don't know. Look," and he does turn, and she is still there, *Her*, looking at him: Laura's eyes, clear, strong, telling him that she is peering, looking beyond, seeing as he sees, "Look, it's a long story...but *then* it's not. It's the old short story—men obliterate women. I hated her because I couldn't possess her. Couldn't snatch her away and ravish her by myself. No, she had been touched. Damaged goods. See," and he sighs, "for me its theological. She, like Eve, touched God. His cock. That's what this Tree is. His power. She, as a goddess, a capital letter She, awoke a consciousness in Yahweh, awoke him not just to his sexual feelings but to his

creative potential, that he is Father, but He didn't want to be Father, he just wanted sex, to jack off, so he creates Adam and says to Her, "Fuck him!" But of course she can't, not like He could, Yahweh I mean, not like a god. But somehow She gives Adam some god-consciousness...that's where the Serpent comes in. It's Yahweh's erotic power, not just sexual, but erotic, his creative power, that part of His maleness He Himself rejects, His fathering." Anger is like arsenic on Luke's lips, the words he spits out, "Fucking stupid Yahweh thinks He can live, be a man, just by jerking off, just by deluding Himself that He doesn't need Her to be creative...Shit, it's all such a bunch of twisted, fucked up masturbation! It really pisses me off." And his anger is godly, striking fear into his tongue...it dares not speak further.

Laura was up and across the room, just about to hug him when she was slapped back by his godly anger, she waits. He glowers. Around his body is a pulsating field of crimson light, a bloody mess, he is in menses...and she knows it is but time, not minutes measured by a clock, but astral time, just time and he will return, *she waits*.

His aura streaks with gold, some cobalt blue, and soon it is gone...Luke relaxes, turns to her, they briefly hug, both sit down, again.

"Well?" he says, he is tired, but yet energized, wants to continue.

"You talk about it differently, but we feel the same way." She smiles—is she happy?

"When I first saw with Gag's Eyes, I gasped. It came in a flash, "The Earth is alive!" screamed through my bones. And I know this is true. I took this class—The bible as literature—and we focused on Genesis...and I just knew they had it all wrong. That we weren't expelled from The Garden. The Earth is The Garden. But I didn't know why I felt that way until I saw this photo."

"Yeah, it's a Lie. Big Lie. A betrayal of the imagination."

They rock for awhile. Listening to their silence, feeling close. Laura puts another log on the fire.

"Yeah," Luke starts up, "Yeah, like this Lennon song, *Imagine*. That's what they did, they imagined a world that wasn't The Garden. They imagined a God who was only Father. They imagined our bodies as corrupt, as shit, as worthless. Look," and he causes the air to be stilled, the moon to not move, "Look, The Brooders, this Order I belonged to. They dream this Old Dream. They, everyday, imagine this Old Story. And so the world is. Continues to dream the Warrior Dream." With calm but deep conviction, "*I am certain of this.*"

"Talk more about that," she wants to hear this, it excites her.

"I had the task to dream Genesis. At first I thought it was just a meditative exercise. Just a technique. But then, and it was only later, later, on The Island...or, or I'm not sure just where..."

"Rian?" Laura interjects, "What about Rian?" *You didn't tell me everything. Jealousy, am I jealous?*

"Yeah, maybe," Laura's frailty is not noticed, "No, I think before her. But I'll get back to her. See, I just came up on the empty side of it all. I mean I became the male Yahweh wanted. I dreamed his dream, not just like the celibate Brooders, no, I went out and proved that a man can live obliterating women! I fucked them all. *Fuck*—yeah, what it means is just masturbation. Sex as mutual masturbation. Women are just like cream, you fuck 'em because their cunts are soft and oily, you can slip in and ride them, but they're just Fuck Buckets!" And he looks at her, *Did he Fuck her?*

Laura had stopped rocking. She sits at the edge of her chair. "Amazing. Let's see, it is simply amazing. You and I come to the same place from such distant shores!"

Luke's not sure where she's going.

"I call it Marauder Sex. Guys just want to rape. There's no other word for it. They want a violent poke and stab. They want to use my pussy like a fencing bag," and she demonstrates with her hand, "Poke and stab!"

"Right," and he looks at her, he has to face his guilt, his feeling of having been his own worst example, "Yeah, that's what we do, huh?"

"Yes." Simple, as if it was a sale finally closed.

