

THE ACCOMPANIST

I often hear this tune in my head. It is so me. I did not write it. I have never heard it anywhere else in my life. It just came to me.

It is my life. And it keeps coming back to me. I weave a piano line around it. And I always embellish that piano line. It is my sole delight.

No one can really hear the dialogue that is going on inside me. And I wish that I could express myself to the world. But I feel so wrapped up in silence. I want to escape. But I cannot find the voice. This is my frustration. If only someone could rescue me.

I am alone on holiday at the beach. My parents thought that I was meeting a friend. But she did not make it. It is a very hot night. I go down to the hotel lounge.

–Are you a very good listener?

I am having a drink and do not realize who is talking to me.

–I always thought that I was. I can hear a piece of music just once and play it back immediately from memory on the piano.

–The lover thinks about love-making the same way.

I am not ready for this. I turn scarlet.

–Who are you?

He makes an effort to notice my embarrassment. It is as if he is looking at a score and preparing to play.

–I used to be a teacher. But now I am just a traveler. You look like a student.

I smile. I like to be noticed. But this is my holiday. I don't want to think about work, about ideas. I want to soak up the sand and sea. It is a thrilling night. A breeze comes in from the balcony.

–Let me buy you a drink. Some wine.

–I've just had a glass. I was going to get to bed.

–Come on. Live. You're on vacation.

I smile again. A radiating smile. I don't want to slip under his spell. His experience frightens me.

I sit back in my chair. I let him talk on. I am lost in my reverie. Why have I never let myself feel this free. There is really nothing here that was threatening. It all is so easy.

The sun even seems to penetrate the darkness.

I fade into the next day.

The beach blasts me with its incredible potency. The explosion of sunlight and heat that overtakes me completely. It is this intensity which catches me slightly off guard. But this is why I love it here.

The ocean looks at me in its immensity and says I am here. And we are together. This massive greeting can engulf me without any reserve. This everywhere. It hits me so obtrusively. The heat permeates me completely. There is no hiding from its rule. I almost shiver from its

excess. Too much to absorb completely. There is nothing to save. No modesty. I am completely naked before it. I let it penetrate deep into my insides. The overflow, as I just let go.

I find a spot on the beach for my chair. I stretch out and let the sun do it work. There is no need to plan this. All other thoughts disappears. Every bit of me abandons itself to the inferno. All doubts, all my faults of the winter are pardoned in the burning purge of the past.

My body is so omnipresent for me. I get off on this realization. Detonate!

This is the life meant for me. Everything that I have done before is only a distraction A weight that drags me down and imprisons me in a dungeon. This is my liberation, the breaking of the chains.

I am so still. I soak in the warmth. On the verge of succumbing to sleep. But I hold in this solemn meditation. I can sense this vibration at the core of my being.

Day fades into the dream that is twilight. He meets me at the bar. We have a few drinks and then we walk out towards the beach.

The water swallows up the sky and engulfs us in the passions that surround us. My smile rolls over in his so that I can already feel his kiss on my lips. A dampness of the sea air enfold us and protects me in the succor that he offers. There is no confusion on my part. I am cradled in the reassurances that he offers.

There is an entire lushness in these tropics. His tropics. A warmth in his breath that descends over me with the gentle night breeze. I take his hand. He brings my body close to his. I don't want him to let me go.

The sands beneath our feet offer me such comfort. We walk to the edge of the waters. The slight tingle of the night strikes me. I squeeze his hand tighter.

If I give in now all my resistance will crumble. As the tide plays around us, he pulls me to his side. I turn away as his intended kiss slips past me. It just seems too soon. Or maybe it is already too late, as I feel absorbed by the environment.

Is it him. Or is it this place. I sense myself just letting go, and the release is so easy. but I keep my distance just enough not to give in at that moment. My surrender has already proven so immediate.

–Is something bothering you?

–This is too perfect.

–It is perfect. You just have to give in to it.

–This is too sudden. I can't. I just don't feel right. I just want you to comfort me.

He again pulls me close. I avert a kiss.

How can I fail to yield to these surrounding influences. Already my personality seems submerged under the pull of his attraction. It is as if he knows that. Maybe that is why I do not give in yet. I resent his overconfidence. That probably is my greatest weakness. I still believe that I am not a victim to seduction. But I have undergone all its effects. Once I do let go, there is no return. My restraint slips and I lose my composure.

The kiss now insinuates itself deep down inside me. This new tingle is so engaging that I wonder if there can be any independence from its reign.

I pull away from his embrace and make my own way in the water. I dig my feet deep in the sand, dragging through the mud. I turn back to him, laugh and then skip away. He runs after

me while splashing in the surf.

We both get carried up in this excitement. Trying to catch my breath, I again fall in his arms. Finally face to face with the suffocating rudeness of surrender. The tide is so real, and I am drowning. An explosive, all-encompassing flow. Tossed in the waves. Our bodies smashed together and then just liquifying, spreading out.

I find no place to anchor myself. I am lost in the spicy fragrance of the night. His lips cover mine. His tongue gently tickles me. I am enthralled.

His whispers. He twists the meandering effects of the darkness around me. I wrestle my way through the brush. My body is bent back by the pressures of the overgrown vegetation.

The exaggerated gestures of our play acting are now so immediately physical. I am afraid of this rawness. But the influence is more dominant than the former promise of his kiss.

I almost resent these tropics. They seem to bring their danger with no hope of rescue.

Music has always held a fascination for me. In the lively themes in the woodwinds, I experience the magical forces that hide in everyday experience. What I have always noted in a brook or a gentle waterfall. I roll along the cascading tones. They offer me a platform to soar, I feel such joy in this take off. Even the entry of the horns spark my awe. I float with the swelling strings. I take the path of the butterfly in its seamless wake in the air.

Not just the reminders of the tones, but an overall spirit is brought to life for me. I follow this attitude to the ends of the earth. I have attained the horizon. Penetrated a land forbidden. Stood against my greatest fears. I love the expressions of the soloist, and her tale unfolds contrary to the enterprise of the rest of the orchestra. The discipline maintained by the other players offers her freedom to wander and delight. She bounces off the themes of the other instruments. She rips apart their ordered lives and recomposes them as intricate patterns. She accepts no punishment for her wandering. She gives without fear. Just let herself flow like a river.

Her gestures are not limited by the more mundane rhythms of the bass. She leaps over the moaning of the cellos. She challenges bassoon and trombone. She scampers over flute and viola. Somersaults over clarinet and violin. She disrupts the march of timpani. She makes up her own mind.

I am calmed by the pensive lulls of the slow section. The meandering tones that sound depths that have been buried too long. So I reach further down. Down into this primitive sea. Weird creatures with their funneling tales. Monsters of the depths with limbs turning over each other. The dank. The murky wilderness. Massive currents. A maelstrom of wish and dash being churned around the onset of life. A possibility. A step into the unknown. Combination of energy and hilarity. We stalk these wilds together.

I let myself merge with the stream. The fluttering tones. The lazy legatos. I am charmed by the inevitability of the flow. I rise to the top and let myself get carried along.

I await the eventuality of recapitulation. The challenge of themes long abandoned. Now brought back to life. They retain the power that they once had to mesmerize. I am enthralled. Noise. Booming sounds. Explosions of horn and cymbal.

There can be no rest in this activity. Even the soloist bumbles along with the rest of the orchestra. The rich tones imply the interplay. I settle in while trying to absorb the racing

staccatos.

I am most amazed by the ability of the music to open up memories in me. Way beyond the expressiveness of childhood, I live as a traveler from another time. I can so easily escape the woes of today. I ride my coursier through fields of sparkling poppies. I will not let him turn back when he sights a threat ahead. His strength and my confidence have no obstacles. He glides through obscurity and continues his path. The monuments of sound to our adventures.

Or I am drawn into more solemn vigils. Remembrance of lost friends. Or a communion that I share too deep for words. The breeze that floats above the votive candles reminds of a finer wind that swirls over desert sands. Even the vigil ends up being a recollection of my greatest journeys.

I close my eyes and am immersed in refreshing waters. Not so chill as to condemn me to an arctic of my desire. Just enough to cool an ardor that has dominated my days. So I find solace in my experience. I climax with the crescendos of the orchestra. The soloist has saved the wonder of her last theme to capture the overall reach of the piece. I am transfigured.

I can feel my hands move along the piano keys. The rich sustains. Banging out the final entreaties. Take me as I am.

I meet a friend for dinner. Afterwards we head to Symphony Hall for a performance of Charmer's 2nd symphony. Charmer is a late romantic. I am overjoyed to participate in that search for the lost spirit. The longing is enhanced by the chromatic touches. These are somewhat due to the use of folk tunes. The shepherd joins his flock with a tune on his pipes. It is the weaving in the countryside of the gurgling brook. And the sheep are led to their natural course by this strain. The shepherd looks to the sky for a more glorious swell. There is somewhat of a cynicism in Charmer's outlook. He posits the frustration of the shepherd. Thus he considers the limits of the pastoral. And in the early themes of the symphony there is a conflict between these two outlooks. I am so sympathetic to the shepherd. But there is something almost tragic in his lament. He recognizes the limits of his quest. There is almost a mocking of his concern for these beasts who have their own agenda. The sheep in rebellion.

So Charmer's chromaticism offers a commentary on the pastoral obsessions of the romantic. He realizes a banality in the tasks of the shepherd. At the same time, he does not babble on about the eloquence of this shepherd. His herder is touched by a bit of cruelty. Hence his vocation is truly an exile. I can sense purpose to the sheep's struggle. Not for them alone, but for the tribute to a romantic calling that even the shepherd has failed.

This is the nobility of Charmer. His grand gestures. The strings in defiance. And his horns. Not so wracked as Wagner or Bruckner. They reinforce the defiance of the strings. A phalanx that articulates itself to comment on the initial woodwind themes. So Charmer build this massive edifice. And the summit seems to hang in mid air. Not the easy classical resolution. Even the chromatic feel is ripped apart by digressions into dissonance. Cacophony. Not quite the insistence of Stravinsky. But this stuff that hangs there. His angst. This is the essence of Charmer and why it is so exciting.

Met with such opposition, there is little wonder why the slow movement is so utterly tortured. The modern who is nostalgic about a countryside that ultimately disgusts him. In the country the villains of the city have metamorphosed into the more traditional goblin and vampire. Charmer's morbidity is a lure. I see myself costumed for Halloween. I am fooled by

these disguises as images of myself seem to return to haunt my nights. I love these ghouls who test my resources. The music has lost some of its playfulness. But this is a real joy as these forms seem to penetrate my soul.

Charmer is teacher in his own right. I confront ghosts that might prove too harmful in my everyday life. But Charmer gives me the strength to take on these demons. I take the challenge with an immensity of excitement.

My companion does not seem to share the same desires for self-exploration. This is hardly something to bother me. I bear him gratitude for taking me to dinner. But he must remain on the threshold of this Nirvana. I will pass over. He must be left to caress the gates and wonder what goes on beyond.

So I regain my teacher as we mount the heights. I haunt because I am haunted. Beyond fangs and sharp teeth. We threaten with our histories. An inescapable past. The prison of our woe.

But transfigured and subject to a more probing awareness.

The final movement sprinkles fragments of Charmer's wisdom. It is tempered on wit and founded on a deep mysticism. Mournful tone. A theme on the oboe that is repeated on the bassoon. A counter theme that is woven by the flutes and the violins. And that pool that is sketched by the horns. Boom!

I spend a good portion of the next day at a café. I make notes in my journal. I am thinking about Gabriella's *Aphrodite*. It is a testament of contemporary feminist art. A Giacometti of a subsequent era.

Gabriella's *Aphrodite* is an eye and a machine press. Her sex is a tuft, a gripping hand looking at itself in a mirror. Her wings are clipped, but she still can make flight.

There is a cruel tenderness in Gabriella's vision. An announcement of promise. A witness to oppression. There is such simplicity in composition. What is primitive underlines the animal that drives the goddess. The leash and the whip. The mastery of Zeus is never more apparent. But it is a mastery that is facing its limits. Gabriella recognizes the liberation in technology. But she also detects a new enslavement. Hence, *Aphrodite* needs to refuse the edicts of Olympia. She needs to define a new organic amidst the grotesque attachments of the technocrats. The bizarre demands of a voyeuristic audience.

Again the simplicity after which I aspire. Gabriella is artist through her practice. The art is simply a record of her victory over the constant assailing of her person. She is continually challenging social hierarchy. Why can't I achieve such vision.

Always at war with her society, Gabriella hardly has a chance to catch her breath. So her art is that respite in the midst of the overall struggle.

The coincidence in her art is haphazard. She does not want the viewer to feel content in what she sees. The art cannot be truly owned. The work implies a process that breaks apart when it is touched.

My life is delimited by this sculpture. I am her *Aphrodite*. I sing desire but it can bring me no contentment. I incite my subjects. I place them in contradiction without resolution. Contradiction made worse by the hopes of resolution.

Gabriella's figure cannot be content with the heavens. She cannot be happy with the gods. They are in constant struggle with each other. She is not unhappy because of fate. She

cannot accept her lot. Aphrodite is angry at the universe. In this she finds pleasure. She recognizes that her nature is a conspiracy by those around her to condemn her to her state.

All these people who think that they know me when they see me. They all want to rescue me. To protect me. I do not need their help. I just need their ignorance. Leave me alone. Let me be.

I wish that I had Gabriella's commitment. The ability just to say fuck it if they wouldn't go along with my dreams. Even though I resist their images of me, I am still constrained by the reputation that is created for me. I cannot escape. So I am like one of Gabriella's figures. A wild dog in revolting against ownership. Cassandra with the eyes that bear testament to no one. A raging sea that has no shore to settle upon.

I look down at these hands. I too could create. What am I afraid of?

I take a sip of my pernod as the cars speed by the café. Does anyone know what I have been thinking about. Can I convey my pose to them?

I think about a flower—how it seems to tell us everything. I wish that I could attain that same transparency. That interaction between sun and stalk. I stretch out.

This is my sky. And I feel that I am being plucked by each onlooker. These hands hold a glass of water. I feel the cold. The firmness of the glass. But I want to fill in. That is where my vision lacks the clarity of Gabriella. I even lack the assurance of the flower. I won't let it be. I want to meddle with the form. Gabriella makes us feel that her realization is the only natural one. She helps us to survive in the gaps.

The next day is beset with a heavy rain. I love to watch it settle down. The first drops are hesitant. Maybe it will pass over. I love the uncertainty. It makes me feel like I am a participant. I know it will rain incessantly. But I want to gamble. Run to the car. Take a chance. Do something daring before it hit.

One drop falls with such power. It wants to fall down. All down on us. The splattering drops. Almost spitting down on us. We try to trick them but these drops want to do damage. My hair. My new dress.

The mud. The splattering stain.

Just avoiding the down pour. A mist. It won't really get you wet if you run. I can almost miss the rain due to my speed. It's not really raining. See I'm not wet.

Is it time to raise an umbrella. Time to give in. The moment of seduction. We know what is coming but there is such a need to hold back. Save it for another day. A wind that might take all this rain away. Now a fine mist that covers the face.

Then the insistence. It is raining now. There is no doubt. A safety in being inside. The windshield wipers taking their course in the driving car. Gliding over the wet pavement.

Watch out! Her is comes. The rain is now pelting. On a porch that moist breeze. So refreshing on a hot day. I want to run out in it. Splash in the puddles. Roll in the mud.

From my window I can see the torrent. Digging deep in the ground. A constant downpour forming this pool The pool growing and muddy in its flow. Spilling over. Just gushing. Running down. Streams. A river. Carrying branches and leaves with it.

The rain that works from the outside in. That you cannot escape. It wets the clothes. the hair matted against the face. It reaches deep in the pores. It gets down to the roots. It waterlogs the bone. Bitter!

The day accepts the darkness. Nature is reversed. I cannot give in. But there is no counter to this mass that falls from the heavens. When will it let up. The sheen of lights reflecting on the wet concrete. Phantoms of the day. The sleek sounds of tires edging through the puddles.

Muddy. Sewers overflowing with water. Too much to drain. Flooding the roads. Cars try to avoid these new lakes. The caution. Unable to see ahead. Too fast for windshield wipers.

The rain as blindness.

The rain as life. Brushing through the green grass. Moving through the trees. I am one with the storm.

The shaking. The tremor. The quaking of the thunder. The thunder roars. Crackling. The lightning cutting through everything.

Come rain. Come storm.

It is the lover refused. It is my life. I am the storm. You cannot avoid this lover that now comes to you enraged. I topple so I may resurrect. I am the new iconoclast!

This is Gabriella's rage. She is so much one with the storm. In this I feel envy. There is permanence in the art. And I sense the same thing in the remnants of the storm. The tree limbs on the road. The gorgeous puddles. Seeping mud. Boundaries overgrown. The wetness pervading the atmosphere. The gravity that comes after the storm.

I am hurricane. I set off. I ignite. For all eternity I rage on.

I need to go for a walk. To survey the after effects. To see who I really am. The sidewalks are still full of puddles. Water still rushing in the gutters. I walk slowly. I want to take it all in. I do not want to get lost in the aftermath!

So I find my way to Jim Volpe's *Apollo's Legacy*. It is the perfect companion to my recent interest in Gabriella. Volpe traces the vision of the artist who tries to leave a trace of his vision. His last will and testament. He confronts his fear with death and records his legacy to his viewers. I love Volpe's style. It is a mix of observation and personal confession. Volpe's artist is immersed in a path of self-destruction. He sabotages his own success. He does not seek the ultimate triumph in his art. He wants to create a monument that he can destroy. The artist is the iconoclast is his own theology.

--Why does an artist so painstakingly arrange the elements of his medium if they are only to be dashed in their destruction?

John had lent me his copy of the book. His friend Magda also recommended the book,

–That is the beauty of his task. The tradition is rendered in all its challenge, its immensity. But the artist cares nothing for this. He sees that there is a greater risk in the destruction of the work. This appears to tear apart the symmetries. It tears apart the balance. The creator cannot stand apart from the work because he gets immersed in it.

–But even then, there is a sort of beauty in the imbalance, an insane sublime.

Magda chimes to reaffirm Volpe's vision.

–But the artist does not allow the traditional unity of consciousness. He dispenses with that. The work cannot just be enjoyed. He invites the viewer to live it. There she faces the same self-destruction that he suffers all the time.

–It sounds like love-making.

My comment makes me blush.

–That exactly it. As Magda said, the artist has to throw himself in the work. There is no guarantee. He wants all the immensity that goes with it, but he does not want to give in to the traditional order. He wants to get off.

We all laugh. John continues.

–He needs to push his sensibility. This is what he sees in nature but he can never really find it in nature. It is beyond the visible. But it slightly makes its way known in the natural cycle. The plant yields to the seasons. Even the delights of nature are only a glimpse of that more radical imbalance. The artist needs to convey that fragility. He needs to take it over.

–But then he just submits to a new order. He imposes his law and then feels the need to give in to it.

–I like the love-making analogy.

Magda becomes excited as she works to enhance John's perspective.

–If one partner becomes too dominant, then that just disrupts the overall force of the enjoyment. There has to be that element of surprise. Something that you assume is so powerful is shown in all its vulnerability. That is why some people have to substitute all these illusions for the brutal nakedness of their own sexuality,

I feel more embarrassed.

–But we're still talking about a destructiveness on the part of the artist. This seems totally contradictory with your view of love-making.

–But that is where the spontaneity comes in. At the time, you can't prepare. And even your assumptions work to contradict your actual pleasure. As you resist, this force seems so destructive. When you let it take you over, it is wondrous.

–Magda, that just sounds like some kind of male excuse.

John interrupted.

–Volpe's a man, and he's proud of it.

–But that's too simplistic. Magda's offering a more inclusive vision of sexuality.

–You see that John has some reason in what he is saying.

–Even though all this is about something that is so unreasonable.

–Have you ever seen some guy on the street and you just wanted to have sex with him then and there. And on whim, you just give in to him. You go to a hotel room, and you let him just put himself inside you. And it fills you with this incredible rush. Afterwards, you just wonder why you did that. It made so much sense, and it felt so good. Like a work of art. But what can you do with it. And the feeling tears apart everything that you do.

–Are you admitting something to me, Magda?

–John, it's just an analogy.

–There is a hotel across the street.

We all laugh and continue with more drinks.

Something about Magda's story really bothers me. Its reality. Raw and so brutal. And the appeal seems so incredible for me. This appears to be my art. More than anything that I have ever seen before. More than anything that I have read about or thought about, her story seduces me. It suggests a wildness in me that I have never known. Sure I have had thoughts. But I never have acted on them. It seems totally crazy. Maybe that is Volpe's point. That is where the artist emerges. In that risk. In attention to the feeling for its own sake. Not what it means for

something else. For the rules, the audience, the expectations of others. This is so pure in and of itself. No one can steal that feeling away. And even in memory it has an integrity that has nothing to do with anyone else.