The room was settling down. The fire kept it warm, but Luke felt a bit hotter than he liked, unbuttoned the top three buttons, morning was on the hunt, moonlight conversing with sunrise—"Rian," and a big exhale, not just Confession, not just Explanation, but Invitation, *Gotta get this across!*

"Rian and I are like the same person. Hmm. Well, its like she's Catholic Woman and I'm Catholic Man. She grew into the same expectations...and she rejected some and somehow evolved to...well, to where I am or just came myself. But we can't be Lovers, *not,*" and he steadies his rocker, stares at Laura, peers at her, "not like we can be. Not like that. *I hope.*" Pause. "But we *had* to be together. It was *inevitable,*" not a feeble justification in that word, but an acceptance of the greater force which worked through them, "yeah, like on a collision course, but, actually, we made a lot of choices. And she became a Radical, like my going into the Marines, and she threw off her chains, like me on The Island, and she died, went through a lot of sexual stuff, like me...and, well, she calls it being Mother of All. Like you and this Spaceship Earth photo. She feels, wants to feel, that everyone can touch her, be her, she wants to be a transforming agent, and so take the risk, take many risks," and here his tone is one both of prideful respect and painful concern, "maybe too many risks, but that's her journey, she wants to embrace the Earth, mother it as her child.. and men, she's looking for, she calls it "The Sky"...and I," and as Luke watches he sees Laura cry: tears of compassion, understanding...happiness—he can't go on.

"She is truly beautiful," Laura's words.

"Right," sigh—a heaving like lifting a heavily laden treasure chest, "Yeah, she is. But this is your Lennon thing, again. She's imagining something new, maybe, not new, maybe actually old, more like Ancient. After all the Old Testament was written only five thousand years ago."

"Luke!" It's almost a reprimand, he knows that she has caught him on the verge of an academic fugue. He stops, smiles...kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar!

"Okay. Okay! I get it. But sometime we should think about that. Not now. Okay. Look, Rian said, "Give me the Mother within you" and I said—where it came from I don't know, I was shocked, really—"Give me the Father within you ...okay, this is the hard part," he glances back at Laura, looking for her acceptance, she is holding her hands to her lips, "Okay, so when we had sex—not the right word, believe me!—well, we reversed roles. Not just play-acting, but really. It was as intense as a Brooder dream. I mean," and he is racing...excited, fascinated, talking faster than he can breathe, "I mean we were somewhere else. On some other plane. Really dreaming. I became Eve or the goddess or whatever and she became me...and I felt, yeah, I became, my flesh changed, I became a woman, a female, and felt the obliteration, the abandonment, Jesus!"—the recall is overwhelming him, Luke is being transported back to the moment, Laura sees him in a bright light, a wave of light, twisting, and from it she sees...almost faints!...sees the Ouroboros! But Luke is enthralled and bursting with the remembrance...*what she has done will be told in memory of her*—"and she plundered me! I was a Fuck Bucket! A whore. Nothing. Jesus, it was insane! The hatred. The pure hatred. I just couldn't believe the hatred...not just from her, sure, but the hatred inside of me, welling up from within me...within, see, *I was fucking myself!*... I felt

Yahweh's hatred...and it was a hatred born of fear...fear of birthing, to be born again, to find real fathering, see, see," excited, almost frenzied, "*see*, He was trying to be male, well, maybe He is actually male, the male without the female—god, how lonely!" (Pause)... and the word *lonely* weeps down the ages, howls from its cradle, echoes as the gates to The Garden are slammed shut..."*Lonely*. I don't want to be that lonely. That is what I found with The Brooders. Loneliness. *Communal Loneliness*. If you can understand that, a bit odd that," and he stops, goes deeply back down into himself, dips his hands into the Pool of Loneliness, splashes it on his face..."But, we knew what we had done. Rian and me, knew that we had to do it. There was no other way to end it."

"End what, *exactly*?" A voice asking for further clarification, a voice hoping to stay in tune, to be filled by the experience, not miss a drop.

"End our Tradition. Rian knew Eve was The Mother, the goddess. She just knew. But she had to be Yahweh for a time to really grasp why He deceived Himself. There was no Adam, you know," he laughs, sees himself writing an academic paper, "The Ontological Flaw in the Creation of Adam," Ha!..."See, Adam is just a word for Yahweh's self-deception. He tries to trick Eve. Tell her that He has created, given birth all on his own...but She knows, She knows His Dream, has Dreamed it with Him—He's so pathetic He's forgotten that He can't dream without Her! *Imagine*, Yahweh stuck in a fugue of meaninglessness, severe neurosis if not psychosis! The guy's really pathetic...and with a capital P!...but She plays along, accepts Her role as player—has to plumb the meaning of this Dream because She's there in Her terrible, ferocious Absence!...She as Eve just waiting, loving Adam, waiting to, well, how else to think about it except as healing? That part of her mothering which is healing. But it can't come from Her, the catalyst for transformation has to come from within Him. Yahweh wounded Himself—Adam is his wound."

Luke is exhausted, it's like everything which he ever was has just flowed out of him...scattered on the floor are memories of his family, his Dad, Mom's dying, Rian's love, Jim's betrayal, The Island, Zinga's peculiarity, and psychic shards from The Brooders...Laura, too, is tired, they realize this, it's difficult for either to move, even a finger, a labor to exhale, they are clay, kneaded so long that it is now something new, novel, at the moment of becoming.

"That's why I bodywander. I like that word. This word you gave me. Yes, I am a bodywanderer. But, and here's my confession, you were, really Luke, you were the first body I wandered. Most others I massaged. Some I began to wander, but it was all tripping and people running away. Who knows, maybe I just wasn't ready? But what you're saying, this incredible experience you had with Rian—and *I am jealous*, but so jealous that I want to love her, not reject her"—with a yearning, "I want to find her within you."

Tired, crumpled old sheets of paper, dried and exhausted, this they are, ancient writing tablets of the gods, her words flare them up, they burst into wild flames!...but all that comes is laughter, like after childbirth, the laughter of happiness—being happy.

"Yeah." He savors the word, places it as a stone, a stepping stone, he knows that she is placing her own next to his.

"When I work—wander—I think of this picture and see myself as the Earth, as bringing the healing force of the Earth to my patients, and I sing *Imagine* in my head, sometimes I hum it out loud—I want to transmit it into their bones...and I believe I do. *I do*." She stops. Two down, one to go.

"Do you know, now, why I left?"



Oh, Christ, is she ever gonna give up on that? "Errr, Christ, Laura, my mind's just phasing out on me...*just tell me*, babe, please, pl-eeee-zze, just tell me!"

"Oh, so you think the pleading-little-boy-with-sad-eyes crap will work?!"

Gotcha! She's gotcha! "I surrender! Damn me to whatever hell you want. I'll never understand women!"

"Oh, really!" Sarcasm, it challenges him, wakes him up, stimulates him.

"Yeah, really!" Mock-threat, teeth bared, lusty breathing.

"Ha."

"Ha, yourself!"

They rock. Dawn is in full display. This time, he finds a log and slips it through the grate.

"Now, number three," and it is Luke speaking, she's impressed that he's keeping count. "Number three, this Ouroboros. Brace yourself. But that's what I saw...found, felt, however it went, with Rian. We weren't snakes, but energy, actually flames, I saw us as wrapped by a band of fire, roping us around our spines. It was, damn, astounding. We didn't talk about it. Maybe it didn't come to her, but I can't believe that. It was," he sighs, "it was The End. The end of our Tradition. She has to go on...and I have to go on."

Luke wants Laura to speak, say something, she rocks, he, all of a sudden, is nervous, irritated by the creaks from her rocker, thinks maybe he's blown it, shot his wad, screwed it up, said too much—after all, *women are women!*

After a few torturous minutes, Laura rises and goes to the couch, picks up the Ouroboros print, holds it at arms length, and to all outward appearances is an art appraiser or an art historian looking for interpretive details...Luke sweats.

"You're incredible, Luke. No, fantastic. Fucking fantastic!"

Her use of the word shocks him, but like a jolt, not shame or disgust, it links her to him in a curious way.

"This has been all intellectual stuff for me. I've heard the Jungian talks on this thing, but I never knew, just never knew how it felt." And she turns to him, "And you do." Clearly, she was pure hunger, wild hunger, her whole being yearned to ravish and consume him. The wave of her lust struck chthonic roots—he came to her like a tree spreading its great limbs to shelter, to embrace....