I wish that I could explore my world like that. That I could sound myself with such independence. But here more than ever I feel that I just accompany the themes of the world. My emotions just follow the invitations of others. Worse, my attachments only aggravate things. I get lost in the explosions of others when I accompany them on their journeys. And I even become nostalgic about my defeats. This is so disturbing!

Magda has invited me into this world and already I want to leave. I cannot. This is my new paralysis. I want to be transported with all the vivacity that she brought to her experience. I want to be lifted off the ground and fly through the heavens.

Something about these thoughts are just so soiled for me. I feel myself getting dressed in a musty hotel room. Dust collects on the corner of the bed. There is that cheap smell of disinfectant. Nausea that cannot be erased. I hold my stomach as these effects permeate. The mirror that is losing some of its luster. The bedspread that is getting a little frayed. The pillows that still bear the impression of so many different heads. And I feel myself lost in that anonymity. My pleasure is not sufficient to distinguish me against the fading of my identity in this room. This man who has hardly said anything to me. His untimely grunts. His fumbling and groping. Everything that comes down to his lively tongue and his sex.

This is not me at all. But I want something from all this. If I got myself in a fix like this, I would need the genius of Magda or Volpe to get me out.

But this is my story not hers. I could tell that she would only derive a perverse pleasure from my questions. Her tale was not a confession so much as an invitation. Is that why John always gave me that weird look? I could hear his words.

–I can see your face all enthralled in passion. The curl of your lips as you try to contain your excesses of feeling. I want to be part of that. To taste your lips As Magda goes down on you.

I just shudder thinking about it.

The next day we also meet for coffee at 3. Magda and John bring a stranger with them. Perhaps I am getting the details wrong. He claims to be a friend of Magda and John. He sits at my table.

–Have you ever seen Else Henry's *The Captive*? It an underwater ballet.

–I've heard of Henry but never seen any of her work.

–Henry captures the feeling of the drowner. This is the ultimate fear of the living. But for the transfigured soul, there is none of the fearful wonder that is so dominant for the mortal. This is the exuberant pleasure that is depicted in Henry's piece. The nymph has been condemned to her human existence and deprived of her true nature. The water holds this awesome power for her. But she almost drowns, and fear replaces her fascination. This fear is transferred in her love for a mortal. But the mortal only wants to sap her supernatural powers. Another water nymph reveals this. This is the climax of the piece, as the mortal confronts her magical incarnation and attempts to liberate her soul. She then is claimed as the victim of a storm. Henry liberates her captive with a final recapitulation of the dance of the nymphs.

–You've actually seen a performance. It sounds wonderful.

–I have never been so deeply affected.

–Surely you exaggerate.

–Exaggeration is what makes us real. Otherwise, we're just a couple of snails making their way on the sand.

–I love your analogy.

–That is why the ballet is so wonderful. These creatures who crawl on the ground finally get their wings. That is the curse of the other mortals. They try to restrict her powers. They know that she is marvel. But they are afraid of her. So they do everything that they can to weigh her down. They make her afraid that she will float away. The drowning is a more accurate metaphor of the feeling. It is not simply a fear of falling. It is a collapse that makes its way known from the inside.

–You told me that you're friends of John and Magda.

–What? I don't know what you're talking about. I saw you reading Volpe's *The Warden's Daughter*. I asked you about it. I sat down and had a drink. Then I started to tell you about the water ballet.

–I'm sure that you said that you knew the people that I was sitting with yesterday.

–I wasn't her yesterday. Although I did see you here before. Or perhaps that is my imagination.

–I do come here every afternoon to read. To make notes in my journal. To figure out what I'm doing.

–What you're doing?

–I'm a student. But that's just for now. I mean what am I doing when I get out of college. Do I want to get married? Do I want to start my career. Go back to school. Just take some time off and travel.

–Maybe those aren't the questions to ask.

–And you seem to know the right questions?

–You don't want questions with easy answers. Then when you hit the real puzzles in life, you'll get frustrated when they don't yield immediately.

–That itself seems like an easy answer.

–Are you willing to try something new?

–What does that mean?

–I can just get up and go right now.

–No, stay. This is getting good.

–I can take this as an invitation.

–A real invitation.

–With no hidden agendas?

–I said it was a real invitation.

–Then you have to be willing to accept the danger that goes along with the revelation.

–That is what I am invited to.

There is a frightening familiarity in his beckoning gestures. This phantom that has always asked me to follow in its way.

Magda and John meet me later that evening for dinner. Magda is excited about the new detective novel by Todd Emery *The Negation*. It is a dialectical thriller where the seductive sleuth Olive 35sight confronts an opponent that resembles her lover. She finds that she is actually facilitating his crimes in trying to protect him. She confronts her guilt in the process. As they continue to talk about the novel, I am reminded of the underwater ballet. The futility of explanation. What is just is. Flush. Immediate. Before my eyes. I am struck by my overall fear of water. The brilliant chaos of the sea. The depths. My fear of drowning. The eventual emergence of the self.

I can also see the reverse of the process. In *The Negation*, Olive 35sight loses her identity. She is simply the trace of all her experiences. A signature on a check. A story from an acquaintance. Graffiti on a restaurant wall. A credit card account. Her social security number. But nothing connecting it all. The sight becomes insight. Then just loss of sight. The number 35. Suggestions of a numerology.

There is no Olive. Only the fantastic vision of the lover. The man who commits to try to bring to life his mythic creation. So his Olive 35sight is his eventual undoing. He cannot create without destroying himself. He is like the artist of Volpe's work.

Incredibly, Todd Emery finds solace for the villain in the physical. His sensuality is enhanced by his deeds. He does not love nor embrace. He covets. He touches so that he can surpass what he touches. A vague ownership offers him the appeal that he seeks. His lover is threatened. This is the heightening of consciousness. The villain creates his Olive 35sight. Only she can offer him the understanding that eludes him in his sexual encounters. She makes his desire criminal. He has to act out these baser feelings. He is driven to escape her. And in escape he reproduces her. To follow his trail is to piece together her identity. But to analyze the clue shows that she does not exist. Hence the wonderful dialectics of Emery's novel.

I sense that I am embarking on the same journey. What threatens me are the same things that influence Olive—her memories. I find myself coming alive in the stories that I invent about my own past. It lends a credibility to my confusions. Retelling and retelling offers certainty. It gives me direction. I savor the past in its bitterness. I crave its poison. I am not ready for its lessons. I resist its teaching. I try to steal pleasure from my obscure nostalgia.

I marry my desire to the nature that surrounds me.

Nostalgia is oppressive. For the uncertainties of the present, I give myself to what is solid in memory.

My awareness of this secret melody was a tragedy that haunted my youth. I knew the details of the melody. I could reproduce it perfectly. But it never came out exactly as I heard it in my head. It lost all sense of embellishment. The sense of virtuosity disappeared. It was almost a bass ostinato waiting for the thematic affirmation from the solo instrument.

I heard the words of conversations. I saw the lips move. Heard noises. Understood all that was being said. But there was this time delay that seemed to divide the speaking and the actual words being said. The two contradicted each other. As if people were really saying something else, and I heard it all wrong. I tried to listen closely. But all I heard were whispers. I recognized the language, but not the words.

I retreated deeper and deeper in my own world and gradually lost touch with those around me. I could teach them my games and my songs. As long as we played follow the leader, I could take them deep into my adventures. I could introduce them to the phantoms of my play box. But I could never play their games. I would get lost in trying to sing their songs. I needed to fly free!

I remember my first piano lessons. I fidgeted while the teacher ran through the discipline of the exercises. My fingers did not take to his discipline. And he hated it when I let my improvisations follow my own fancies.

–You have to play the song as it is written.

–But the writing is not music. When my fingers strike the keys, I feel life.

–That is not life. Those are demons.

I wondered if my teacher was trying to exorcize his own demons. The flares of desire leapt high in the air with his flourishes on the piano and these extremes only encouraged his wandering eyes.

I couldn't sleep at night. I kept hearing that infernal tune. I wanted to let it out. To get rid of my frustration. I couldn't!

–You keep staring at my legs. That's not very dignified of you.

–Well, the way that you sit at the piano is not very lady-like.

–I just want to feel the pleasure of the music.

–Music is not that kind of pleasure.

What kind of pleasure was it. Was there an extraordinary perversity in his exercises. The whip of domination came down in his discipline.

–You cannot make me submit.

I shook my blonde tresses in affirmation of my pride. He was not my God.

I asked my parents if I could quit the lessons. They had visions of me sitting at the piano. And it would be a while before they could shut off the fantasy. So I needed to carry on as the apple in the eye of my jailer.

I rode my fingers up the keyboard. A staccato banging replaced the tinkling of the keys. My playing was inspired. But it disturbed my teacher all the more.

–You have no future in music.

–If that's how it is, so be it. But I think that you should quit trying to waste my parents' money by continuing to make me do what you want.

–This is not a waste. It is the essence of learning the piano.

–Says you....

–Says the tradition that dates back to Liszt and Beethoven.

–Is this what they tell you in their seance.

Needless to say, the torture had its limits. Eventually I was released from my bondage if I agreed to keep playing the piano on my own. I gave in to this attempt to capture that majesty of the underground sea that passed through me.

My parents used to take me to these welcome vacations at the beach. When I returned home, I felt this incredible sense of longing. As if they had taken me from my ancient home. They were not my real parents. I was a mermaid. Only in the sea could I get in touch with ancestors. Find my roots. Strike my bearings.

It was in these moments of intense solitude that I discovered that underground sea. More potent than the ocean. It sang to me in the music. I worked furiously to bring that world to life.

–What are you playing?

–Ocean Song.

–It has so much fury for a little girl.

I laughed. It did little to depict the real darkness that I beheld. I knew a storm of such passion and fire that the world would tremble before its warning. But this hardly frightened me. I knew of the powers of a deeper sea. After all I had been kidnaped from my heritage. I waited for the rescue that might return me to the place where I belonged.

I liked to play at night. Through the wee hours of the morning the song would echo through the house. A wonder that anyone could sleep...

I couldn't.

I needed to pay my debt. I needed to confront those phantoms that followed me. that tried to hunt me down.

I sought refuge. I needed to be safe.

Away with you wolf. And a big dog chased me across a meadow. I ran with all my might. Ran to my house, ran to the piano. I needed to play!

It was about this time that my whole life became an opera. I sang all the time. sang because it was the only thing that spoke my silence. Sang because it made so much sense to me. better than just words melody. I could hear the song in the words. They all looked at me as if I was crazy. My brother made jokes about me. After a while, it just became expected. And they just hoped for the day that it would end.

I could not end until I found my voice. I explored all the time. I need that voice that would liberate me from my imprisonment in my body. Why could song birds fly. Because what they sang about made them so light. I sought the charm of the songbirds. I tested my wings. It was sick! It made me so dizzy. But it was time. I just didn't want them to catch me at that little game.

–Come down from there immediately.

–I can't. I'm already floating too high above you all that if I come down immediately I'll hurt myself.

I laughed at my silly joke. I could feel my transformation. I was not just human. I was becoming a changeling. I sought others of my kind. I found affinity with the wolf who howled at the moon. The song circulated to others lost in this absurd search. Free spirits who had been imprisoned in these useless bodies. It was time for all of us to listen closely and liberate ourselves.

The more that I pursued my vision, the more I became convinced of an ultimate solitude. But this was due to my state of being human. So my belief haunted me deeper and deeper. I cried out for reply. Surely others listened with this heightened sense of awareness. They did not let their fears overcome them.

–You need to wake up.

It was the middle of the night. My dreams, the only place where they could not penetrate.

–He is coming.

–What?

–Then end?

So deep into the night, I was struck by all the light. Every light in the house was on. I wanted to go back to sleep. But they were preparing me for final judgement.

–Think about everything that you have done wrong. The weight of all those things together. The lies. The unclean thoughts about the body. The wanton greed. the vanity. All these things that make you corrupt.

I caught a peek of myself in a mirror. How could I not help it.

–You should have covered the mirror if you knew he was coming. We don't need any distractions.

Luckily I only said this to myself. If I had actually said it to her. She would have hit me across the face.

–What insolence, you wretched one.

But if I was so wretched, why was it that they were covering the mirrors. Aren't evil spirits overwhelmed by their lack of reflection. I stared at that glimmer and in my staring I saw my eyes glow with a devilish stare. I felt that I was the source of all the perversity. My sleep had been disturbed for just that reason. They knew what I had been doing. And it was time to root out the demon. I smiled knowing the malice that could not be detected with their meager resources. Worse, I felt indeed that the corruption had consumed all of my mortal soul. More than ever, I needed the blessings of the judgment. I needed punishment!

As I started to catalogue my offenses, I felt an insane pleasure in my deviant habits. I wanted to lie with the demon. Bear his seed and increase his regime.

I felt that they could hear my thoughts. He whispered to her and then she gave me the sternest look. I just stared back. I was getting good at this.

–You don't want to disturb him with any interference.

I felt that her remonstrance made so much more noise than anything that I had done. I bit my tongue and tried to maintain my pose. When he arrived, did he want us to kneel down. We awaited his supreme majesty.

I felt strange. All the powerful forces in this house were prostrate before him. Or at least before the slight hope that he might make his presence known, This only added to the fear that they commanded at other times. His whispers and her stares.

–You must serve him.

I felt that I was the perfect servant. But it was 3:30 in the morning and the best way to serve was to be asleep in my bed.

He told us that we could all return to bed. Was this a false alarm. Or all part of the overall preparation. I could hardly tell.

The next day no one commented on his coming. It was all taken for granted as a natural thing. This told me to be prepared for a similar calling at some point in the future. It all made me realize that I held this event in greatest contempt so it was probably put on for my benefit. They realized that I was the one who prevented their family from being chosen. I was the impediment to the family's resurrection. No wonder we had been passed over.

Since I had been isolated as the cause of our perfidy, perhaps it really was part of my nature to stray from the true path. I didn't feel cut out for these nightly escapades. Perhaps my

spiritual makeup was a little more mundane. Or, on the other hand, I might be the only one who could actually hear the symphonies of the universe. I was being held back in my ascent by my tone deaf relations. Such a judgement seemed so harsh. But if sleep was really a healthy part of our being, then these interruptions were being orchestrated by wanderers who really had no inkling about his plan. Sure this could make the demon. But I could also be the chosen one whose salvation was being restrained by my being placed in the wrong house. This convinced me more than ever that this was the wrong family for me. I had been plucked from my rightful home and sold to these monsters so they could have another convert to their salvation mission! Oh what a betrayal!

This confirmed more than previously the need to maintain my secret language. To keep the opera playing all around me. If I could continue my sympathy with my true nature, my action could ward off the mischance that had befallen me.

Moreover, it struck me as preposterous, that the visit would occur in the middle of the night. We could hardly prepare for a judgement without sufficient sleep. I liked the idea of all of use being in attendance at Sunday service. This would give everyone the time to wipe the sleep away. To do their hair. To make the unclean clean!

I was slightly taken by my vanity through all this. Didn't it give me the greatest opportunity to reflect the harmony of nature? The golden sunlight was dazzling off my hair. I admired myself in the light.

As I brushed my hair over and over again, I became convinced that I was the anointed one. This was my blessing. I was meant to use it. Otherwise, creation would have been in vain. My eyes were downturned while I contemplated the flaw. And my eyes opened fully to resist the effects of my doubt. I felt myself rise up in appreciation of my vocation. I could continue the good word in a more substantial way than ever before. Attentive to any defect that might show in the mirror, I could easily remedy the irregularity.

I couldn't pass a mirror without hearing the calling. I wasn't a demon. I loved my reflection. It was not just my reflection but my divine message. No wonder I had to make things right. As the day made firm its presence, I felt so comfortable in its brilliance. I didn't want to again get cast into the darkness. The lonely silences of the shadows were gilded with my new knowledge. The light melted away the freeze of the cold night. I made a fist with ease to demonstrate the freedom of warm day. None of the bitter constraint.

My smile seemed to pass from me into this image. It bore away any obstacle to the realization of perfection. Not in me, but in my desire, I could sense the remedy to any suspicions about my purpose. The world needed to mirror the same certainty that was being offered to me. If not in themselves, they all could see that blessing in me. I felt honored that I had been appointed the messenger for such a sublime endeavor. I wasn't finding glory in my vanity. I was sacrificing my beauty for a more profound reward. I was simply the vehicle for a transformation of the world.

I thought about this. It seemed like such nonsense. I just had to pass a mirror and feel shocked by a mortal fear. The transience of what I saw. Already I could see a pale that threatened my whole demeanor. And this darkness might just creep all over me, I would soon find myself engulfed in my utter ugliness. I couldn't let myself succumb. My face felt puffy. I looked to see if that was really a fact. Oh no!

With my companions I was able to maintain a surly distance. The girls recognized the mystery that I exuded. They were almost disciples who hung around me in hopes of learning about the lore that I had collected. My stories were not just imaginative. They held a grain of revelation that when explored blossomed for the listener. They were rapt as I sculpted the miniature fairies that played havoc with our everyday assurances. A pen that disappeared down a hole. Toys that went missing permanently. Gift money that was nowhere to be found. I told them all about the plots that the spirit world concocted against them. I showed them techniques to battle the evil.

Our adventures took us deep into the woods. It brought to life devils that were better left undead. We would summon these monsters to our seances. Then they'd follow us home and try to disrupt our ordered lives. They would force us to stay up all night. They would make us not want to get up for school the next day. They would make us sick when the burden of the night still hung over the day.

Was there any refuge at night? As I slept, I watched a lone firefly kiss the darkness. It left trails of its flight. In this path I saw an art, a sign of my eventual liberation. For the time being I was caught in my perfidy. The light was the gold that I craved. Greed set in with the descent of darkness. Shadows marked the form of the riches, highlighted the sharp curves of sumptuousness. But only in gold was the true treasure.

I thought of a time when I had stolen a ring from a companion. Our supervisor had searched high and low for the treasure. But it was mine. And I cradled it in my pocket. Reached in there for my private delight.

When I got home I pulled out the ring. I unwrapped it in the light. The glow was astounding. It hypnotized me and burned deep inside my brain. GOLD! It was mine. I tasted the ring with my tongue. It was electric.

My visitor still graced the night. The firefly was my companion through my dark hour. I drew life from his path. This art might eventually free me from my lethargy. His message was unwavering and insistent.

There was a languid intensity that covered the night. Even my companion reiterated that same atmosphere. Even in his liberating presence there was this haunting stillness. More disembodied than ever. This perhaps was his true nature. Not to show a way out but to guide me deeper inside. I shivered just thinking about that mystery. It was the closest that I had really come to thinking about my mortality. The omen. His darkness was a surrender of the light, an infernal trade of any real promise of freedom.

So what he really lit up was the objects that gave up their form to the darkness. This gloss that melted as the night reimposed its discipline. In shadow the ghost took shape and quarreled with my hopes for solace. They mocked my isolation.

I tested the reaches of my childhood. Would I ever find release from the phantoms? Worse, memory seemed to condemn me to the constant repetition of the same trauma. A distant wail took shape in the room. I wanted to hide under my bed. But I was frozen in contemplation of this supernatural form. It was the successor to the firefly. Some new harbinger of the dreaded horror.

The noise seemed to pick me out. My haunting was complete. It invited me to leave my physical form. I knew the awful results of this journey. That some ghost would come to inhabit

my body and I would never be able to escape.

How could I shut out the pernicious effects of the daytime? In its dark cloud, temptation settled over me. I used what strength that I had in trying not to give in. But there was something so delightful in the proposition that was offered me. I felt the perversities of light settle so deeply in me. My self-admiration had its complement. This hollow that needed acknowledgment. I felt untouched and incomplete. Until the moment that it was overtaken by passion, my sense of self would be inconsistent and partial. I more or less wandered in a daze. Drunken on my self-recognition and its terminable aspirations.

At first, my intoxication was dull in form. It seemed to lack any basis in actual experience. So the uncertainty added to the daze that beset me. More profound was a realization that nothing could engage my interest. Or I could not truly command the attention of anyone else. perhaps, this was because I always seemed to hold back something of myself. This reserve was an impediment to a real contact with another person. A deep sense of longing attacked at my being. I was so open to its resolution. But then I feared that any real encounter with another person would only damage my integrity. I could drain what I could from communicating with another soul. But anything more than that and I would risk the purity which was the true complement to my brilliance. This was the fundamental lesson that had been drained in me from my teaching. And I swore to uphold the intent of those lessons even if part of me felt uplifted by the transgress rather by the faith.

I could sense that I was being cut in two. My faith achieved a sharpness and a sway that were unprecedented in my youth. I was so immersed in devotion that nothing could turn my head from that singular focus. The more that I committed myself to this regimen, the more that the transcendence found a home in my body. This warmth spread throughout and its intensity augmented with each further application. I prayed and I centered my adoration on the oneness that my faith suggested.

Contrary to my faith was the hideousness of self. A challenge to my piety. The demon. That devilish laugh that would not cease. It enhanced its pleasure with my spiritual ascent. It was the parasite which attached itself to my religious awakening. It was totally immersed in the flesh and played itself accordingly. It left me no room for resistance. No hope for respite. I could feel that dull hum that surrounded every action. It had a fascination in its sickly sweet appeal. And it set itself to work at the heart of my very physical being. Any act that involved the body was prey to its influence.

With such a dominant temptation influencing me, I need to shut down its effect. I clamped it shut! Just closed it down. I left no doubt about my further intentions. This was the deepest peril to my mortal soul and the greatest threat to my salvation.

I concentrated on what was the core of my spiritual life. With solely that heart of the matter in view, any distraction could be rendered powerless. I remade my body. I directed all effort to the same end. Sure, there was a dynamic to this whole process. Physical energies themselves could serve as the basis for my damnation. Together they could create an overwhelming hold of the body against the spirit. But they could also provide the basis for liberation. Acting in concert, these energies locked together to underline their true revelation. They had to be curtailed before enjoyment itself could impress its deviation. Pleasure was itself a lure. I could admire the glitter but never give in to the glow. The swerving away formed the

basis of my spiritual exercises. Concentration gave way to an all encompassing sense of composure. I could recognize the force of a more powerful spirit. The recognition was a transcendence that pervaded me entirely.

Where had the demon gone? To its rightful resting place. Inside me. Where the true home of my spiritual devotion was outside of me, the temptation rooted itself in my heart. As long as the spirit made itself know, I was firmly within its calling. As soon as grace was withdrawn, I would descend into the lair of the temptress. I let her locks become my locks. her lips become mine. Her body found its support and welcome in my body. And I loved it!

The independence of its effects were extreme. It was a wave that washed over me. I could let myself be dragged or just cast myself into the surf. The latter option had such appeal. Added to this attraction was a sense of immunity. This wildness that had nothing to do with me. After all, my self was given to the spiritual. There seemed to be no consequence for this fall. It gave the moment an eternity. It engulfed any fears that might have touched me previously. I could let the effect just wash over me. Why not?

This tingling inside me. Deep down. An insane perversity. There was really no way to direct this passion. It gave me a fever. It projected way beyond my body and put me in a trance. It was wonderful.

I threw myself into the experience. The more that I gave the more that it seemed to take. I could feel this insane flow. If it was so blissful, why could it be wrong. It couldn't and so I felt at ease in offering all myself to it. It gave me reason to think about it all the time. A new perfection to compete with the spiritual enlightenment.

I held on so that I could relish the promise that was offered. The increase in effect appeared interminable. Sure the spiritual held out eternity. But here was the immediate glimpse of that eternity. With each new application, the glimpse became a certainty. The honey became a nectar. I floated sea by deep sea onward..

Immaterial in its very materiality. My body vibrated. My loins expressed the excess. I could not contain the tremors.

I was sure that my head was coming off. Spinning around. Delirious and then just plain uplifting.

Why couldn't this be my spiritual liberation? What else could compete? My desire seemed to form its own lover who found his way to my bed. He bathed me in kisses. He sanctified the body so that he could take of his pleasure. There was no holding back. I made myself totally at his disposal. Knowing his body meant knowing mine. He knew where to touch me so that I would be compliant to his will. There was no resistance on my part. I pulled him towards me. I cherished him. Caressed him. Entranced him.

We sank together under the same spell. I merged deeper and deeper inside him. He disengaged to provoke a stronger desire on my part and to this I submitted without doubt. What had for so long been my fear was now coming to pass. There would never be any escape from the passion. The two of us linked in such permanence.

The union tore at me. Its dominance was such an affront to all the time that I had spent in perfecting myself spiritually. There was a rank ugliness in my betrayal. What could I do. My descent had been so far that nothing could pick me out my hell.

This hell had been so unique that the former well of grace was easily dried out by this

assault. A thirst that sucked it dry. That just shook my resources until they cracked and disintegrated.

In the night of my damnation I wondered where I could find respite. It recontemplated my passion. Even its domination there was a limit. My temptation sunk hard in deep in testing those limits. What I had experienced as damnation was nothing compared to the awesome majesty of my overall commitment.

I felt a massive door close. Not the door of temptation. But the house of the spirit!

I was overwhelmed by an infinity of my own corruption. Damned. All damned.

This should have devastated me. Instead, I now felt that I had truly found the seat my pleasure. Formerly, pleasure had suggested itself in its intrusive form. Now it was part of me. this was my pleasure. The force that I had liberated. I was no longer at the whims of a lover. Pleasure came to me as this supremacy of the self. Period.

Sure the lover might reveal. Sure the lover might cooperate. But failing to excavate these far reaches of my body, the demands of pleasure were independent and needed to venture out on their own.

Were these simply the illusion of the fantasy? Would the actual pursuit reveal a barrenness in these travails?

Even if real contact told me something else, the result was already obvious. I burned with sin and enjoyed it. I felt the corruption engage me completely. I could touch these forces as they overcame me entirely. I could reject the advances of anyone who tried to penetrate my inevitable bliss.

What then!

I had arrived on a most conclusive understanding. No one could ever take away that ecstasy which was the heart of my being. The burning that accompanied my knowledge only revealed the indubitability of that truth. I was born to have fun!

The fires of corruption were omnipresent. A heat wave. The sweat covered me. I drowned.

My tongue expressed the hunger. I needed to taste. To feast. To devour. This beast was set free. I rode this monster until the two of us could roam the earth as one. Its prancing became the cadence of my search. I could smell the flesh. That alone was satiation. Something in me. Something outside of me.

The sulphurous fires that made me cry. The acrid smoke filled the air. Not just a searing but an entire consumption.

We gave ourselves to the fire. In its molten hot form, the flesh liquified and its elemental form highlighted the essence of that hunger. The gluttony. Swallowed completely. Over and over again. That vague sensation that hung at the edge of suffocation. The body could not stop even under this peril. Harder and harder it gave way. The torrent became a typhoon. Everything got caught up in this flow. From the bowel of the universe, the nauseating smell that was my perfume.

Here was the entire degradation in the process. I wanted to be ripped apart by this storm. To open up all the entrails that offered contact with the foundation of desire. Beyond the lover. This was corruption in all its glory

I looked at myself in the mirror while I was lost in my fits of lust. I drew that force to me.

My body spread open so wide and I let the tar mass get poured into me. This felt so good.

The muddy mass just shot out from the holes in the earth and spread themselves all around. I bathed in the buy and it only added to the lithe perfection of my flesh. The line that ascended up to the heavens and slid down to his submission before me.

He vibrated in me. I opened up wider and wider to engage his passion. His head exploded. I drained all his energy. All their energies. By themselves, none of them could attain the true heights of my desire. But all these experiences unlocked it for me!

The damnation was complete. My meditation had revealed the orgy that was my sought-after release. All organized for my pleasure. All telling me that I was the very source of the evil. Now no lover could liberate me from the chains that my corruption had finally imposed. What had been lost in my fantasy. Where was the spiritual connection that had been the thread that held me together. I lay alone in my bed. And this solitude was now so intense. Who would want to share the pain that so affected me—no one!

I felt the punishment to be greater than ever. What savior could liberate me from this new condemnation. Was I only using my religious allegiance like I would use a lover. This made me really frightened.

A muggy heat hung over everything. There was no sharpness to this heat. No freedom offered by the sweat. Just the weight of the humidity. Here was the ugliness of judgement. No forgiveness. Just the yoke of corruption.

Even punishment permitted escape. But here there was no punishment. Only the gasping without refreshment.

The nausea dripped through my whole system. I carried the weight within me. I felt so heavy. I wanted to get rid of this feeling. This listlessness. I was paralyzed in my realization. Something needed to come from inside of me and dissipate this pollution. But the pollution was thorough.

I felt infected from the inside and I knew of no way to get rid of it. I could feel my body bloat with the pressure.

For once my realization offered no relief. It only underlined the extremes of my suffering. So the meditation was now intermittent in its effects. I wished that I could swallow a pill or down some tonic that could cleanse me. I knew the corruption was thorough. But this only convinced me that there was no relief in sight. This was an actual corruption. Physical and dominant. No metaphysical emancipation.

I couldn't stand this real depression. This was not a property of the imagination. The reality was thorough because it was physical. A case of the flu. An internal explosiveness that victimized my body. There could be no pleasure that counteracted these effects. Just to move hurt and reminded me how intensely were the pains in my stomach.

Now my stomach started to twist from the inside. I could feel myself being passed through a ringer. Twisted tighter and tighter. The winds pulled and pulled. A rubber band that just extended wider and wider.

The tension reached its peak. I wanted to tear out my hair. Scratch my skin. I just rolled on the ground in some hope of releasing the pain. It became uglier and uglier and I found myself so tired just battling the pain.

I screamed out. A scream that attained the core of my being.

Here there was no human rescue. The world was in utter denial of my suffering. I could not use any of its appeals to ease my oppression. This was a call to the other world. A world that I had attended all through my youth.

Why had I been invited within this place? None of this was for me. Either real or supernatural. I was helpless. My request rose to the heavens. I was taunted by the overall silence. Even a hope for a more intense pain provided no vision outside of this fundamental opposition.

Was there any strength left within me. I fainted under the pressure. Left in my corruption, abandoned to its ravages!

Would I not be hear?

In my heart of hearts, I was convinced that I was not like the other girls. I was still seduced by the fatalistic myth that my smile could triumph against any obstacle. Even immersed in my self destructiveness, I would not surrender to the effects of darkness. But as I held there before the night, I confronted its endlessness. This hope of rescue in the morning, the impossibility of ever sleeping. Hence the eternity of the evening. Here, I came face to face with what the true nature of haunting meant. To ravage when not hungry. My doubt sought solid form and this was the sustenance that could support me against the lack that burned inside. An emptiness that would never be filled by solid food. This hilarity of the self that just echoed. What could not be pieced together. This was the harrowing form of my punishment. That lofty aspiration that floated in its own dissatisfaction. That sought its fleeing victims. And just drove down on them.

No wonder there was this inevitable coincidence between the teeth and the feeding. Not the food, but the dominance as the predator tore into her victim. With such a legacy, no wonder I gave myself over to the phantom. Flight meant to rain down in terror on the unsuspecting. This was the presentation of desire which now seemed so familiar.

This was all the power of the corruption which had plagued me. At the fading of the night, there was offered a meager relief. I knelt to offer myself to this deliverance.

When daylight actually arrived, it came with such open arms. There was an entire lushness to the dawn. That aftertaste of the night. Love had finally crept into my room. I was overjoyed. I saw joy in its full form. It was wondrous. For this moment, my fever broke. None of this corruption was really who I was. I had been led astray.

The morning offered the shining moment that I long awaited. I acted as if none of this ever happened. the bad dream that dissolved in the clarity of the day. All my delusions had been exaggerations. Even my turning away from the righteous path was only a temporary distraction. The certainty of devotion reimposed itself. But I was still subject to the same influences. Something remain unsettled in my heart.

—Temptation never occurs without some element of cooperation on the part of the tempted. This is the ultimate weakness in the sinner.

I was not a sinner. I never gave in.

—I don't understand.

—You understand better than you let on. I can see it in your face.

What could she see?

–I'm more than a guardian. I'm your flesh and blood.

The day offered the cradle to her watch. She would guarantee the purity of my eternal soul. She looked me in the eye with that knowing stare. I felt the shame of all the enjoyable adventures that I had explored. The resultant frustration before my corruption.

–Temptation is the harlotry that rends the body. It robs it of the life line to its creator and makes it into something filthy and ugly.

I was lost in a rather absurd vision of rolling in the mud with a lover. There we took the most intense pleasure from each other.

–If the light does not remove your source of sin, then it must be burned out of you.

I saw myself chained to a bed with a torch being held close to my head. The evil in the soul burns away. If the believer is firm in her belief, she will not succumb to the flame. As the demon is engulfed, the eternal soul is rescued along with that part of the body that retains its purity.

There was a particularly grotesque quality to the imagery. This was the form of my rescue. I was overjoyed that I had pulled through. My joy was to be temporary as my next challenge would tremendously sap my resources. The demon inhered in the body even if I had cast out its evil influences.

The demon still lay dormant in me. I bathed in the joy of my recent conversion. All the while its ravage spun within.

Its emergence would prove to be the worst trial of my childhood, scars that still extend into everyday of my adult life.

I felt like I was beset with the plague. My skin burned all over. It was from the inside. An itch that just got worse and worse. This really creepy feeling that I felt all over. This pain seemed to recycle and pour out from the inside. A general nausea. and the more that this pain made its effects, I started to feel this itch come alive. It was as if I was now subject to a swarm of insects that poured over me.

I could feel it. All over me. Something done to me while I had my eyes closed. And whenever I'd close my eyes again this thing would invade my world. Like a giant insect scratching me. And as I thought about it, I was splitting in two. I was becoming this insect that was doing things to me. I felt preyed upon but I didn't want to look down. Didn't want to feel it least it would take me over completely.

As I put it out of my mind, it seemed to disembody as this giant cloud. And it traveled into my head. These words inside of me saying these awful things. I was losing all attempts at resistance. The scratching was now this weird tone. More than that, a brushing. A taunting. My fever seemed to go along with this.

I was slipping down more and more. A slug on the ground. Pushed down into the mud.

–Is there nothing that I can do to stop this?

My cries were lost on a heartless night.

Then the weird cramping in my stomach. Even to talk was only a whisper as my words seemed restricted. A night in the day. Or the lights on forever in the night. There was no waking up. No freshness of the day.

–We'll help you. We're treating you.

But they couldn't help this. I didn't want to get up. Didn't want to get out of bed. And the extremes of the night were my ever present illness. Try as I might I could not shake these effects. I knew the remedies offered would only aggravate the condition.

I had heard of tropical diseases running rampant when the medicines had produced these mutated germs. That was what I suffered. I engaged the melancholy of these tropics. A monsoon without respite. A suffocation. This intense cough. The cough had this weird effect of suggesting faithlessness. And so I gave in to its discipline. I cursed everything that had supported me up to this point. Damned my faith. The curse was exemplified in the utter weakness of the body. I tried to expel these humors but they only stuck at the edge of the throat unable to come up. Trying to clear these spirits away only had them rooted deeper in my being.

I experienced this strange tingling. It was as if I awaited this major punishment. I wanted to run as far and as fast as I possibly could. But I felt that I was running out of space, running all the way to the ends of the earth and just tottering off. To head off into forever and to confront the limits of nowhere.

The coldness of night, buried in this dank sewer, waiting to emerge but knowing even the air above was besieged by the same loathsome dampness. There was nothing to grip on to. Nothing to lift me out of this despondency.

The air contained the same heaviness. The humidity pierced all my body. I sat up with great difficulty. The hollow of the room seemed to cast me down a giant well. Here my desire to escape was echoed by the denials of the immense walls. Too slippery to scale. Too steep to overcome. And the frustration again materialized in my lungs. This disgust just poured from me.

This incredible uncertainty was something that I could not share with anyone. The possession sought to isolate me entirely. The anger of the world seemed to press against me in the silence. They had wanted nothing to do with me. Rejected me in the sickness. The contagion. Peeking in to see if the disease has passed. Not allowing enough of a revelation to let the infection seep in.

--We watch you. Sip from the potion. It will cure you.

Here there was no expectation of cure. More like a watch for the end. The vigil seemed absurdly long. The draw of other distractions.

Nobody, nobody could know how crazy this all was. The inner dialogue. The whispers in the dark. These waves rolling over me. Voices that told me to do things.

I tried to sit still. Tried to stop the effects. It was almost like these weird x-rays that just passed into me. In the core of my being I could tell how I was being worn down. Just burned away. And this shock rebounded through the rest of the body.

A knock on the door. A bang. Clanging in the night. The chains of enslaved poltergeists battling in the remote. Just a key to unlock their devotion to my despair. Let me free.

Thunderous, heavy walking. My wheezing. The fever inside as some being inside. Its insolence. A refusal to release me from this suffering.

Oh wondrous one!

Even rescue only reiterated the mania. A sweet nurturing in my dissipation. Just to taste the nectar of this condemnation would only attract me more to the final resolution. I lost myself in these artificial drownses. I put the cup to my lips and sipped on my rancor. The more I

engaged the feeling outside of myself, the more that I challenged the phantoms, the sweeter that this potion became. I sank under its charms. A headache that seemed to send me floating off the ground. A ravenousness even in satiation. I loved the feeling. I wanted the complement. Touching the other. The raving. Rumbling around in the lunacy.

The silence was replaced by cacophony. Everywhere the chant became more extended. Harmonies degenerated into aggressive dissonances. The noise was inside my head. Now a throbbing. The high just too great to bear. I needed that added jolt. The possibility of projecting into a nether world. And in my hesitation, I noted the threat that I now posed to myself. Even to find some enjoyment in my suffering was a let down that was too great to contemplate.

Was this the result that these voices sought? The ultimate degeneration of the disease. The internal opposition that was so long imagined now confronted me in the gross refusal. An exaggeration that had become real.

On this basis, it seemed to easy to dismiss all these effects. My imagination had run away with me. But none of this really explained the cough, the fever, and the shortness of breath. Something too sympathetic in my physiology? My resolve became so completely evident.

I could deal with the effects and ignore the cause. In essence, there was no cause. I felt relieved. Like the cloud had passed over me. There was no isolation. I had simply withdrawn from the world. I needed to get myself out of bed and rejoin the living. It seemed so easy until I stood up. I had forgotten about the dizziness. This was not simply a result of being in bed for so long. I tried to brace myself. I caught my breath. Lifted myself from the bed. But then I hit a barrier. I just slumped over. There was no support in my bones. I turned to liquid!

I lay on the bed in utter helplessness. This was the root of the sickness. Worse. Once I came face to face with the weakness, there was no way to raise myself from the debilitated condition. My confidence only spurred the disease to a new level.

If it was possession, I could not simply counter it with will. It had already seeped into every function of the body. It was part of my psychology, but also part of my physical being. I was repulsed by the self.

I lay there with no recourse. I sought the rescue of sleep. It would not come. Totally awake in the middle of the night. This was the constant feeling of the affliction. When the entity first entered me, there was all the associated shock that went along with it. I noticed a blurring of vision. A loss of appetite. That initial drain as the parasite made its home in the host. Disruptive. It needed to take over and impress its order. That pang of extreme emptiness that rooted in me.

I initially sought to cast off its effects. To ignore the influence. Worse the desire to overwhelm my character became the heart of my pain. If I could just subdue the fever, then the other effects might dissipate. The cloud still seemed to hang over me. It gave a gloom to my overall condition that far exceeded any of the individual symptoms. I could feel the glimmer of hope fade. I felt myself hurtling head first into a brick wall. The result, splattered against the side, left me helpless to counter the possession.

If only will could give me the strength to overcome this dark humor. But the negative feelings were reaching deep into my spirit and sapping my desire to resist. It was as if the entity

had found its home. My will was its will, and it now acted with this cocky assuredness that it could not be dislodged. I seemed to be a rebel within my own being. And the revolt was appearing a more remote possibility.

My knowledge seemed my most formidable opposition to the disease.. But beyond this, the effects were entirely real. Even a refinement of my resistance was based on my physical resources. These resistances were only dwindling. The entity used my degree of security against me. In the moments that the fever might subside, the attack was actually becoming more relentless. By letting down my guard, or focusing my energies somewhere else, the entity found key regions to extend its regime.

There was no getting over the illness. The occasional victories turned out to be the emergence of more stubborn strains of the same infection. Its idleness was entirely a cover for its actual devices. Even the core was becoming decentralized. Instructions were being given asynchronously in a way to disrupt any counter-strategy. Almost a randomness to its pattern so that the attacks eluded even the most sophisticated predictions.

In this attentive wait, I prepared for the next onslaught. This invasion would be so much greater than the previous ones and offered such an affront to my overall composure.

The depths of the room seemed to suggested a distant horizon of light's glorious flourishes. In my surrounding darkness, I sought a beacon. I shook in anticipation of the blessed light. But this only drove me into the enclosure by the shadows. I was held by this promise, and arrested by my disbelief. Was this the weakness that allowed doubt to overcome me as it crept in so unheralded and vicious.

I lay back and hoped that my sought-after relief might pass over me. The wait verged on a hope for a miracle. I thought the more still that I rested, the closer the revelation might come to me. I tensed up in trying to resist. Almost holding my breath, I felt perfectly ready for whatever might befall me.