As the sun and the moon arrived together at dawn, so Laura and Luke embraced. Held each other, kissed, and knelt down together, embracing. Hands rise and touch the other's: palms to palms, and the sight in their eyes is a gaze into the mystery of their souls, there to find themselves totally naked, primitive, without shame, naked as knowing, each knowing the other as their own skin, and they explore their bodies with courage and fearlessness, set out to find all that is, as it is, the perfection of imperfection, that which makes each unique, individual, and so they share smooth touches on their skin, he to her face, she on his arms, light flying, caressing, playful pinches, hands alive at fingertips, drawing static sparks as they course up and down thighs and across buttocks, fingers which dip into the pools of desire and pools of fire—their lips and mouths, her cunny, and into the recesses shadowed, now, all explored...slowly, carefully...in celebration...her breasts he strokes, raises her nipples to hardness, licks her with tantalizing nips and then sucks upon her, true suckling, finding not just the capture of her beauty but access to her power, the power of her milk, astral milk, spiritual nourishment, knowing that she cares for him, is offering him her life's blood, cradles his head and opens her bountifulness: he is fed, he laps her milk...and it is so like a call to her, his tongue calling from a distant hill, a call of excitement, of wanting her, of waving her over towards him, of saying, *You are my body!*—Yes,

as he suckles and she is drunk so they are one, truly commingled, in communion...at her breasts he is dipped into her chalice.

Hands, oh, hands, how magical, so sacral, so filled with power! Wonderful digits, ten, and as ten they become a hundred and as a hundred a thousand...and they are feeling each other, feeling, drawing new flesh around themselves, exchanging coats of flesh, their smells, hands and smelling, hands opening desires, new desires to smell...and she is stroking his cock, and with each plunge he splashes into the lake, plummeting from the outreaching tree limb, free-falling, falling-backwards, heart-stopping and breath-grasping plunge, and with each upward stroke he is on eagle wings, soaring towards the sun, fierce master of the air, a missile of unearthly fire about to explode...but she works him well, craftsman that she is, and he has come a thousand times—a million!—on the astral plane, shooting wondrous plops of sperm all about, wicked, wonderful, wild and wanton sperm, sperm on the make, ready to jazz life!...and when she takes him into her mouth it is all he can do to hold onto consciousness...here he calls upon the practices of The Discipline, calls a strategic retreat and sends his erotic troops back to base, the base of his spine, he images it...knows that this is his body spot, Cauldron...and she senses it, can tell that he is becoming iron-man, putting controls on his wildings, and she titters—knows he wants all her pleasures, all and as deeply as possible—and the cock she messages with her tongue, here before but then never here before, this not a dagger, this not a gun, *this not a sword*...this his dream tongue...and it speaks to her of how time and space cannot separate them, how she is always here upon his tongue, as memory, in dreamtime, here, this the tongue of memory and dream, needing no words, only feelings, astral touches, this his tongue of sacral emotion and sensation: sensitive, fragile...the symbol and reality of his ebb and flow...and she tenders it, waters it, rolls his balls and hears the roar of his blood, blood like she hears each month, roaring through her, pouring out, and here his cock spews blood and she laps at his menses, this astral blood, blood of his creative yearning...and upon her southern mouth is he: speaking with his moist tongue, encaved, here to her clitoris he presses cave entrance to cave entrance, sexual kiss, and he calls to her, he hears himself as echo, as invitation, and they are at lively conversation—is such as he senses her orgasms, rippling waves shuddering down her legs, *Ha!* he loves it, the flames! the magic!...and as blessed through this common bond he becomes crack and thunder in her northern kiss, now linking the world: south and north, tongues to tongues, blood to blood...and around them rises the serpent, encircling them, they the ouroboros, one-self, one consciousness, one desire, one body.

As the sun and moon conspire and create the receding tide, so Laura and Luke ebb into each other's arms. Nestle and rest. The full light of morning is upon them. The clarity of light exposes the clutter and trivia of the room. A call for normalcy, balance, get-back-to-work is issued...but they linger, whisper and laugh at the posturing sun, "No, not today, today the moon is up, all day!"...and they fall off, nap.

Luke is jarred awake, like a gasp, his eyes bolt open and his heart skips a beat. Boy, was I sleeping! Meaning a deep, dead-man's slumber, but here is Laura, like a curled up cat...breathes like she's purring, glad my snoring didn't wake her...a legendary snorer: woke up many in the communal dorm during minor sem, they even petitioned that he be assigned his own room!...but, as he shifts about, she wakens. Droopy lids but happy eyes, she smiles, and scrambles more tightly into his body. She sighs and rests there, both are awake.

"What time do you think it is?"

"Who cares!"

"Yeah."