Nothing happened. I felt no change. Only the light seemed to hang in a distance. A path outside of the room where none actually existed. My accelerated breathing seemed to reflect the intensity of my let down. The promise had seemed so total. But the resolution bespoke only of my futility. I felt pinned to the wall. Where was my rescue?

The pain gripped me intensely. I retreated deep into myself. My relatives could hardly penetrate this cocoon. They were no longer my caretakers; they were only guardians. Good will mattered little in the state that I was in. Sure there was the desire to help. For a while it made me feel that they participated in the same dilemma that I did. But they did not. It was only me who dwelt in these lower depths. Pretend as they may, they had no inkling of the depths of this hole.

The isolation drove me crazy and no doubt was in the forefront for the demon. What better way to seal the effects of the illness. Favors proffered. Hands held. Caring words. All these were covers for their real fear—the contagion. If they didn't get too close, then they would never suffer the same effects. I knew about their suspicions. That I somehow had merited my fate.

Even in the concern, the veneer was so thin and made my suffering all the greater. I didn't need a demon to haunt me. I had my loved ones. I wondered if the warm tea that they brought me might be poisoned. If they could rid themselves of me, then they would never have to

face their own pain. Or maybe the noxious fumes burning from a candle.

I felt presented with the worst presentiment. I was the source of all their troubles. The scape goat. And the slaughter was so close.

I just lay in my bed all quiet and still. Maybe they didn't know that I was there. No sound and they might forget about me. I felt like I was imprisoned in a tent. I could see the shadows of their faces and their eyes as piercing lights. But they were separate from me. I could not get through the tent!

The air within became rare. I was being sucked up in this vacuum. It was taking away my breath. I hope that if I could just reach out, it would give me some form of relief. But it did not work that way. I came up against the limits of my space. Growing tighter and tighter and just moving in on me.

And the stares from the outside grew more intense. Not that there was any more clarity. Just a rigidness in the pose. The negation that they offered me. The reminder that this was my sickness not theirs. They fed the demon that wailed inside. They wanted nothing in common with me. They denied my humanity. Made my affliction totally personal. Without human cure. Only through exorcism.

The ghastly condemnation forced me to confront this thing in a way that I had been all along. It reminded me of the uneasy truce that the two of us had made. Was this my road to health. This was the forever of my being. Once corrupted from the inside, did the worm find its permanent home and affect all future decisions. I wish that I had perished in a conflagration.

I had given in to my guardians. I saw them gathered around the bed with torches and gasoline. The witch was to perish. If I worked with this infernal form, then sorcery was also of my nature. To do the devil's bidding meant that I was the demon incarnate.

In fear, they knelt before me. They beseeched their weakened savior to offer me consolation. But I had consorted with the demon. They feared that my heart had give way. Before conducting me to the fire, they would have to run a stake through my heart.

I was in awe of the perversion that now assailed me. I wanted the stake and the fire. I knew about the extent of my actual powers. Nothing could stop me! My triumph was fatiguing. I lay back in my bed and just gave out completely.

My isolation reminded me of that split which I now took for granted. In gaining my integrity of spirit, I found that I was giving licence to my perversity. I refused to admit defeat. But that deviation seemed to gain some kind of dominance over my physical being. I found the need to retreat deeper into a contemplative state. I made this spirit into my refuge, while I let the physical delights continue to have sway.

The disease impressed on me of the truly hideous form of these delights. Something seemed to vomit from my spirit. This refuse gave me an insane pleasure and served as the model of my overall submission to the physical. The uncontrollable shaking. The vibrating. The utter acquiescence to the illness. I felt the entity penetrate me. My resistance increased the pleasure of its entry. It rolled over me, and I just gave in without any pretense.

The stimulation had an unexpected form. Its spontaneity was a surprise unlike anything that I have ever knows. It became what I measured all other experiences against.

The realization that I might never want to leave this feverish state. More than an isolated ecstasy, it turned the whole body into a place of pleasure. But even in my isolation, I hardly felt

alone. I welcomed my demon and his pricks. Needles which filled me with a potent venom. The initial sting. The overall burning and then total compliance. I loved it!

The mere spontaneity of these gestures made me certain that this was not of my own doing. I had already turned away from any intentional alliance with the demon. I could enjoy these effects without any guilt.

My wide-eyed smile. The warmth that filled the face. The little chuckle. The turn of the mouth. The invitation. My lips swelled with the excitement. As I felt myself go under the spell, the flashes became more and more intense. These fluctuations provided me with no control. I found that I was being tossed by the convulsions. This was the heart of the illness. What I could not resist. I just gave in!

I wanted to be sick. Wanted to be in the throes of its passion. All my former guilt had just overcome. It had stripped away my will so that the only enjoyment left was my dissipation. Silly. I was giddy. There was no way to censor this feeling. I could not block or direct it. I could only make use of it. If I failed in that mission, then it might blight out all hope of recovery.

My, how I became lost in my own delusion. I did not want to admit the utter failure that I had been at ridding myself of the plague. All those around me had abandoned me to my isolation. But in that failure, I was finding stimulation. The cure seemed the bliss that I always sought. If I accelerated its progress, I might lose the very thing that seemed to make me whole. In my weakened state, I did not have to worry about the rift in my spirit. About the haunting bliss of the physical. I could lie here and just let the entity do its thing on me. This was not my doing at all. It came from without and I just let it be.

Perhaps it became all too easy in just letting the disease have its way. This was the wearing down of the will that was so characteristic of the demon. I had been victorious in the spiritual battle but had just given in on the physical front.

The demon seemed to deny any transcendence at all. It gave tribute to the transient. The immanent. The immediate. Forever was now. Now was forever. I had no need of anything else. This was proof enough of the spiritual. A more intense physical pleasure. A longing. A lingering aftertaste. A burning inside. Wonder of wonders!

I had passed over. The disease was a fantastic gift. I would not get over its effects. I would marry my concerns to it once and forever. In our wedded bliss, we would forever enjoy our greatest pleasure—the infection!

—You can't give in to the fever. We have contacted the doctor, and he's coming immediately.

Why weren't they taking me to the hospital if they were so concerned. Was this an actual doctor?

I didn't want them to take me away from my true love. I would not submit to the treatment. This was their fantasy and had nothing to do with the reality of my situation. They had withdrawn their love from me and now they pretended that they could give it back by just bringing in a mediator. Did they not want to admit their part in creating this monstrosity. Would he just give them absolution for their grievous fault?

I buried myself deeply in my symptoms. This was my only escape. My convulsions and my fainting.

It was like the effects of radiation. I had read about disasters. I had embellished the

stories with my own version of the events. My myth.

The first consequences were an overall sense of apprehension. Psychological disorders accompanied the physical malady. I waited on edge for the actual effects to hit. This long delay made me feel so puffy. Listless, unable to do anything. I felt that there were things to plan out. Important things to do. But I just felt so muddled.

I could feel movement beneath the surface of the skin. Itching. An inability to localize the pain. Numbness. Weakness of the muscles. An inability to hang on to anything. Loss of balance. I just braced myself against the bed. Hugged the wall.

The skin seemed to bubble. The itching more insistent. The source became more real. Things were again crawling all over me. I looked down at these massive blood-filled blisters. Was this deformity real?

I couldn't look at myself in the mirror. Couldn't face the cause of all this pain. It was obvious. As if I had scratched open these sores.

The assault on my vanity was complete. What could remedy the aftermath of all this misery? I covered my face. My lips were cracked and swollen. Too much for a miracle. Just too much.

My stomach exploded. The convulsions pored over my entire body. I just crackled with all the unsettling movements.

The tremors became impossible to contain. The room quaked. Dizzy and nauseous. Turning over each turn and just poring out!

This was even worse than the previous incarnations. There was no phantom to dispel in the hope that this ugliness would cease. It was deep inside my physical being.

I now felt like the victim of a massive crash. The parts strewn over the room. The pattern lost in oblivion. No salvation. What could take me out of this mess was the exact thing that held me down in the morass.

My cries were useless. This was not just about corruption. It was a total putrefaction of the body. A thunderous roar and the echoing cackling. This was real. This was forever.

I needed to expel this plague from my body. I tried to not think about the ghastly result. I aspired after a body image that seemed to float on air. I followed this vision as the only way to extricate myself from my captivation. I dared not move and disturb these blisters.

I didn't feel like doing anything. I just wanted to lie there and let and pretend none of this had ever happened.. I closed my eyes and just gave in to sleep. It anesthetic was total and complete.

In my dreams, I reacquired my former grace. I was sought after by my suitors. Lovers-to-be bestowed marvelous gifts on me. Rings and bracelets covered my body. My smooth skin stretched in a glorious line from the tip of my forehead to the sparkle of my toes. Nothing besmirched this wonder. The day graced my talents. I flattered the day with my pleasure.

So ensconced in radiance that the sun orbited the heart of my passion. I held my breath to increase its effect. I held all in reserve for a day when the glitter would flower. All the flowers would splendidly blow together in a gentle wind. The symphony interlaced the harmony of a rainbow. More than the colors, a concentration of light, the source of all the energy—an inner glow. I was touched by this inner glow. It could be seen in my smile that bubbled up from deep within. But it also was reflected in an intense vigor that charmed everything that I did. The

strength without fatigue. I could run forever. I could fly.

I felt the wind toss my hair. I held my head at a slight angle to demonstrate my confidence. I soared again.

I was the jewel of the day. I could sense the concentration of all these forces in my gait. I drew all the sympathies to my proximity!

It was like these skeins of light that are broken down in a pool of water. Each vein had its own glitter. And the arrangements were a patterned myriad that interplayed with the flux of the water. The movements were hypnotic and suggested a consonance that went way beyond the visual. It was this consonance that smoldered in me.

I could enjoy the pleasure of a scurrying squirrel. Or a bird swooping down from high in the air. The blade of grass slicing in the wind. I wanted to roll in the meadow. Jump in the brook. Feel the morning chill give way to the impetuosity of the daytime heat.

I could sense the admiration that the day offered me.

I thought of the glorious image of rain falling in a pool of water. More than the effects of the day, this kinetic force impressed me. The pool swept up the marvelous energies of the storm. Even the still after effects carried on the marvelous explosiveness of that image.

In the mugginess of the sunny day I could detect something of the same revelation. Would I ever be able to liberate myself from ugliness of my time of loss. What loss?

The sweat beaded on my forehead. Brought a confident glow to the rest of my body. I played barefoot in the grass. Twirled around on the smooth carpet. I giggled. I jumped up and down.

I wanted to believe in the verdant blessing and to roll around in its promise. This belief became stronger in the ability of the day to entertain the contradictions, hot and dry, wet and refreshing, humid and dominating. Still the affirmation of the sun. The day would not surrender to its many doubts but continued on with its mission. I sparkled in its splendor. I felt a verve beneath it all. I wanted to tap this root. Wanted to taste the sap that sent it all into a spin. To crash down so intently and veer off with the same vibrance!

I worked to encompass all these marvelous tendencies. Time spoke to me. The line opened up and curved on to itself. It found seed and grew and blossomed.

The gentle tufts of the evergreen, the wisdom of the oak, the shade and knowledge of the maple. I pranced around them all. Took counsel with the birds

I wanted to fly. I was with them.

I could conquer the hesitation of the heat. No wonder water mixed with fire. This humidity only dragged us down closer to the earth. We needed to bypass these clouds. The wings spring. They felt informed by the mind. I was in the air. What joy.

But the dream wandered from me. I was again condemned to the bed. The plague drew me back.

For the rest of my life I wanted to do nothing but lie still here. Just let the night roll over me and swallow me up.

Who would worry about it if I was one? No one would really care. Just let me disappear in the darkness.

I returned to my cocoon. I rolled myself in a little ball and concentrated hard. I wanted

it to all go away, to all disappear. Smaller and smaller and smaller. I hardly was there.

The suffering was excruciating. I could not banish the entity through any effort of my own. It was working its way deeper and deeper into me with no way of getting rid of it. What was this monstrosity that was becoming such a burden for me. This ugly parasite that was draining all my energies. My former techniques were useless. I was beset by this intense restlessness. If I could just move in my bed, I might gain some relief. I was uplifted with this thought. But the movements only froze me deeper in that realization. This formless mass was everywhere. From lethargy to nausea to dismay. There was no way to get out. I had to get out of me. I could feel something snap. The weight just all caved in on me!

I jumped up on the bed and let out a blood-curdling scream. It was the disheartening scream of a nightmare.

Should I let myself out of this illusion that held me together, for what it was.

I just went crazy. I screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed.

OH GOD! OH GOD! OH GOD OH GOD!

I hate you all!!!

The silence dominated me and gave no relief. I vibrated from this shaking inside me!

Can no one here me. Help me! Help me! Help me!

My young form gained this immense voice. I roared. I gave a storm to the universe.

From within to without curled the spiral that vomited out everything that existed.

Where were my attendants? The guardian. Who was watching me? Why did they not hear my cries.

I turned into someone else. Someone with this barreling voice. I extended my scream to the top of the sky.

THE ROAR!

The world just fell at my feet. I hopped on the bed in my raving lunacy! The overcome vision!

I could hear them rush in the room. She tried to restrain me. I struggled and yelled and shook things.

I cursed her!

Destroy my guardian.

She held me down with more determination. She wanted to destroy my composure. She did not want me to scream. I felt her suffocating touch. I struggle against her touch but it was in vain. She held me down, held me deep in this dilemma.

I hated her. I felt that her anger was directed toward me more than this thing. She wasn't my relative. Her blood did not flow in me. That's exactly what she was—a guardian. None of her blood flowed through me. Perhaps my resistance had been the very thing that encouraged my suffering. The only way to rid myself of that torture was to do the demon's bidding. The intruder was only there to warn me about the true nature of her domination. The only way to assert my independence was to explore the roots of my pain.

A disembodied voice suggested a critical insight:

—I tried to rescue you until I realized that I had to rescue myself.

My pain brought with it the most basic fear. Grounded completely in a heightened

awareness of my own self-disintegration. In this entrenching, there was a foreshadowing of my future sympathies. I figured small doses of pain might serve to create an immunity. But I was coming into contact with this place of utter destitution. A thorough emptiness. I could feel the hollow ache all the way to the bone. Not a shaking, but just in being still.

I worked to extend my discipline. The pretense that this stimulation was enjoyable. A needle rendered in the brain. Motionless. The core of feeling. Pain as a mere knowing. Remarkable.

This utter freezing of a feeling. Total focus. This was solidity of pain. Just to be here in the body. No outside. Nothing but the immediacy of the physical.

I wanted to make this pain my own. It was these sharp blast that hit me frontally. My small doses were hardly a preview of this gut-wrenching. My stomach twisted. The unsettling churning. More shaking. The challenge by my body to upset any effort to maintain a rhythm, any effort to subdue the pain.

A dog barked outside my window. The unrelenting night howling disturbed my already unstable condition. Does the animal sense a presence in the atmosphere. Is the demon known everywhere.

My possession continued its impertinent manner. The feelings of discomfort. An overall sense of airiness. I couldn't eat. Spent hours lost in empty reverie. I verged on a self-destructiveness.

I still thought that these feelings had their origins deep inside my character. But as I peeled back layers, it became obvious that a force held my attention. Once I arrived at this realization, the force only gripped me with all its confidence. So I found impossible not to surrender. It took advantage of my self-doubt. It exploited my weaknesses to reveal a stratum of thorough corruption. When I looked at the body, I was struck by the essential perversion that seemed to motivate the disease. I wanted to defile myself. Humiliation without any protection.

The assaults kept on. Letting go more and more. Total disgust with the body. Just a tool. Way past the accepted norms. Anything to get me off within this absurd discipline.

Something was drilling into my skull. Disrupting any hope of a lull. Incessant banging and cutting.

The threat to my being was paramount. This meant that I could not surround and expel the feeling. The entity now emerged—not in a way to offer encounter, only to browbeat me. There were no concessions that might serve its interest so that I could liberate myself temporarily from its hold. I was absorbed by the possession, and that was the way it had to stay.

The visitation reached full aperture, and the room started to quake. Not a tender sympathy. An entire revulsion. The storm blew inside the room. Tore the door from its hinges, opened the drawers and upset their contents, tossed furniture around the room.

The bed was cast loose from its moorings. I slipped down the incline. Sucked into the twirling vortex. My screams reached a more intense pitch. This was not a ride. There was no catching my breath. The ripping apart was enormous in force. Letting go just permitted more extreme confrontations.

—You cannot take this experience for yourself. You cannot learn from this. You have been overwhelmed. In conquest there is no triumph left for yourself. Give in, give in!

I was awoken early in the morning. It was still dark.

–What happened here?

–A bad night.

–Is that all?

–Well, it's time to go.

–What?

–We're all getting ready to go to the beach.

–It's the middle of nighttime.

–It's 4:30AM. Time to get going.

After my ordeal the welcome was so inopportune. The welcome seemed entirely natural. I longed for relief.

The hot sun would dissipate the effects of my ordeal. The plague could no longer fester when confronted with such light and heat. My relief was complete.

During the long trip down, my nausea reminded me of the difficulties of the past nights. Why had no one guided me through this eternal night. It was so much easier to remain detached and then just show up at the end bundle me in the car and drive off.

Didn't the demon continue to occupy its place in the house? Or the house just echoed what festered deep in the soul.

I had them open the window, and I just stuck my head out. The breeze was so enlivening. I lay back in the seat. I breathed again.

Could the monster attach itself to the hood? Or slide along the windows of the car? Or hover above the vehicle? As the car sped up, I started to feel even better.

My conversion was profound. My faith had been doubly challenged. First, in thought and then in action. The former possession had been so much easier to break down. But this final temptation offered few inroads. Here I was overwhelmed by an entity that did not yield so easily to human appeal. Even my seduction only served to enrich its powers. I could not piecemeal the attack.

Where had grace penetrated this atrocity? There was happiness in the day. I did not grieve the passing of the illness. I craved the blast of sunlight on the beach. I could think of nothing but the sun and the water-cooled sands. The tides tossed me back and forth. I fought being submerged in the waves. I held on to the bottom while the current tried to pull me out. The sands were such a fragile reassurance. But I fought back.

A bit woozy from a long day, I retreated to the room. Playing had taken so much out of me. I showered off the sand and settled into a comfortable bed. Now the night was a welcome companion. But most constant battle was against the memory of the tides. I was a little dizzy as I could still feel the waters pulling me back and forth.

In my dream, I was again a mermaid. I swam with fishes. Followed the trail of a dolphin. Descended to the depths.

And then a grotesque reminder.

We were face to face. My nemesis. Even here there was a darkness that I could not penetrate. The advantages of being a mermaid. My tail. I snapped it with all my might and ascended.

I needed to come to. Needed to surface. My mermaid powers were fading. I gasped. I pulled myself up. Alarm rang throughout my system. This would not be my end. I needed to

wake up!

There was rope swing hanging from a tree on the edge of a cliff and the swing extended out onto the lake. I was at first so afraid of the swing. Afraid that my hands might slip and that I'd fall on the rocks. That I wouldn't swing out far enough. I could feel my fear hanging in the air. I wanted to fly. Wanted to be cast off from the bonds of the earth that held me down with such insistence. But here was a new fear. That my flight might be interrupted by the very thing that I wanted to escape.

My will spoke of my desire to fly. I did not belong on the earth. Too much to think about. This desire turned into a will. I knew that this was my destiny. So the swing seemed to offer me wings. I played around with the rope. Looked down at the cliff. Walked the distance from the tree to the edge. I ran around the tree. Jumped all around. Mimicked my landing. It all seemed too little.

I held the rope for a long time. I needed it to give me the reassurance that I liked. I pulled on it. I climbed up it. I tried to tear it down. It seemed so sturdy.

I gripped the rope and started my swinging. I held on tight as it veered close to the cliff. I didn't want to let go. It was my life line and the water seemed so far down.

Next time. I watched some friends try it. There was so much ease in their motion. They were scooped up by the rope and dropped in the lapping waves.

I wanted to take my turn. Maybe I could succeed. I cast myself out and held to the rope. Then I let go. I closed my eyes and held my breath.

I could feel my stomach come up to my throat. The fall seemed so fast. The fall seemed like it took forever. Not the water...the rocks.

AH!

I screamed with all my might!

I fell. The splash was so sudden. I went down. Felt myself go deeper and deeper in the water. Drowning. That fear.

I should just stay down here. My mermaid nature again spoke to me. I didn't want to come up. If I just stayed down here what would they think. They all could jump but I would be the only one who didn't come up. It would really make me special. I could live down here.

I started to panic. I needed to breathe. Needed to reach the surface. I scrambled up. All my resources needed to be applied to this inevitable task. I flailed, I wanted to come up. Just to reach the surface. I took that deep gasping breath. Whew!

It was so exciting. I wanted to do this again.

There was a magic in the rope. My new wings. I loved to dangle over the cliff. That moment as I extended out. I felt that it could last forever. As I let go of the rope, I tried to make myself as a bird. I was flying.

I went again and again. This was my liberation. I got so perfect at jumping that I could just hit that high point and let it hold.

I wanted to fly. I was flying. I learned how to soar. I never wanted to come down. And I just held there. Even as I came hurtling down toward the water. Even as I submerged. My wish.

That desire kept me going. I let go of the fear with each repeated jump. The excitement. the rush. Too long the climb back.

The take off. It became a science as I could calculate exactly how to keep myself suspended for the longest time in the air. I savored the delay before the dreaded descent. Even in the fall there was sort of a whirlwind effect. I just gave in to the force of the oncoming waters. Oh the pleasure of letting go!

Again the voice:

–You can't pretend. I know what you are doing upstairs in your room. Playing with your jewels. Trying to unlock the secret of your pain.

–What?

I had a great sleep that night. My malady was washed away by the effects of sleep. I hugged the pillow. My breathing was free and unhindered.

THE KISS

Try as I might, I could not entirely escape from myself. I lived in my world of poetry and imagination. It was a powerful opiate. And on some days I felt so elevated that I hardly existed within my body. I floated on air.

I wanted someone who knew what I felt. I had this image of the perfect messenger from beyond and I waited days on end for his missive.

After a while there was a boy who began to turn my attentions. I would watch him in the halls or in the yard at break. I turned away lest he made eye contact with me; I felt a sense of immodesty in his pursuit. I really didn't want to give in to this. Perhaps he had an inner vision could just look into my soul. I was sure that he knew something about me.

I savored my understanding even if he was not a part of it. Once he gave me a look that pierced to the heart of my being. It lingered with me the entire next day. I could feel his lips on mine. It was too real considering all that he did was look my way.

I feared that the kiss might swallow me up. Even as I gave it all my attention, my reticence was still certainty enough that I would not get eaten alive by my desire. Nothing felt so cruel as the potential that this kiss had to overwhelm. Through it all, I worked to catch my breath. But I felt my heart held under the standard of its regime.

I could feel this possession work its way from the inside. With each adjustment to the force, the feeling spun around me more and more. I felt turned around by this concentricity. My resistance only provided more and more dynamic to this discomfort. I staggered. I worked to brace myself. The nausea only engaged what had served the basis for my hesitation. I felt myself slip deeper and deeper in these orbits. Now I was being dragged into the maelstrom.

Under such a deep spell, my breathlessness shook me to the core. The drain had a sense of permanence. It made recovery seem impossible. I fell so completely that my composure was entirely separated from me. This dizziness made me unsure of myself. My wits abandoned me, and I groped around in this daze. How could I ever end the internal opposition that I was creating?

The more that I tried to evade the trepidation, the more that it haunted. What the kiss

said to me was so real. It was the figment that held before my eyes to weaken the spirit. With each new appearance that figment became more tangible. I no longer felt the fear only as a reaction. Now it was a physical presence that seemed to threaten. Moreover, I felt that its effects would reverberate unlimited through my future. The figment filled the horizon, and condemned everything that was to follow.

I was beset by feelings of encroachment. Try as I might to get away, the domination was part of me. I was my own persecutor. I observed myself and waited for my stepping out of line. I became engaged completely in the self-policing. I more or less created incidents of infringement. The sense of discipline became perpetual. I was duped by myself. The self-deception made me embrace the effects of the kiss. At the same time, my fear suspended me in inaction, The image of the kiss enlarged and so engulfed me. I was a speck against the massive storm cloud. I was obliterated in the torrent. Turned around and ground down. Buried in my aspirations.

In its worst repercussions, the kiss spread me open and cut me up. I was stretched from myself. Feelings that I cherished were on display and mocked. And this ridicule prevented any sense of unity on my part. Where the fear might have first offered me a clear opponent, now this opposition attained its universality. But my resistance could not attain a massive quality. So the interference was more potent since it was intermittence. This was painful. The individual impulses invaded my serenity and shook me apart. These monsters were insightful and direct. They grasped their targets and sought their nurture. They fed in an insistent way. I could feel their bites and incisions. There was no charm in this haunting. I could not become attached to these entities that surrounded me. There was no accustoming to their reign. I could not predict. Just when I seemed to have subdued their effect, they would strike. Of they would hit me in these incredible barrages. There was no way the I could recover from one assault before I was confronting another. I was being tossed around. the tremor shook from the inside and splattered me into the exterior. I couldn't stand upright. In my prostrate condition, I was set upon again. Harpies of my own making. Sniping at me due to my attachment to my own passion. So I face the inevitable ravaging by the kiss. In defeat, I was scattered unto the far reaches of the earth. And still I was held together and submitted to a further attack. Hence the radical paradox of my new nature. The kiss could not totally obliterate least it lost its ability for further damage.

So I felt that this kiss would give me a new sense of attraction. That no one felt as privileged as I did at that moment. And this feeling would last forever. I could savor the kiss and make it linger. It would seem to answer the confusions that I had always had. That I would never again feel as small and dejected as I had felt in my past. The kiss would fill my whole body with a sense of completion. I could breathe in the new air. Glow in the new wonder.

That there would be nothing that I could think about but his lips pressed to mine. More intense, I would not even feel his lips because my whole body would be transported to this space outside of time. And thus I could give in completely. There would be no feelings of regret in my transport. I would completely let go.

This would be the fountain that would allow me to make myself anew. I would drink and feel refreshed. Everything about me could be invigorated with this spray. I let its rush flow over me. I bathed myself in its spring and it rejuvenated me. It enhanced all my charms and I was

enticed by its vitality.

There would cease to be this separation between past and present. I would survive forever in this new present without regret. I would cease to be haunted by bad memories. This would be the image that would be forever memorialized in my heart. I would pass out under the weight of my happiness.

Here I was confronted by a new strength. I had the material support to indicate that there was a concern that existed for me way beyond my imagination. This support gripped me with its reassurance. I only had to look and everything that I desired was evident for me. My former weakness was now replaced by an extremely robust attitude. Nothing could stand in my way. I beamed with pleasure. The physical reassurance was simply so dominant. I did not have to survive on my dreams. I took sustenance in the reality of my vision.

My lips were on fire. Everything about my being just concentrated on this realization. What I felt in me was but a glimpse of a more massive conflagration that bubbled under the earth. This reality was so cut off from me until I could feel his kiss drift over me. Beyond the immediacy of our contact to this reservoir of brewing energies.

For the time being the kiss struck me as my lifeline to a timelessness. A time before the groping of the present. And so I stumbled around the offer that it held out. His lips promised an eternity. Far less complex than the damnation that might await other physical explorations. And this initial salvation might serve as the antidote to other temptations that might assail my soul. His lips bespoke of a tenderness, and I fell under that spell. I felt all my desires preserved in that gesture. My body could just melt in that splendor.

I had no doubts about the glitter that seemed to entice. A halo-like aura seemed to surround my representation of the kiss. Even the supposed aggressions that I might associate with him were subdued in this fairy tale. I lay prostrate waiting for his resuscitation. A Sleeping Beauty. I was a bit embarrassed with my enactment of the tale. But I loved being the center of attention. Where was the poison that might put me under so that I would be compliant to his magical will.

I knew that I was already deep in that haze. And I nurtured it. So lovely to be held under these tremulous waters. I drowned for him. The sparkle in his eye that was such an invitation to mischief. For once in my life I felt that I was really making up my own mind. I could live in this wonderland. I suffocated on my own bliss. And I was all the more overjoyed.

The more that I thought about it, the more that the prison seemed like a palace. His next move would only propel me to prison. So I fortified the bars with my dreams. This would make my eventual rescue all the more courageous.

Deeper than this vision was a sense of something alien in his approach. Another world—another planet. That he was another kind of being. His kiss would literally shock me like I put my hand in wall socket. But that there would be some pleasure in this shock that would enable me to resist the harmful effects. Why had he picked me out as the representative of all the earth's women. We were to start a new race—a different sort of being. Beyond human.

My thought were getting sillier and sillier. But I could feel that electricity. Like a kiss an indoor kiss on winter's day. That little touch of static electricity. I jumped just thinking about it. And so my thoughts filled me with this intense glow. It radiated all over my body. I felt so

peaceful imagining it.

How could I ever resist against this enormous intrusion. And so my body opened to this effect. Almost an infection. I let the fever take me over. I gasped. I sought breath. I needed that kiss now more than ever. Otherwise, I really would suffocate.

He was really my lifeline, and I felt that I was draining life from him so I could survive. My body now shone with the realization that I was so close to him. The more that I dwelled on the image of the kiss, the more that I seemed to bring to life the spirit that has been dormant in me. With the effects of this glow increasing, I could feel the fever coming to dominate me entirely. What had pretended for resistance was now slipping away. Shaking on the verge of convulsing took over. The heat was so intense that I needed to cool down. But even the cooling brought chills. The chills again ignited the fever. I was caught in a fluctuation that I could not quell. I could not because the only way to stop my shivering was by the warmth of this kiss—AH!

Every bit of my body longed for his touch. I wanted him to cover me. To wash away all fear. I sought his concentration. If he could just find that will that would totally take me over. the lips!

Immaterial in their working. I floated in the reverie of the kiss. Touched as untouched. The spirit wafted over me. I tensed up my body so I could absorb every drop of its mist. It found its source deep inside me. I needed that kiss.

I could feel that I was recasting my body from the outside looking in. A series of kisses displayed like veils. Each more intense than the last. Or in reverse. The first so intense that it engaged all the subsequent ones.

Wonder. How I could make it mean so much. To kiss me there.

—Kiss me there.

The opening, his whisper in my ear. The tingle. That tickles. And his words penetrated so much deeper. To find this place so deep inside that was getting kissed. But then the lips were still untouched. There. Kiss me on the lips.

A kiss on the lips could unlock the treasure. And he wanted to unlock the treasure. So badly! To stare at his lips so that I could shape mine to accept his with such perfection. There would be no useless sliding. Each touch would speak so much more. Speak lips. And I felt the key slip into the lock. And this is how I wanted the kiss to work. So I pursed my lips to mimic that gesture. The key in the lock. Even the thought gave me such pleasure. I smiled. I put the mystery away in a locked box. It felt so great. I felt so great as I sensed the reassurance raining down on me.

My doubts needed that physical reassurance. That is what the kiss was. I longed for its touch. I was getting lost in my own imagery. Feeling excluded from something real. Could the kiss ever measure up to this desire for it. Now I hoped for an unbalanced passion. A crazy appetite that would just grip me by its suddenness. I wanted him to take his kiss. To take it now. I offered all of myself to him in the hope that he could make me forget a moment like this when I languished in such a despicable state.

Take me now or forever hold your tongue. I wanted the gesture to be so drastic in its effect. I felt the wave come over me. The drowning was now permanent. The damning eternal. I wanted him to make me into something so reprehensible that my corruption would haunt my

days. I would be an addict that feasted on his kiss. Making his love, his physical presence into this magnificence that its withdrawal would threaten my very existence. And I waited for this appetite of his to resurrect my passion. We spun useless in this revival. I needed to be fixed by his concern. I could feel the rush of his blood in me. Such was the potency of the kiss.

I gave my self to servitude in his domain. I knelt before him. Let me rise and come with you. But he loved me in my wretched condition. It only brought more potency to the kiss. I could feel it jack the submissive body into a statuesque arrogance. I let the explosion shake me!

I ran my fingers through my long hair. I pursed my lips. Stretched out my legs. Rubbed my hands on my hips. Perked up my breasts. Gave him that smile. And this kiss just vanquished me. At the heart of this splendor, the need to repeat this all. To rise and fall in these intensities.

His denial. His inability to sustain the same level. Just giving in to the realities of the physical. A useless squid. Beached. Until the waves roared over both of us.

I let the kiss take me over and over again as I felt it eventually could. I immersed myself in this eventuality. It was the all of my being. The two of us imprisoned by our solitary desires. These flashes pained him. Brought him back to the only reality worth living. The kiss.

I needed that kiss so badly. I cried for it. Worked to hide my desperation. Every bit of my body ached. My stomach contorted. I wailed in the night. I fell to the ground and shook uncontrollably.

My whole body shivered before its breadth. And here I was so lost in my hunger. A hunger so fundamental to my being. When his lips touched my I could then lift that spirit from the hole that now enclosed it.

For the time being, I left my spirit exiled and began to explore fantasy in its more physical form. Did his arm actually brush mine. The whisper. the tingle all over. He ran his rough hand over my smooth legs. That felt so good. A hand touched my back. He stared at my exposed midriff. A navel ring. A belly chain. Something more to send him to the stratosphere. Send him and just get him ready.

I sensed his arousal as I passed him. His staying power. that he knew how to touch me. Where to touch me. A kiss planted on the inside of the leg as promise of much more. to see two lovers just going at it in a frenzied way. My vision offered images of complete surrender. I gave in to them. I would please him. Use my lips to bring him to climax. Let the kiss surround every bit of his body. Explore the inside of his being. Shake him all around. Rock his world.

Make him jealous by my denials. Get him thinking about me every waking second. Wanting to be together. To feel him inside me. the rolling waves of our desire. Until I could feel the body, just the desire!

On fire in that physical presence. I expected that summit of his desire. Knew where he would take me. Anything less would stand out in its disappointment.

Let him colonize my body. Wear jewels that spoke his name. Let him paint his mark on me. Bear his brand. Let my skin sing the intimacy of our connection. As we become one flesh.

I awaited the conquest. Nothing could hold back the dominion of his kiss. As his conquering force just rolled over me. The march! The rumble.

His lips pressed against mine. The portal to all I have created. The edifice of my desire. I long for the kiss. The yoke.

The fear. Punishing. Withdrawing.

Was this why I have waited so long? Each day a century. Each week a millennium.

Where was the reassurance? I counted on him, and that count stood empty.

My hopes turned around in a mix of hope and confusion. Would I ever attain any acknowledgment? I sputtered just trying to express my feelings. They just spined around in my imagination. I hoped that he still found me attractive. I have seen that glow in his eye and can only hope that I appealed to him with some of the same glitter that I have seen in him. I looked at myself in the mirror. Did my hair still have that shine? My luscious kiss. My lips shone with the same intensity of my desire.

I watched myself in the mirror. I moved with that slink that might catch his eye. I laughed. I looked so silly. This separation between us became all the more profound. In itself, it could inspire his realization of my feelings.

If he could just reach over and kiss me now. How did I let him sneak in to my bedroom. I felt us move closer. The kiss influenced all his other actions. He pressed me closer. I could sense us becoming one. He held me tight. His hands moved over my body. It all felt so natural, so automatic.

He took me into himself. He so easily moved inside me. We melted together.

As I watched myself in the mirror, I wondered what I would have to do to get him to notice me. How would I have to remake my image. And then the fear:

–I've helped you to see something about yourself. But now you're becoming like a weight on me. I need you to let go. This was all fun. But now it's all so silly.

I faced the burden of this curse. I didn't want to be his lover. I wanted none of this. I found my notebook I wanted to describe my feelings. I wrote his name. Stared at it. Started writing it over and over and over again. Embellishing my designs. Getting lost in these curves.

–Don't ask any questions. Just follow my lead.

He touched my arm. He gently grasped my arm. He kissed me

I opened up like a flower. Layer upon layer. His insistence guided me.

I was immobilized by a frozen kiss. The naked electrical shock against the lips. The android's kiss. No sense of reply or communication of feeling. Just the touch and the crackle. It was this effect that could so easily be exaggerated, that it could appear to be something substantial. An intent in that first jolt.

There was none. But I wanted there to be more. This was my dream. So the encounter with the automaton would be so devastating. I ran the scene over in my mind. The kiss was the expected thing to do. The coming together. The immediate touch. Raw.

But I wanted a promise. Not a static charge. I wanted a permanence. Why couldn't I just find delight in itself. I would always want more than that. That each sensation provoked in me need to have its complement in my lover. I hoped with all my might for this basis for my affections.

–You can't love me. You can't know the suffering that I'm going through.

Again and again I had the vision of these crazy robot brushing his lips on mine.

–What does this mean to you?

–Huh?

The nightmare seemed more prevalent. If the silence conveyed so much more to me, then just the thought of the kiss drove deep inside of me. A fireball burning to the center of the world and out the other side. I could not restrain this intensity. I just gave in over and over again.

The Robot's Kiss. For what it was. This terrible exaggeration. And then nothing –nothing. What I wanted. I wanted this to live up to my expectations. I needed it to live up to the promise. It bathed me. Washed away any misery. I projected out in its endlessness. I projected back to my origins. Even its infinity seemed so momentary. I tried to hold on to it, Needed him to answer when he could not. Nothing...

Could there ever be more? Was any contact but an exaggeration? Where the charge just magnified in reliving it. I was ready for all this. I had been doing this over and over again. I did not want to let go, because then I was left with my hope alone.

Did love always go that way burning out before the morning light? That was what had always impressed me about the kiss. The desire to let it linger on the lips. The lips would always vibrate in memory of that occasion. I kissed longingly. I kissed deeply. Such had been the essence of the fantasy. From the least acknowledgment to return an overflow of emotion. Not to scare him away, but to impress him how well I had his interest at heart. That I was conscious to the utmost to his every variation in movement. My intensities communicated everything about this awareness.

My lover couldn't help but follow along. But could his kiss attain that level. Wouldn't all the fear and hesitation that he brought to the event condemn it to be a disaster? He would never let go enough to really do all that I required him. But it wasn't a necessity that he do all at once. This was the wonder of the kiss. It could store up all its meaning and release it in time. Release it in recollection.

Paralysis. With all riding on the kiss, could it ever happen? Lover–ha ha!. No automaton could ever accept that appellation. No robot could ever arise to that occasion. He would shut down after his initial act. I would be left with this yawning gap.

What did they call something that could do so much damage but had no awareness of what it was? The kiss was its weapon and it had been designed to inflict its suffering on me. I needed to know more than ever.

I wanted the thing to touch my lips with his.

I became lost in the fullness of the night chill. It confronted me flush and soaked in my spirit. I welcomed its realization. After the heat of the day, there was an understanding in the night air. It had all the heaviness of a humid day. I had immersed myself in the radiance of the kiss and needed this relief. There was a dominance that was a refreshing counter to the anger of sunlight and the prodigy of its humidity. I could escape in my present tranquility. I remained still in my comprehension of a transformed balance.

Less than a breeze, the romance of the night hung over me. It dripped down and worked its way along my skin. Like a cool drink whose condensation seemed so restorative.

I didn't need to move to let its effect hold sway. I was myself again. Even while the hopes of the kiss surrounded my experience, I could make a defense that enabled me to stand with confidence.

The tropics that were my soul held less salvation than the immediacy of the darkness.

This was my new lover. It gave without expectation. It ended all my questions. I turned my head around in acceptance of its caress. It passed through me and over me. I let it envelop me totally.

I was not afraid of my solitude. I no longer projected my affection. It rose from deep in me and held in my very being.

I was the kiss. I was touched just by my very will. It seemed so exciting to be thus engaged.

The former progression started again. Now it meant so much more. There was a reality that I had never seen before. The infinite expense meant an infinite return. Such were the appeals of a real kiss. The lover did not promise. There was not simply a vision of faraway lands. The lover delivered in his exotic appeal.

The chill marked a more entrancing tropic. The golden brown of my tanned skin attained a deep richness in the night shadows. This wealth the lover unlocked with his certain caress. He moved aside the layers of skin. Washed over my assurances. Everywhere the traces of passion. I drained the dew from the blades of grass. Tiptoed on the tingling carpet. He caught me and entranced me with his kiss.

The kiss—a spell. Did the spell require the cooperation of a willing victim. The words would only echo with such brilliance if the lover was totally compliant to its regime. I welcomed the magic. I needed its return. I let it rain all over me.

I praised the night. I dwelt in its salvation. I sapped all its resources.

I was the chosen one. I looked to a awestruck moon to give me the recognition insisted on by my lover. There was a playful jealousy between the night and the moon. I let the rays of moon extend its hospitality.

—Come to me, lover. I have been turned by a passion which did not dignify my spirit, but now you have rescued me, and nothing can disturb our unity.

I danced over the surface of the night, this superb effusion of life. Crickets greeted the outpouring of energy. This sweetness gave me a marvelous sense of animation. I drained the honey. My dance became more impassioned. The chill inspired me.

In these meandering orbits, there was still a hollow—a longstanding night that would not give itself up to the bliss. I could feel the seeping in of this bitterness. I worked to accommodate to its flavor. But it became sharper and sharper, like the return of a former pain. I tried to counter with the embrace of the night. At the core of this embrace was that kiss, the infernal kiss. I succumbed to it in all its intrusiveness.