He pushes himself up into a sitting position and tugs her ever so gently so that she sits upon him. Totem pole, he laughs, *Anthropology 101!* But he is a totem pole, and he centers her upon him, she coming as she knows she is, The Cave...*Lascaux*, Ha, she laughs, *Plato!* God, he'd die hearing me say that, afraid of his own shadow!...and, He says, You are my arms. And She, You are my legs. He: You are my eyes. She: You are my tongue. He: You are my ears. She: You are the tip of my nose. They laugh, lightly. Hands lock. Eyes engage. Ever so slightly she moves upon him, clouds over mountain-top, and he is reaching, reaching up to grasp Heaven, that within her which is song, angelic song, the sirenic song which heals, makes whole, and she comes to him for nourishment, to drink of his essence, to wash herself and be refreshed by his passion, his depthless pool of lust... *oh, each so likes being craved!*...it becomes clear, the serpent is flame, the flame is lust, the lust is Eros: pinpoint in orgasm, widespread in ecstasy...Luke to know Laura, know her as Earth for his Tree, as source for his waters, as co-creator...Yes, as every part of their body allows them to wander into mystery...and so change the Dream, set loose another Dream beside The Brooder Dream...offer another Dream to be chosen, explored...this their task: their work, their labor, truly, their prayer: *Ora et Labora*...Yes, the soul is found all over the body...for the body is sacral, is the reach of the soul...both in harmony, both tuned, sharply and in pure vibration with each other...so Luke and Laura wander—bodywandering.

This is where they will be on many mornings, where they will be forever, where they are now. Waking and bringing the day into being. Sleeping and bringing the dream into being. For them, this is their common daily labor. The work of the bodywanderers. For each to explore the other, and through such exploration tap into the energy, primal energy, fire and flame, with which to mold the day, fire their clay. They realizing that each is the godding force, He and She, and it is from their common body, their embrace, that life is born anew—today becoming tomorrow, and within their embrace that all dies—today becoming yesterday. As they wander they speak to each other of the shades—those parts of the body, of their souls, of their self, both common and separate, which are yet to be discovered, must be healed, pool still only as potential. In this way they work with the violent fire, the Warrior Dream, take into themselves all that is about, take into themselves as Cauldron, as Receptacle, as Chalice and transform it, for all is, verily, their body and their blood.

Though the fire would recede and only embers remain to warm the room, the heat of their embrace suffices to melt the ice and snow all about, an embrace which is celestial fire, more brilliant than the sun, more passionate than the moon...for eyes that could see the house, their house glowed, an Eternal Flame aburst the Trees of AnoMar....

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Luke:Laura are breaking-through.

Never wanting to know ever exactly to where or to become what: accepting the playfulness and mysterious magic of loving, the risk, the peril of many deaths, the joy of many risings, Ouroboros, yes, embraced existence, the embracing presence, blissful, fulfilling, rewarding, death but into a growing, a new life, resurrection.

Endless years?

That long since their first conscious step—  
Her house, His House,

Their house: seedbed...

Yes, it's coming again,  
they are all thought and emotion, they steady, make ready,  
like two dancers: fire and beauty at the first touch....

THE END

Francis X. Kroncke—Federal inmate 8867-147—is a seeker whose has journeyed through the monastic life, the theological academy, federal courtrooms, a federal prison cell, and the byways of corporate America. In 1970, he took his Catholic theology into the American courts as he defended his draft board raiding crime, re: the trials of the "Minnesota 8." During and after serving time, he explored the dark, Shadow side of America. In his published essays he has focused on the ancient call which is heard most distinctively in the institutions and through the experiences of the dark side of the biblically based Western and American cultures. The article, "An Outlaw's Theology," was published in the journal *Cross Currents* (June 2011). A companion piece, "A vision of coupled presence," appeared in the journal *Theology and Sexuality* (2011). Play, "Peace Crimes: the *Minnesota 8* vs. the war," by Doris Baizley, produced at U of Minnesota in conjunction with History Theatre, February 2008. See, "Minnesota 8" site.

Links:

[The "Minnesota 8"](http://www.minnesota8.n35) <http://www.minnesota8.n35>

["Peace and War in the Heartland"](http://www.pwh-mn.org) <http://www.pwh-mn.org>

["Earthfolk"](http://www.earthfolk.net) <http://www.earthfolk.net>

["Outlaw Visions"](http://www.outlaw-visions.net) <http://www.outlaw-visions.net>