Too much of a good thing. I had spent a night of indulging on sweet candy, and now I faced a numbing-hangover. I needed to drink from a deeper source for actual refreshment. But something about this saccharine diet was so appealing and I did not want to surrender my temporary delights to this profound roar that rumbled beneath. After all, the tremor was only a more intense honey. I wanted to let this soak into the tongue. I wanted to swallow all the nectar. The hidden tastes left me in awe because they continued an attachment to the sugar instant.

I revolved around these various stimulations, but could draw together no consistency to uplift me after my fix had ceased to affect me. No anesthetic could mask the essential deceptiveness of my initial high.

Perhaps I could get a rise from the vibrancy that moved behind the night's tranquility. This had always been the appeal of the kiss. That its sour aftertaste would eventually lead to a

realization, a craving of a more longing flavor. The kiss would never exist in itself but would carry on all the illusions of its initial appeal. Hence the entreaties of the lover.

The kiss was the signature of the loved one. I bathed myself in this supernatural contract. No wonder the night spoke with such intensity. The blanket of the chill. That absurd stillness. The chirping of the crickets. The more provocative longing. Not just the static shock of the first kiss. But the romantic locale of a kiss that would not cease.

I intoxicated myself on the night ambrosia.

I passed through a thick musty cloud. It was the remnant of an oppressive day. The cloud went to my head—a degeneration of my former elation. Would the kiss undergo a similar let down? The kiss could not contain the full pressures of my desire. Whereas the kiss suggested a pointed intent, the flesh allowed for the more encompassing impressions of desire.

In its raw form, desire cooperated with this humidity. It suggested the stripping of layers. Flesh just dripped over flesh. The body opened to suggestion. I could sense the stretching and twisting of the body of another. The kiss was so languorous. Desire played on the flesh in a more insipid way. An aggression. The more that he wanted, the more I could offer. It tempted me to push myself. I attained an anonymity in my own being.

The night hummed with the wonder of lingering. A lulling remembrance of the day. The escape and the passing beyond. There were no mistakes. Only a generous flowering.

I concentrated on the crickets. A relentlessness that knew no other light.

Still these fireflies dusted the air. They offered a certainty that might last beyond this constant chirping.

A fiery illumination surprised me. An indecent exposure troubled my imagination. I had progressed way beyond the kiss. And in my surrender my embarrassment needed some reassurance. What could he offer?

His nervousness seemed to make up for his silence. But again I wanted more. He had been a victim of the night, and I did not want to give in as he had. I need to hide what I had revealed. I needed to pull back what I had shown

Did darkness offer this cover? Would it ever offer this cover. The chill made me feel complete without the kiss, without the desire. But then there was that musty cloud that could so easily pull me in. I had this vision of naked bodies drenched in sweat. And the more that they moved, the more that they brought to life a daytime in the night. But the night permitted them to hide. Hiding, they could go farther. Reach those denials to which the body accustoms itself. I wanted him to engage me in the forbidden. The kiss would never be sufficient.

What did I need to say to him? I needed him to know how deep the kiss had touched my being. I needed him to see something about himself that time held in abeyance. I felt betrayed by his youth, by my youth. I wanted him to admit what this kiss meant, what it might mean. But that meant seeing a totality that was beyond his awareness. I knew that he could sense something. Only in retrospect could he look back and see what this really meant. But I needed him to assume that concern now. Otherwise, what could the kiss mean.

—Someday this will mean way more to you than it does now.

—How can you say that? It means a lot to me now.

—If it does then why are you so distant.

–Because you're trying to make me feel things that I don't feel.

–What?

–We were fooling around and we did some things. They were sort of dirty. I got into them and so did you.

–What?

–You know what I'm talking about.

–That's what I'm trying to tell you. There's nothing dirty about what we did.

–If they caught us, what would they do to us.

–Nothing. We didn't do anything like that.

–If we didn't, then why are you making such a fuss.

–I just wonder if you feel the same things that I feel.

–I felt your touch. I like being with you. It makes me all funny inside.

–Is that all?

–You're asking for way more than I can give you. We're just kids.

–That's just an excuse for not caring for my feelings.

The conversation was getting out of hand. He seemed much more articulate than I assumed. But I was so good at putting words in his mouth.

What had really happened between us? How could I ever know what the kiss would mean to him? His denial seemed so lively that it made me think that he could penetrate my inner thoughts. Had he read my diary. Eavesdropped on my conversations with friends. It really made me mad, and there was little that I could do about it. All these things just went on in our heads. If it transpired this way in my imagination, what could he really be thinking.

I followed through the same events again. His denial that he had ever done anything.

Could I ever really know if he had the same feelings that I did? The sweetness of the lips. The gentle surrender.

We passed through each other. I found a special reassurance on his part. As if he was watching over me.

This confidence slowly eroded with my further meditations. The brashness in his gestures. The mechanical quality to his movements. The rude expectations on his part.

Could love turn so quickly to hate? Was this a critical lesson offered to my young heart? That was where passion overcame me. Kisses gave way to the desire for more kisses. The body seemed to assume an independence from its past. There was the rather vulgar power that he exercised—why he always had an appeal for me. It felt sort of gross, but it was so exciting. All my preparations seemed in vain. I had to do something. I would write him.

The night air gave me a clarity that I could never attain when actually in his presence. I wrote and wrote and wrote. It gave me such a high just stringing the words together.

I am afraid to admit to you the incredible awe that I feel in your presence. Even before we have touched, I can feel your kiss on my lips. Its impression haunts all my nights. It has tapped the root of my being, and it is an allegiance that will stay with me all my life. Such is first love. True love. It transcends even the impressions of the physical because it is based on a bond that is much more eternal.

When I look at you, I can sense a mischief in your heart. Perhaps you are already aware of this mysterious power that you exercise over me. I am afraid to admit it to myself. But there is a special connection between us that allows me to admit this to you. As I am

writing this letter, I can feel this amazing release of energy. I can feel your embrace with each word that I write. As word trails into word, the power builds. Sure I have let my imagination run away with me. But my body is gripped by the same crazed passion. Just to communicate this to you hopefully fills you with the same excitement. I can feel our bodies just go wild together. We can't control this feeling. It takes us over and controls us.

Since we both share that same intensity of passion, I know how the kiss can send us both into this frenzy. I have seen how you look at me. And I know that such a gaze lingers even when I am not there. I am sure that you have memorized the details of my body. Part of me finds delight in your imagination. But part of me is incredibly shocked by your impertinence. You are a peeping tom. But perhaps in your fantasies, you have acquired a confidence to calm my nervousness. Such is the physical reality of the kiss that you will gracefully plant on my lips.

I sense us spinning around in the ecstasy awaits. I want the kiss to be forever otherwise the throes of passion will just come over me and destroy all that I have created.

I wonder why you have not yet responded to the same flashes of affection that I have. I fear that you have created this insurmountable obstacle to our being together. Your glances, your whispers, your poses, your smiles—all communicate this fervent intensity. I can feel it engulf you as it has me. But you will not give in. You feel that passion in its torrid waves. How can I approach you? How can I convince you?

I need you to do your part. You have shaped my heart, and now I am trying to bend your ear. Listen to my plea.

This is not a cry of desperation. It is a love borne of a realization. I wish you could see with the same clarity that I do. I wish that you could see yourself in all your radiance.

Do not be afraid. We can become so much more if we are together. I can already feel your warm kiss on my lips. You fill me with such extremes of feeling. I can hardly hold still. Forgive my excesses but they can only appeal to the same feeling that surrounds you too.

If you don't feel what I feel, then ignore this letter. Just let me be. Act as if I have said none of this. Just destroy this.

Let me lay my love to rest.

I feared that my letter had said too much. I didn't want to send it to him. It said too much. But I had already admitted something to myself. I tried to remain calm. I confronted how much I had worked myself up. Did I want to shake him up in the same way that he had done to me. Damn! It had already gone way beyond that.

I knew that he had felt things—things that made him confused. I hoped my letter could offer a clear way to deal with the confusion. I needed him to respond. Just sending it to him would be such a relief to me. I needed to breathe easier. But it was just driving me crazy. I thought more about the kiss. That reality would be the reassurance that I needed. I fell into a sweet dream as it carried me along its gentle ocean.

My parents sent me to camp for the summer. They promised to rescue me by the end of the summer with a vacation at the beach. I consoled myself with that fact as they dropped me off at the camp. I loved exploring in the wilderness. But I hardly needed some camp guides to manage my every waking second

Bob Tillman immediately recognized that there was something special about me. He saw that I could read a topographic map. I could recognize twenty different varieties of woodpeckers. I could find my way out of the woods if I was placed there without any reference. Just by natural feel. Just by observing the moss on the trees and the sunshine.

He made me feel like such an adult. He let me venture out on my own. He excused me from silly craft activities. I could do pretty much what I pleased. None of the other councilors really interfered with this attitude because they seemed to see the same things that he saw in me.

–I didn't know that you liked poetry too.

I recited one of my poems for him.

–That's really insightful.

He lent me a copy of Alex Herrington's Perspectives.

–It's really deep meditative stuff. Really adult. He finds a voice in nature that verges more on melancholy than on revelations. It is tinged with this intense solitude.

I liked that feeling. I loved how Bob made it so easy for me to understand something about myself. I started to develop a crush on him. I sort of tagged along as he made his solitary treks in the woods.

–I taught creative writing for a while at a college. I wrote a few books of poetry.

–What was it like when you first saw your name in print?

–It was pretty cool until I couldn't even pay the electrical bill.

–You're kidding me.

–Rock singers make money. Poets—there a hopeless lot.

–Why aren't you still teaching?

–I do. But I really enjoy being outside more.

I was surprised how easily I was adapting to my time at camp. It almost felt like a writer's workshop. It was so exciting. I felt Bob was my writing adviser. I always had dreams of being in a college creative writing class. This was so exciting.

I went to bed at night thinking about stories. My notebook was getting full of ideas. This was my vocation. It made my walks in the woods have such an intense vibrancy for me. Everything seemed to come alive, talk to me. I could hear the whispers from the trees. The wonder from the underbrush. Conversations among birds. I entered their world and talked back. I had always envisioned walking into a different world and participating. This was my opportunity.

At night Bob let me come over to the counselors' cabin and read him what I had written that day. He listened intently. He complemented my imagination. He made suggestions to bring more life to the stories. He helped my poems ring with a more powerful liveliness.

I never thought that I would get this kind of encouragement. Before this, my writing was something so private, but now it seemed to be real for him too. He even talked to some of the other counselors about me. Emily and Jack were two college students that participated in our group. But he always seemed to reserve his greatest complements for me. At first, I thought this was empty flattery. But even Emily and Jack gave me the same type of encouragement.

Early in the morning, Bob would get me to accompany him on one of his meditative walks. We greeted nature as it revealed its remarkable discourse. We were scribes who listened to the marvelous dictation and then plagiarized it as our own. Just as our observation brought

this world to life so the splendor engaged our morning resurrection.

We burned with the light of the morning light. It continued to run its course as the heat increased. We welcomed the sun as the ultimate acknowledgment of our discourse. The lovely chatter in which we plunged and renewed ourselves.

For me, there was an intense purity in this experience. I lost all the guilt that my nightly challenges forced upon me. The sun shone in all its integrity. But I was most fascinated by the reflected light. The expanse of vegetation that surrounded me. These sympathies were the tone that quieted me and truly sent me soaring. I felt the omnipresent. AH!

I told Bob about my feelings of oneness. He enjoyed hearing this. He again complemented my insight, but I started to feel weird around him. I admitted to myself that I had this crush on him. Sure I really liked his attention, but something about his looks started to freak me out a bit. I decided that we had to be apart for a while.

I saw him at lunch.

–No stories to show me, kiddo?

–I'm working on one, but it's not really finished.

–I could look at it.

–Yeah, but it's not ready. I just want to get it done on my own.

There was this strained hollowness between us. I could even detect a hostility on his part. Some of the former concern was replaced by a sort of leering on his part.

Things got worse as the days went on. His reaction made me feel more and more the need to keep to myself. I didn't think that anyone else would understand. They sort of resented my special treatment in the first place.

I don't know what it was that made me wander off from the rest of the kids. Maybe I just wanted to go for a walk in the woods. I needed to be alone.

–What are you doing out here?

Bob looked at me in a weird way. One of those adult looks. It had always made me feel special, older than the other girls. But now it made me feel strange, dirty.

–What are you doing out here?

He smiled.

–I dunno. I was just getting a little bored hanging with the others. I just thought that they were being little silly.

–I know. When they all start giggling and screaming, I just want to plug my ears.

I could feel he touched something inside me. I didn't want to give in to the feeling.

–Maybe we should go back.

–I know that you're here. It's OK.

–I don't know. Are you sure?

–You're pretty. I'm sure all the guys tell you that.

–They just think that I'm stuck up.

–Do you have a guy?

–I think that they're just afraid of me. So I just spend weekends with my friends.

–Do you like to get high.

–I don't even drink.

–You don't?

–I think that if I did my parents would kill me.

–They don't have to know, do they?

–I just don't think that it's right.

–Are you afraid that they'll find out things?

–I think that there's a lot of things that it would be best that they know about.

–It's not like I've really done anything.

We sat down on a rock. I stared out into the coming darkness while we talked. He had a small flask from which he took a swig.

–That's why I like coming out here. It's like the one place that I can escape their watchful eye.

–Here, take a sip.

I loved the taste. It seemed so adult. The more I drank, the more that I burned with desire to know, to expose my self to the world.

–How does that make you feel.

–All excited.

–I remember my first time.

He gave me a weird smile.

–Really.

–I've always thought that you were sort of special.

I like what he said. I didn't know what it really meant. But it sounded right. He put his hand on my leg. I sort of moved back, but let him leave it there.

–You don't mind.

I smiled.

–Have some more.

–I shouldn't. It makes me feel crazy.

–Just go with the feeling.

–I feel weird. Like I'm doing something wrong.

–I'll make sure that you won't get in any trouble.

–What?

–You have a great smile. And your eyes.

My head started to spin.

–I'm feeling a little sick. Let's go back.

–Here, brace yourself.

I slipped on his arm and he caught me. He held me there, just suspended in air until I could support myself against him.

He pushed closer to me. This was crazy. I really didn't know what was happening. It started to feel so uncomfortable. He kissed me. I didn't know what to think.

It made me feel so adult. That he wanted me. It made me feel dirty.

–Let go.

–This is fun. Don't stop.

–I don't want you to do anything.

–It's been so good up to now.

I felt paralyzed as he slid his hand up my legs. I said no. I started to cry. I choked on my cries. I felt his hand run under my panties. It was this strange sensation. Something that almost seemed OK, and that just made it feel worse. I was feeling so sick. And he just kept doing it.

--You're hurting me.

The next morning I caught up with Bob outside the cabins.

--What happened last night?

--Nothing really.

--Nothing really. You wanted it as much as I did.

--Wanted it. I didn't even know what it was.

--You had fun. I did too.

--Fun. It wasn't fun. This is too weird.

--You didn't tell anyone did you? If you did, I'm just going to tell them that you threw yourself at me. They'll suspend you. And they might not let you back at school.

--This has nothing to do with my school.

I started crying.

--I didn't mean to do anything to you like that. We were just hanging out. It was mistake. Let's just pretend that none of this ever happened. I won't tell if you won't tell.

--You've got nothing to tell.

--What would your mother think if she knew what you were thinking? What her little girl is up to?

--You're crazy. You're just so crazy.

--You better not say anything.

--Just crazy, crazy.

I didn't know what to do, what to think. Where to go. He just left me as I collapsed on the ground. One of the directors found me and took me to the infirmary. She asked me if something was wrong but I just felt so bad. There was nothing else to say. I just felt so bad.

I just sort of stared into space. Sat on a bed paralyzed.

--I'm going to get a nurse.

The nurse thought that I looked tired and needed to be excused from the activities of the day. They had me waiting in the cabins by myself. It just made it worse. I wanted to do something. What could I do? I wanted to kill myself.

I didn't eat anything all that day.

--It's not good to starve yourself. You already look so thin.

They were all idiots. I just wanted to run away from them all. They didn't understand. As if they were all in it together.

When I thought about his face, it was like one of those horror masks from the movies. It just burned inside of me. It made me so sick and afraid. I wanted to throw up. the nausea was intense. I became dizzy. I wanted to make him go away.

I looked at the lake--it was a little ways from the cabin. I just wanted to drown myself. I just wished that they would never find me.

The next day he found me wandering the camp grounds. I had wanted to be alone and didn't know that he would track me down.

--I just couldn't help myself. You made me do what I did. You're just irresistible.

–You need to leave me alone.

–I wouldn't have done anything to you that you didn't want to do on your own.

–You're crazy. I never knew what made someone like you end up at a place like this.

You're just sick.

–We always react with fear when we do something that's new, that's unknown. Down deep I think that you really enjoyed it.

This was the thing that made him most monstrous to me. Not just what he did. But that he had got in my head. Part of me wanted to say that what he did was OK. Part of the whole thing felt good. Not really. But I didn't know. I couldn't stop myself from feeling things that I didn't want to feel.

I wanted to put it all out of my mind. The whole bad feeling, all the bad experience. But it kept playing over and over again in so many different forms. In one version, he threatened me physically. He attacked me. He choked me. In another telling, I went along. I encouraged him. I enjoyed it all. I couldn't keep straight what had happened. I knew that he had messed with me in such a dirty and devious way.

I wanted to kill him. But in my heart of hearts, I found that I was letting him off too easy. What had all the talk about literature meant? All the flattery. Had he always been planning this?

My thoughts were running ahead of themselves and only getting in the way.

When something intense happens to us, we assume that it is the defining moment of our life. That everything has led up to that point. I often feel that all my destinies are tied together. They just wait to explode in these disasters. At first, I was on tenterhooks waiting for the next calamity. Later on I found a delight in these catastrophes. A strange balance. For these lulls, the lows, I expect intense rushes to send me soaring. I welcome the prospect of these flights.

Perhaps, I could never put my finger on the pulse of what has really been happening in my life. It has all happened too fast. If I try to resist these forces, it just seems to make things worse. I just hated the perverse logic that I seemed to be giving in to.

What is my past to me? I can savor the critical points of my development. It is so easy to get lost in this nostalgia. There I am basking on some beach without a care. My hoped for unity with the sun is underlined. I can always return to the quality of this memory. Or I wander in the woods while entertaining another story idea. I speak my poetry to the birds.

But the fairy tale always comes to a precipitous close. The wolf is lingering behind some rock. Or some lecherous hunters form their pack and give me dirty looks.

If I give in to my nightmares, am I only giving the monsters from my past a credibility that they don't deserve. All my friends tell me to resist. They don't seem to be as easily bothered by the horrible visions from their past.

I had a friend who had a crazy problem with her step-dad. She'd been caught running away from home. She had a precocity that frightened me. But we seemed to share a secret understanding that none of the other kids had. She said all her experiences had created a special language for her. She didn't have to say anything. It just happened. But this was the scariest part. Things would happen to her that she had no control over. She'd find that she was doing all these things—crazy, psycho shit. At the time, she'd get this pleasure from all of it.

She told me not to let it bother me. That you just had to go along for the ride.

More and more I wanted to be the driver. I didn't want to go along for the ride. I wanted to remake my past.

At the same time, the more that I forget about my experience, the harder it seems to write about it. My old creativity seems numbed by all this. To that degree, I can only accompany what is going on. I cannot create it.

Sometimes I think that the darkness has so absorbed me that I may never be able to write again. That my words just seem to slip away from me. And the only thing that I can hold on to is something that I can actually touch and put in my hand.

So I head out on this journey. Trying to feel something that is real. That I can hold on to permanently. Sometimes, I just give in. I let what I cherish just fall from my grasp.

I am at a table in a café. I'm drinking white wine, no it's an apertif. I stare out at the dimly lit street. I am in between locations. I cannot leave this place. I did not want to come here. I am waiting for some resolution. The staff react like they are made of cardboard. There are no other customers here.

Do I want someone to open a door. Open a door and take my place. Will I even see him come in? Will I just pass through him on my way out the door.

—This is your last stop.

I hear the words but don't connect them to anyone. Stop. I am not even moving. does it related to where I came from before here. Where is that? I cannot remember the daytime. I am restless. I feel that I have been here a long time.

When I first sat down, I was thinking about an ex-lover. Thinking as a way of trying to forget. Could I recall his face. Could my hands still shape the turns of his muscles. Could my fingers trace his smile.

The wine had felt good. It helped preserve a feeling. But it prevented it from becoming too overwhelming, too present.

I am thoroughly alone here. It seems that even the staff has stepped out. What are they afraid of? What do they know?

I have always feared a moment like this. It is total concentration on the now. I could feign a sort of amnesia. Haven't I already reached that point? The alcohol no longer serves its purpose. I cannot escape this strange appointment. I do not want to review the moments of my life. I feel no twinge of conscience. I escaped to this moment so I could avoid just such a moment.

My memories return undigested. They have all the ridiculous charm of the original circumstances. I thought that time might age them. Give them a veneer of wisdom. they only strike me by their utter silliness. And I thought that I was serious.

This absurdity makes me feel afraid. Insane. What was all that time about? Could there ever be a taking account for the immensity of all this lost experience? This sense of waste. this was what drove me to such minor intensities. That in the power of the moment that I might have some kind of breakthrough. There is no breakthrough, just a flapping in the wind. In my mind, a

torrent shakes everything. There is a hollow echo. The roaring emptiness.

I wish now that I had ordered a last drink. Or asked them to leave the bottle. There is no protection from this reminder of myself. I almost want to break my glass. Anything for a pretense at something more real.

Now the wait is a confrontation with the burden of time, how it has always held there. It was watching me in my communal bed. Passion raged against it alone. Where is this café-- at the edge of nowhere. It is a place entirely reserved for me, a place where I do not feel at all at home.

So many places like this in my past that bubbled with activity. There was even this magic in the glass. But there is nothing like magic in this scene. The glass is permanently empty.

The door seems to open. Opens and closes and opens again.

I feel that I am sitting down again, getting my drink, talking to the wait staff.

I need service, where have they gone?

—Is anyone here?

Is this a question that I can actually ask under the circumstances? Who can ever answer to that one?

The café reminds me of another rest stop on my journey. I try to place it between crises in my experience. The critical moment of self-reflection. What put me in this place? Certainly a vague hope of getting out.

This is what I am now asked to remember. An event that made me sense dejection. But at the same time, its impetus was my escape. What was it?

I try to work my way back to a more recent experience. What had put me in this café. What had just preceded this arrival. Again the vague image of a lover. But now faces blur into each other.

Am I waiting for a new messenger, an amalgam of the previous emissaries. Toward what end. I always thought that I had my sources. A well-placed spy who could fill me in about all the gossip. Was I still a topic of scandal. But this certainty only covered a more insipid fear. No one really worried how much I had been drinking or who I was going to sleep with. I was part of memories that they had filed away. Their ancient histories.

For the time being, this could be the most critical moment in my experience. The only experience of any consequence. The isolation that I first found to be relaxing is starting to drain on me.

Is there a purpose for all this? Sure I could sit and think about things. But what's the point of all this?

Even if I do come to an understanding about myself, will it really make a difference?

I'm at a station waiting for a train. But there are no trains running through here today. Not today. Not ever. This is the extent of the wait. I am being asked to contemplate my forever.

In this weird moment I can feel myself rushing headfirst into a wall. The train crash. After this point, none of these experiences are mine. Nothing of any of this is mine...

If I lose my faith... I believe in that train, and just this time the train is going to chug down that track and get me out of here. I need it. This is one of those experiences where I believe that need will be the rescue that I finally deserve.

My hope engenders a counteraction. I am brought down by this darkness. Has my pride led me inevitably to the same point?

I feel a night that had crept uncontrollably into my day. And this night will take away everything that I have. That night is already here. In daylight, the shine is such an assertion of this ultimate darkness. I want to run screaming into the street. My pace can outdistance even the fastest train.

I feel my body slip over that divide. I try to hang on. I look for something to grab. But the slide is faster and faster. There is no one here to tell me not to think about it. No one can tell me not to be afraid. The train is that fear and I am to be its only passenger. The faster that I go to escape it, the swifter it reaches its destination with me a passenger to my destiny.

It all seems too silly in recollection. But this is so real to me right now. It is not my past that flashes by and disappears. It is with me now.

I take a drink. I need a stiffer drink. But the former elation is now giving way to a darker draft. I cannot swallow it. I need more. I need a larger dose. The ultimate narcotic.

I know who he is. I have been waiting for this conversation. I admire his freshly manicured nails. His light summer suit. He prods me. He makes fun of me. I do not leave the table. I listen for his invitation.

--Something that you've never really risked. You've just sort of drifted into the same things over and over again.

–This is not drifting. This is my belief.

--Are you willing to really experiment so that you push it out so far that you actually are risking something about yourself? That no one can really rescue you from that fear deep in your self. That in you there is this force that will just shake you so completely that there can be no hope of containing all this craziness.

–You exaggerate something that we're already familiar with. You pretend that I'm dealing with something that I don't already know. I've had lovers. And now I have a lover. Someone that I can care about.

You're caught in the explosion of your own passions. But in the end you are only holding yourself back from getting lost in the heart of your passion.

–This is silly. It's some line that you can keep repeating just so you don't have to face your ultimate loneliness.

–Who's playing games with words now?

–It's not a game. That's what you can't grasp. You can screw around with people's lives. It's not just a crossword puzzle.

--The game is that you think that you can hold on to something that is way beyond holding.

–You can't be positive of that.

–How far can you really go with your lover before you feel yourself fading out?

Returning to all your petty concerns. You get lost in your work so that you can't get lost in yourself.

–Are you really enjoying this?

–I'm just telling you what you need to hear.

–According to whom?

--Have you ever let your lover bury himself inside you?

--What?

--You know what I'm talking about. That moment when the flesh is all-present. That screaming inside of you that gives more and more to every caress. As you tickle while he kisses along your legs. The tingle that grips you from inside. And you surrender completely. You get excited being reminded of it.

--And it only makes me feel more connected to him.

--But you felt that reminder as I talked about it. In fact this had nothing to do with him at all. You can sense his hand divide your body in two. And you yield to his explorations. Just fold around him

I am becoming surprised how really easy it is to hide my dissipation from myself. Even my smile has a look of severity. Who recognizes this? That silly turn in the mouth that suggested how I was just going along with this down swing. This is what clearly sets me up in the strongest way. I give in to this descent with such ease that all that I see are the moments of ecstasy. But even these I resent with a sort of dread.

Through it all I bring a sense of confidence to my experience. I run my fingers through my hair. I shake my head with an air of vanity. I smile. Are you looking at me? Are you all looking at me. Do you enjoy my well being.

I don't want to let on how deeply I have given in to my devotion to image. It's not what you see that expresses that loveliness that has captivated me. It goes way deeper than that. This is what really shakes me up. I see and wonder if anyone else does in the same way. How my face changes before my eyes. How I can shape my emotions with my fingers. The electricity that I bestow on my coloring. I feel pale but you will only observe my radiance. And so goes the magic that I need to exude. I need to pass off this mask as my only preoccupation. I braid my hair. Apply rouge to my cheeks. I am awakened by this change. It is only too easy.

And when you look my way, you become all entranced by that sense that I have attained my fondest hope for myself. My disguise in your attachment. Do you really like what you see? It is so easy to deflect these complements that have very little to do with how I actually feel.

And I wonder if anyone can ever know what I really feel. Can they push me, provoke me into another state, a total futility that surrounds me, that just takes me over.

I can feel someone watching me. The blinds are open. I am performing for someone. I am almost imprisoned by this need. This risky exhibitionism. That the thing that really makes me tick is this immediate physical thing. Something that I show you behind the glass. Something that you want to grab a hold of.

A hand running down my back, brushing my hair from my face. The desire to kiss my lips. And I can't help but give in. A certain frustration causes me to close the window. And your glimpse of my bliss is so temporary. And it only adds to that need to experience more. I let you be with your imagination and am almost disturbed by your refusal to take it further.

Your pleasure almost demands that you take another peek. And this is what frightens me the most. That I have given into something that has no end in sight.

I love how you can pretend that this was something entirely spontaneous and you just

loved me to make your my visit.

Oh you find this so exciting! Like it was something that you just let happen.
Or something that never happened.

Or a surprise that you never meant to happen.

You don't expect that. Or you aren't awakened by my touch.

And you can lie immobile letting something overwhelming happen but hardly affected by
its wave.

I wonder in the heart of me if I could ever scandalize myself. A silhouette rides past me.
This is where the moist infection seems to pulled me in. A remembrance of a past sickness. This
is where the girl ends and the woman begins.

I fade in the warm decay. I ask for a fleeting touch. Where it begins...I just float.
warm decay

*It was my piano lessons. I never could really sit still. My teacher would tap my leg
to keep me in rhythm.*

Not too hard.

But rather...hard

You are everything to me. I want you all the time. feeling my body twist and surrender
into you. You are nothing.

You have destroyed me. Left nothing.

For me sleep had become nothing less than a disease.

I once heard a story about a woman who had been in a car accident. And her face and
been destroyed by accident. And the plastic surgeons had worked to restore her identity. to
rebuild her face, to give her a new identity. And that's what I wanted for myself. I wanted to be
someone else. For them to give me a new face. So when I look in the mirror, someone else
would look back at me.

–What is with your poetry and your other interests? Will they bring you love?

–I can share my soul with my writing.

–All this is nonsense. You do not know what is your soul. All that you can share is your
body. And your writing is just the after effects of your sex. You can never love a man if you do
not love his body, every inch of that body...

–Isn't that what I told you from the beginning.

–You told me silliness.

I can sense his power play.

--What if I am becoming attached to you?

–I told you no attachments.

There is part of me that I do not want to reveal to him.

–Are you having sex with someone?

I don't say anything.
 –Is it someone I know?
 –Not at all. There is nothing going on.
 He couldn't tell if I got a sense of power from hiding it.
 –Good. What if he left you?
 –I told you that nothing was going on.
 –What if he left you?
 –I don't know what I would do.
 –Are you desperate?
 –I said I don't know.
 –Would you do yourself harm?
 –It's not like I'm with someone, so it wouldn't matter if he left me.
 –But when you think about him, you can taste his flesh. You can feel him sleeping next to you. These are all things that matter to you.
 –What are you saying?
 –Nothing that I haven't already told you.
 –That's my line.
 –Good. Then stick to it.

**It feels good for a while
 and it kills when I watch you leave**

**it's not enough to get me over
 it doesn't add up
 I'm losing myself**

**if I lose my looks
 I loose those looks**

**what they can't see
 forgetting the best time of my life**

**if I lost my looks
 he looked at her**

–I want to come over and lick every cavity and indentation in your body until you're panting for more.
 --I have a boyfriend
 –You only have a boyfriend so you don't have to admit you're insatiable lust something he can never understand and never really satisfy.
 --He does the trick. I don't want to be put in a compromising situation
 –You want nothing more than a compromising situation. Or you just want to be protected..

Down deep I don't even want that. And what am I getting myself into. Something that started long ago and is just continuing here and now. I can stop it by saying no. NO!

Or I can't stop it at all. It is everything that I want to be wanted or adored. I want my satisfaction to be so great that it kills me. What has taken me to this point? Down deep I feel such an intense solitude. That I could get so close to someone. Push even closer and still feel so alone.

Once you lose your link to your rooted sense, who are you?

Our restaurant is coincidentally across the street from Lakeside Country Club. Coincidentally since none of the members of the club ever come to our restaurant. As I wait tables, I look longingly across the street at the nicely manicured greens and the marvelously landscaped grounds. Even when we get slammed, I can still catch that glimmer in the corner of the eye—the magic that seems to elude me.

Occasionally some of the maintenance people treat themselves to a meal. They remain in striking distance of their locale, and they accept our service as a break from the same concerns that they show for club members. We soften the blow that a return to work means for them. In some ways, they offer the promise that we might some day take advantage of their service to reciprocate ours.

As money changes hands, we can only hope the process might speed up enough to enrich us. This is particularly true for temporary workers like myself, students for him the dream seems so much more tangible than the permanent employees. I say permanent with a sense of condemnation. This is what I too feel on my worst days. I will never be able to cross the street and always ring the grounds with that mixture of envy and disgust.

I've played golf now and then. I imagine that an extended exposure on the links, and I could demonstrate skills of which any member would be proud. Physical challenges have often come easy to me. And if I can frame any problem in my life with the same ease that I bring to a game or an athletic competition, then I can achieve superiority with very little effort.

Or so I like to tell myself as an irate salesman screams at me for dessert. I return to the kitchen somewhat forlorn while trying to keep straight each order. The cooks joke with me playfully. And I wonder if that group of department store buyer will leave me a big tip. They hardly look at me when I bring them their food. A few years ago some were no doubt in the same position that I am now. They don't want to acknowledge the insecurities of their present as they nibble on their salads and arrange the napkins on their business suits. I try and let none of my frustration show in my face. I am afraid that this mark might etch itself in my face and forever exclude me from my trek across the street.

It is under the conditions of such fortuity that he enters our place. I attribute his arrival to some disaster—a malfunctioning cell phone. A heart attack. Perhaps banishment from his hallowed grounds. I am more surprised when he actually sat in my section, flabbergasted. I want to comment on this incongruity.

—Did they kick you out of paradise?

I bite my tongue. He smiles. What is he ever thinking? Does he want his pampered stomach to experience the rot of indigestion. Is he on an investigative mission? Is he testing his

resolve? Perhaps he is embarking on an affair with one of the club bigwigs and he hardly risks detection in a place like this.

–Are you planning to eat?

He looks at me incredulously. After all we are a restaurant.

–I thought that you just wanted coffee.

–This actually reminds me of a place in my neighborhood. We used to go there after we'd been up all night at the clubs. We'd end up harassing the waitresses.

He checks himself.

–I was more immature then.

Of course he seems all the more mature now.

–Sometimes I need to get away from the club. To remind myself who I really am. Everybody over there just gets too full of themselves. I really feel like a big burger with bacon and tomato on it. And some fries and cole slaw.

He grins as he tell me his order.

–What do you want to drink?

–Get me a coke.

There is something rugged and unafraid about him. More than ever I sense him as my ideal match willing to bring out my best spirit of the contest.

–Did you just move here?

I talk swiftly as I bring him his lunch.

–I've actually been here ten months. I haven't quite accustomed myself to the South. I know so many transplants that you'd think that it would n't be a problem.

–Yeah, I was born here. But there are so many newcomers that it hardly seems like home anymore.

–You'd like to travel.

–I sure would. But I'm a student. I don't really have the time or the money.

He smiles and the smile seems to ignite a secret desire in me. That he can open all the doors that seem closed to me. I try to mask my enthusiasm lest I scare him off.

–I can see your name from your name tag. Mine's Evan.

Before I have a chance to say to much more, the lunch rush rolls overs us. Before I know it, he's off before I can say good by.

There's that point in every student's life where the grind seems endless. You start to wonder if you can ever finish school. And the hours at work keep piling up and you never seem to catch up on sleep. I imagine myself soaking up the sun on some beach. I can feel the sun works its way deep into my bones. I cast off the cold of a thousand winters.

But here the heat is only grimy and oppressive. I'm in the parking lot, sweating, wondering if I'll ever get out of here as my ten year old Honda keeps stalling out. I'm staring at the back of the restaurant. It blocks the view of the Country Club and reminds me of the ambiguous resolution to my meeting with Evan. Something about him seems all too smooth, as if he thinks he's some kind of hot shit. But at this moment I feel totally susceptible to his kind of flattery.

I don't hear from him for a couple of days. Then one day roses are waiting for me at work. The card apologizes for him not getting my number and ask me to call him. Why am I

supposed to call him?

In my life that is the only sensible thing. Everything else seems absurd. It's driving me crazy.

He takes me to dinner at Rosario's. It reminds him of a restaurant in the neighborhood back home. He tells me about his Dad and all the expectation that his father had for him. How he made it big in telecommunications way beyond the dreams of his father. Still he feels that his father is holding back his love. He tells me of his ex-fiancé and how his father sabotaged that relationship. As he tells me this he looks lovingly in my eyes. I need to put on the brakes. This all seems too perfect.

I have never felt this sense of destiny while I am sitting with him. Sure I have plans for my life. But that's what they are. Plans. This is all too real. And he has a creative side.

After dinner we go back to his place and he shows me some of his drawings. I am amazed at his skill.

–Sure, I'm busy. That's why things happen for me. But what's life if you can't enjoy it.

At a dance club, the next night I am rather intimidated by his ease in the crowd. It is as if something is being held even closer for me. But it is still being held away, snatched away before I can get my hands on it.

He kisses me. Deep in my heart, I feel that I am signing a contract, signing away my life to him. Giving up my soul.

I hear the giggle on his part as the flames gather around me.

–I've got you now.

–What did you say.

–Nothing. I just have to get home early.

–Yeah, I have a class tomorrow too.

He glances at a woman in heels and a short skirt as he slips out the door. I feel that he won't let go. As if I'm just the prize in this contest and I can never let up or he'll settle for some other consolation.

I don't see him for the next couple of nights, and I imagine that kiss that he offered me now being the price for another girl's attentions. Maybe more. Maybe he is offering her his world.

I blossom under his gaze. Despite my reluctance, I give up myself. His touch becomes my mirror. It is its own reply—so extreme that it turns back on me.

My connection with Evan brings me this sense of monstrous permanence. And I give in totally to that feeling. I never thought that I would get drawn in this deeply. But my degree of commitment is no doubt fueled by my doubts about what we mean to each other. I am using the intensity of my emotions to balance a sense of wickedness about this whole nasty business. The more that I am overcome by this attachment, the more that I am convinced it is real. So it takes the least acknowledgment on his part and I am totally oblivious to what might be thought of his ignoring me. I am in a worse state. His ignoring me only becomes the pretext for his doing whatever necessary to make up for his offense. And he is so good at this.

My dessert spoon is poised over a double chocolate mousse—my entry into heaven. The dessert chef at the club is a godsend. And I crave the smooth cold concoction sliding over my

palate. I do everything that I can to sustain this pleasure before swallowing. Imagine my delight when another bite awaits. The spoon does my bidding, and I am victim to its dips. Evan smiles knowing how pleased that I am by my reward. I can feel his tongue curling around my ear with the cat-like gentility on his part. Such adventures are postponed for later. But now he shares the culinary ecstasy by extending his fingers against mine so that I might transmit to him the exquisite delicacy and its attendant bliss. Its sugar kiss is so much his involvement in my wonder. My reward for maintaining our love.

How easily I maintain this illusion. It rolls over me with such a sense of profundity. Flowers on the table that remind me of the flowers on my dressing table. Where is this feeling that we have for each other contradicted. Everywhere I see that self-same attachment between us.

His eyes are my mirror, and I lose myself in the image that we have created for each other. Immerse myself in their stare. And even if his look is blank and stupefied, I am convinced that in his heart he is aware of this intermingling of our souls.

I scoop up the last drops of heaven, and smile at a certainty that even he cannot attain. No wonder he has left such bounties at my disposal. All this echoes such terror. In this gulf, I seek his touch. I need his reassurance. My body yields with such effusiveness. Thus I am overwhelmed by the spell. His picture on my dresser, his shoulders receiving my kisses. All is so pleasant.

I want for nothing else. No disturbances. My present has finally overwhelmed my past.

I wonder why I still have doubts about myself. Will I never gain control of my body. But he is so good at hitting that point of pleasure. There is still my fear. That it has all become too automatic. It is the substitute for any sense of real acknowledgment on his part. I try to prolong the ecstasy. I seek his devotion. His hold.

–You only respond to possession.

I hear that bizarre echo. Is it real or just my way of working through these experiences?

I need you to tell your story. The story that goes along with the voice. Along with what you see. The body, the sculpture. What does it say?

How does it start? Passions withheld. Passions spent. The need to hid something from the viewer. What can never be revealed to the eyes. To soak it all in. To save it until the moment is right. Is that what you want for me, from me. I ask for nothing less than your consideration. So it is transmitted so deeply to the world. That friction, that electricity that mumbles underneath the all the screams.

–What is your name?

But the name cannot be spoken because the name is only revealed in passion. And all other disguises whisper and disappear in the whirlpool of desire.

–If you can't call me by my name then you cannot know what I see and what I feel.

Can you let it speak. A revelation that is so quick that it is lost if missed in this primary coupling. The moment when you know to ask the name.

You cannot hold back once you see desire offered with such desperation.

He takes his turn. Grasps what he wants.

–Do you have what I need. Can you hold out amidst the desperation.

In the morning sleep strikes with such insistence.

–You know that we want the same things.

But do you? If you give in too easily now, then there will be no wonder to bargain with.

–I don't want you to stop.

But you do want it to stop. You want it all to stop.

I've always that there was more to this. More than I can get from him or any of them. You are sketching an identity. But that personality is becoming too much of a fascination.

–I want you to take me!

And you are again getting off for the brutality. The two of you together ripping each other apart.

–Who are you?

–This is getting silly.

And you feel his hand running down your stomach. And his gestures seems suspended in the turns of the night.

–I didn't want to go that far with you.

Already the two of you face each other naked.

–After this I expect to get something from all this. Maybe your keys. Can you give me your keys?

You have felt the soiling of your vision. You didn't want to go along with this little game.

–What are you willing to really show to me?

–My history. A night that got out of hand. And I wanted to get out. But I had promised too much. you know where that takes you.

But you can't go through with it. Not yet.

–What am I getting for this, lover?

–You're getting something.

–I want something more.

–And what are you going to give me if I give you something.

You can sense that partition between the both of you. The wall that you are breaking down for some reward. but once you get the rewards, does the wall go up again.

And you are afraid that he can really see something about who you are by the way that you move. You need to anesthetize to really go along with the game.

–How can you escape you own dreams? Your things. A place to keep your things. A place that you can never escape.

But you show him what you are made of. Let the partition slip. And once it has slipped away, you want to pull it back. You need to hold your breath.

–Are you giving me what I need?

And if you really hold your breath, you can keep the contact going. The contact seems almost a nightmare. A little death. But you savor that moment.

–Now can you tell me your name?

–Come on, fucker. I want you to come inside me!

I can't bring you back to life. You are already the phantom.
 And so you are now a ghost, tumbling over yourself. Where do you go to escape yourself. You are a phantom; you can go everywhere. You must go everywhere.

-I want more life.

You realize that passion is the only way to bring yourself back to life. You have to drain the life from your victims.

-I need you to love me.

That's what they see.

-I want to love you. Put on the red dress with the little gold designs and the heels.
 And dance for me.

-I'm not a performer. You're offering a secret to me.

-In turn.

-I'll seek my revenge.

-It's too late to seek revenge.

-Why? I haven't given in to you yet.

-So it's coming.

-I'm sure that you get excited thinking about it.

That makes you woman. It give you sense of a mission. To get him to discover that thing in you that you can eventually use to betray him. And betray him you must.

The two of you work together to upset that composure that desire seeks. But to be real, you must always be vigilant and not surrender to that complacency. To covet some part, something real. He runs his hand along your legs. So smooth. And this will reveal everything about his aspirations. Once he tastes, he feels the need to return. How to take your price without giving in to him.

You need to make him want to taste it more intensely. Just wanting it becomes its own satisfaction. The way of the tongue. But not the surrendering to the tongue's dominion.

Just something that he might enjoy unto himself. And this is the beginning of his betrayal. The betrayal has nothing to do with a rival. It is entirely a property of his doing. Maybe if you could invent a nemesis who might bring to an end your love for him. Why not accept what he has to offer. But you have already gone too far in accepting his caress. You find it endearing. You want to cherish it for itself.

You are breathless. To retain that sanity that makes it so easy to keep it all going, you have to bring such belief in the physical. You get to know every part of him. The back of the knee. The small of the back. Kisses planted on his neck. His lips.

His picture is on the mantle.

When you're not with him, you still retain that connection. And it takes root so deeply.

-Do with what you will.

Do you really mean it? Can you let him get away with it. You really wish that he would misstep so that you could be on top of it. Whatever he is doing.

A long lunch and a trip to a hotel with a client. He's so efficient. Insatiable. You wouldn't know. He'd still have enough for you.

–I really like to keep myself at tip top shape. If I feel it, I just like to act it out. No hesitation.

He has filled his days with this myriad of desire. When he stares at your body, you can feel him with other woman. You want to betray him before he does it to you.

You spend the evening in the bath in preparation to take a lover. You let the sponge flow inside you in anticipation of his touch. His tongue igniting something so absurd in you.

You slide on hose and your new panties, size five in black silk.

–I love your body.

He love the compliment. His hand struggles along your ribs. He takes your breast in his mouth.

–Is this all meant to say something?

–I can't go through with this.

But you love his body covering yours.

–Am I getting you excited?

–We need a place to finish this off.

He thinks of a hotel room. You think of a castle.

–I need to get away from my lover.

Both of you displayed on this bed in the center of the room.

–I wanted to finish this while the desire is still burning hot.

But you cannot finish any of this. You rush back to your place and destroy all evidence of this contact. You forget it even more as your lover vibrates inside of you. You never allowed any doubt on your part.

–What do you see?

–I see a woman in love.

–And how can you tell.

–The coupling is completely without hesitation.

–Give yourself to me

–Look me in the eyes.

But you smile and break the spell. You let him fuck you deep. And you cast off his grasp when you attain such intense bliss. For a moment, you suspect that he has nothing to do with this pleasure.

–I want you to leave me alone. There is nothing between us except sex. That's all I am too you.

But you want to give your body to him more than nature allows.

–Will you allow me to cause you pain?

–Your lover has already done as much.

A whole day lost in his arms. Slicing deep into you and discovering this rule, this principle that tells you what is the basis of your love.

–What is the basis of our love?

IT.

And now that you know, you can give so completely to just that.

–We were just having some fun.

–Are you feeling shame?

–I don't want to do this any more. It just felt right at that moment.

–And I want something that you continue to hold back?

Beyond it, you need to find something else. Something that had never been asked of you before.

I see how you are looking at me. I almost expect it. I court it. The invitation and the retreat. Have you captured my attention. Have you captured me?

I know how you want to take me. I want to give in.

That incredible surprise. You are there inside of me. You least whim already touching me in such a provocative way. Once you have made me aware of your presence, your arrival. nothing else can delight. Nothing else can distract me. I give over to you completely.

And this space beneath. Way below assent. Below invitation. A place that I am afraid to admit. Below ME.

You are there. Crawling around. Affecting me. This is my insanity. My possession. That we can never be apart. And I have to peel off parts of myself just to escape. And this silhouette haunts my days as I wait for you to come back to me. A shadow without a body. Light without light.

Your tongue guiding your way inside of me. Speaking for me. My sighs. I have already so given way. I can feel myself spreading out infinitely. You anticipate my every gesture. You welcome me to yourself.

It cannot be otherwise. I am in your light. I burn in its heat. Let it cover all of my body. And you intrude on all these geographies. I am utterly unprotected before you. I surround you. You envelop me. I slide within the turning.

Where I try to resist, I cannot. Where I want to resist, I will not. Where I have to resist, I can never put up any opposition.

I am your thought. Wish me real. Touch me real.

You look me in the face, but you see my perfection. Deeper, deeper, deeper still. I only wish that my spells could take you into these depths where I now hide. I can sense you there, so deeply there.

–Are you there with me?

–What, honey?

Lick this sweetness. From my lips, my tongue, my shoulders, my breasts, my legs... all of me. Come deeper inside me. Hear my inner flows. The pulse towards you.

I ascend with you. A plane of sheer liberation. We soar together. Take down time. Float in this eternity. Don't let it end.

See me for this. I am cut in two by your gaze. I give way to that second pose. You draw me in half. Put yourself inside me. More, more.

Not a touch. A whisper. A breeze. The rustling of the leaves. The wind. Your storm. Rain on me.

Do you see that I am ready for you? I cannot wait for your touch. I am mesmerized by the anticipation. The trance. I render unconscious all that does not yield to this wondrous feeling.

This is my isolation in your affection. I long for you. You can see. I let you see. And I ache as I wait for you to recognize how open I am to your wishes. I need your desire to bring me to life. I am sick waiting for you to see me.

I want to tantalize you. My thirst for your kisses renders me helpless. Why have I given in so.

You have cut me in two. This is my only way to get myself back. To get my soul back. So I condemn myself to this devotion to the objectivity of the experience. Your penis. I sense it erect. Cocked, ready to strike. You are part of me. I become electric by its touch. I explode. This is where I exist—my it. It vibrates with your intrusion. You are just it. I am just that. Done. Here.

The more that I give myself, the more that I exert myself, the less remains for doubt. I cannot doubt your presence. I do not want to doubt your.

You know what this is. This is it!

I know how the adventure has captured me. No longer leading towards a summit. Or helping me escape from my past. This present is entirely dominant. I am here now.

The anticipation and resolution used to be delight in itself. The now is its own immediacy. It is the most extreme intensity that makes itself available to me! Not just the act, but what makes the act stand out for itself. What stimulates me to the greatest degree. The interaction that leaves no doubt as to its intention. Where the focus is not at all a question. What displays the sex. The contact. The gasp. The strain. All the vigor of the act. How he can be best positioned to just let it loose. How can I feel the most comfort as he raises his influence to the most intense degree?

I am frightened by the almost mechanical quality of my meditation. Anything less would be a compromise of my desire. This is beyond invitation. It is demand. That he expects it. Pushes it to that limit. That I put everything else aside and just want to be fucked so hard. I want the flesh just to progress beyond itself. Ripped apart. Just crossing to the next level. And I entirely explode in the stimulation. I splatter apart. All revs up with the dynamo churning inside of me. It is now ME. HIM!

I am frightened because this leaves no chance for regret. Once started, I cannot restrain myself. I give utterly and without question. He sees me in just this way. Automatic. Beyond automatic. Once started, we will never stop.

We are always preparing that same contest! If he can hit this point and just let it ride forever. I cannot even feel him as apart from me. I can feel nothing but this ROAR from inside my head. This bursting. And the explosions are incessant. Dynamic upon dynamic that cascades to this incredible quaking. The tremors. The ripping apart.

These masks. These pleasantries. We have become these pleasure machine. My hand is on the ON button. Don't let it stop. This is our coincidence. He cannot save me. He has to protect me.

The pretense has no recourse. I accept its reality. I have no doubts about its reality. I am with that reality.

This is flesh. This is the heart of its vibration. It opens up the whole body to its rhythm. It quakes the entire universe. Everyone must know.

What can I know? What can I know and not be a part of this turning. I work to balance myself. I cannot. I am completely overcome. I cannot be sane apart from this. My lovely madness. Getting primed for his return.

I can't let him go away for more than a moment. I need him to start me up again. I feel the engines quiet. I wonder if his love is constant. This is a love that needs its sustenance. I await my transformation. The body needs to evolve to accommodate these far reaches of pleasure.

Beneath my fingertips, the swirls of his skin. I acquaint myself with his body. The hair on his legs. The muscular legs. His butt cheeks. The small of his back. The landscape.

All project out to me so that I can eventually be drawn within. He can be sucked into me!

I am engulfed.

- You're not really going on a trip without me.
- I'd take you if I could.
- I'd love to come.
- I'll call you every day.
- Don't you need me to be there. You can't live without me.
- I won't have a future if I don't go.
- I won't have a present if you're not with me.
- You have school.
- I hate school.
- You need to be more independent.
- I'm independent. You just won't let me pay for anything anymore.
- It's not like that. I have it.
- You're not saving.
- I've got stock options.
- But you spend so much money.
- I do it for you. Don't you like that?
- You do it for yourself.

The widening gap between my intense pleasures and my intimidating regret is starting to crush me. If my regret offers me some sense of clarity, then I feel that I am only a spectator in my experience. On the flip side, I crave more and more extreme stimulation in the hopes that I might get the breakthrough that I am seeking. That bliss might reveal a new sense of self, the emergence of an all-powerful will. A will that has overcome regret and can marshal such degrees of pleasure that I never feel hunger and the pangs of regret.

I think I have achieved that sort of devious balance. It is accompanied by a belief. With friends or sitting at a bar, I start to feel that rising ecstasy. I laugh. I am drawn to the entertainment. I feel that I am part of something. I almost need a tinge of that old depression. Then I shut the door quickly. This first assertion gives me the confidence to immerse myself in my new experience. It gives me a rush of excitement. I am then washed over by a sort of compelling vision. I don't want to come down-ever. And I know the more that I pursue this

escalating high that the come down will be swift and abrupt. What can keep me up there? How can I ascend such extreme heights.

At this point, I have convinced myself that there is really no come down. Just sort of a retreat of the high. A general fatigue. Why would I want to give in under such circumstances. It would just be too depressing to crash. I look at myself in the mirror. I feel that I am breaking in two. But no one can see that. They all react to the same dazzle that is overcoming me. They can see that I am overjoyed. They tell me as much. They give me pleasure. All the glittering loveliness. I am creating something with what I see. This is my new art. He touches me on the hip. He smooths his way down the curves of my body. I let him sculpt me, let him liberate me from the sense of floating that is part of my fear. I love the automatic quality to his caress. I am part of him. He hardly thinks about it. I touch his shoulder in acknowledgment.

I immerse myself in a kiss. He wraps his arms around me, and I give way.

It feels so good. I don't want anyone telling me different. This isn't going to lead anywhere. None of this will. But it all gives me a sense of solidity. Even if there is regret, it will be real. I am living. I am learning about myself. I don't need anyone to tell me differently.

As he talks about his life, he does it with such authority. His plans. His accomplishments. His ideas for stories. He's writing a novel. I listen intently to the story. I feel that I can do so much better. But it gives me a deeper sense of purpose. He's not drifting. These are losers. These are people of quality. Bright lights who I've so admired from afar. Now I feel that they are turning around me. I define their orbits. I crave my satellites. I let them veer perilously close to each other. They all want me.

This absurd desire is the source of my high. It is so tenuous and this is just the feeling that I need to preserve. I swear off wine for something more severe. A cranberry and vodka. This is time for serious drinking.

I keep drinking water to reassure me that I will not be hammered in the morning. He pulls me closer. He does not own me. I am in control of all of this. This pleasure. He has another lover somewhere. A life that has nothing to do with me. But while he is with me I feel that sense of total concentration. To put him to the test. I want him to commit to abandoning it all for a vague promise on my part.

How much do I have to give to get him to go along? More plans about moving to Seattle. But even out there he knows that he cannot find a glimmer of the shine in which he is now bathed. He lusts after this permanence. It is a lust that is so immaterial. He soars with his anticipation.

I sense all this in his kiss. He has invited me to conquer his world. And I am regal in my survey of my new acquisition. This is all the better when he relates his spiritual journeys. His meditation. His sense of wholeness. I rob him of this complacency. I offer him a side of jealousy that he has never known in his life. Previously he figured the attachments of the flesh only served as a bridge to more substantial revelations. Now, he is convinced of the indictment of all his previous ecstasies. He is close to something eternal. And he does not want to let go. Where are his means of escape? He cannot.

Perhaps this is my ticket. For the time being, I'll do anything that he suggests. And this night starts to take on an importance beyond all proportion. He nibbles on my ear. I suppose that this is an invitation to a purifying delight. I need his succor. My hand turns around his.

He holds me close. I want him to envelop me. I am fascinated by the danger. But I feel that I have already crushed him. As he touches my body, I can sense his body becoming lost in me. So I give way to a total surrender.

I need another drink. I need something to remind me of this high. To sustain my realization. I can't let on to him that I see him totally exposed. Beyond any nakedness. I can feel the bones. He tries to get the bartender's attention while I go to the washroom. If I stay there, I'm going to piss in my panties. I will derive no pleasure from that.

What more can he promise? I see him completing my memoirs and I want him to discover a scandal that even I have not contemplated. What is holding me back?

In the bathroom I am again subject to my own regret. I am waking up too suddenly. I want him to possess me. I don't want him touching me anymore.

When I return to the bar, he has the drinks ready. I tell him that this will be my last.

–If you do things right, there is no limit to your intake. I can help you out.

–I'm sure that you can.

–When passion is eternal, there is no night and no day.

–How do you make money at this eternity?

–Perfect passion is infinitely sustaining.

This sounds silly. Didn't the alchemists perish seeking such a wonder. Or maybe this is the new magic.

He is so confident. If I go along with him, will I lose myself in that same sheen.

I am watching him work out. The sun plays on the muscles of his chest. I spread myself all over them. He focuses these energies. He holds his breath then explodes. Contraction and expansion. He is so controlled in effecting these waves. I am washed by the undertow. The energies become heightened. I can sense the nexus of his potency. He projects in this void and fills it with his assurance, his strength. He absorbs it all into the fibers of his muscles. My fingers penetrate these layers. His breathing becomes rhythmic. He submerges in this union of will and flesh.

I dissolve this reverie. Still lost in the night, I take a sip from my drink. My possession takes me over and fills me from the inside. The warmth rolls over me. I want him to finish me off here. Otherwise, the fantasy will break apart too suddenly.

–I want you to come back with me.

–You do. I hardly know you.

–It's not like that.

I let the drink talk. It can deal with my later regret. I look at my body in the mirror. Do I have that same commitment to form that he has attained.

He wants me intensely. I don't even have to reciprocate. This is ideal.

–I need to get home.

I know that if I stay that I probably will succumb in the car. I can't let this happen. Not now. Not with him. I need something to not let the come down be so massive. I need help.

I look at him and all I see is a skeleton. I laugh/

–What's so funny?

–It's you.

–What did I say?

–You just look so funny.

He's getting a little irritated. I really don't think that I can leave with him.

–You're not coming back to my place.

–Let me get some water. And then I'll be OK to drive.

–You can leave your car here and we can get it later.

–I don't want to leave my car. I'll be OK

–You don't want me to wait.

–You don't have to.

–I'd like to.

–I prefer that you wouldn't.

He tries to touch me.

–Don't grab my arm.

–I wasn't grabbing it. I was just trying to...

–I don't want you touching me.

–You're getting really weird all of a sudden.

–This isn't weird. This is how I am. I'm not going home with you. You've got my number. Call me some time and we'll do something. It's just not a good time any more.

I can see that he is pissed. He's an arrogant son of a bitch. Whatever. He had his chance, and he blew it. Now he's grasping in the wind.

Things just keep getting stranger. It's not like he wants to leave. At first, he's belligerent. Then he's just there. Then he's in my apartment. And he keeps talking about his life. All this nonsense.

–Art, you're going to have to leave.

But he's not going to leave. He stays there as I get ready for bed. It would be so easy to have him sleep with me. And I think about it. But he just sits at the foot of my bed. And when I fall asleep, he just leaves.

I feel confronted with my dilemma. No man can hold me permanently. He can only provoke my desire. I am afraid that I am now subject to the search for a more and more intense satisfaction.

–I want to go bareback

–I'm not ready for this

He stares at me

–I've got a condom in my purse

He laughs

What is going on

He pulls me into the bathroom. It's a single and locks the door. He's kissing me and I'm wondering what's happening. The next things my skirt is pulled up above my waist and he sliding his hand under my panties. I'm really going for it. I let him slip my panties off and he starts to lick my clit. Then he let his tongue circle the walls of my labia. I'm going crazy. I want him inside me. I pull the condom from my purse. His pants are down along his legs. And he's got this massive hard on. I open the package and ease the condom on his dick. He eases it in. It so quick. Hardly any preparation. But I am so aroused. And he floats in me. And I am just

going crazy. It's blowing my mind. And I come over and over and over again.

He doesn't call me after that. I don't call him. I'm afraid to admit what I've done.

Now I am faced the ugly realization that the basis of my creativity has been sapped. Something that I had is gone. It has now evaporated away.

Sure I can keep a journal. Copy conversations that I hear and rearrange them to create little situations. But I can hardly get to the heart of the matter. Hardly move beyond the surfaces of these exchanges to examine actual motivation.

I don't want to expose old wounds. That would be too much. And my confidence is a little shaken by the transparency of my efforts.

I am becoming more and more of a phantom. I need a drink.

What had always impressed me about touch was that tangibility. My doubts could find their limit in his flesh. Solid. His kiss. His embrace, his body. My hands could know. My assertions always found their reply in something that I could hold.

Now I am coming up against the shortcomings of my own understanding. I touch and I lose touch. I touch and cannot get back what I give.

Who are these men that get close to me? Is it something in any of them, something in them all. I want to touch that other thing that I can never feel. Feel because it is at the heart of me. That thing that leaves me dangling, looking for support.

As I am there dangling, hanging on, looking down at the precipice, my greatest fear is who will pull me up. All my life I have been confronted by this vertigo. And I felt that if I faced it, I could overcome it. But it only gets worse. And I am hanging so precipitously. And the heights only get more forbidding.

Whenever I have been able to pull myself up and rest, however briefly. I could step back from getting thrown around.

But now my fear is who will pull me up.

—I noticed the sparkle in your smile, the glimmer in your eye.

But I can tell that he notices so much more, a magic. It seems to seize me as if he is looking deep into me and provoking something. I feel it flower inside me, almost to provoke an electricity.

He wants to meet me for dinner. I am afraid. I must go. I know how Evan would hate it if he knew. But it's just dinner.

Nick is such a nasty boy. He tries to touch me, whisper in my ear, chew on my ear. I feel it tingle. I need to draw the line but I cannot. This is all too exciting.

I can feel him grasping at that flower, molesting its purity.

There is no doubt why we are together. We eat, but he concentrates his gaze on me. He looks at me longingly, and he suffers his desire. He craves satisfaction. He is restless in his wait. This only makes his stare all the more intent. It is a warm sun that penetrates to the bone. I soak up all its rays.

He smiles. He know that he has caught me. He wants to touch me. I stop him in mid-

course.

–You’re not going to get in my way.

–No, you are. You’re too eager.

–I know what I like.

–I don’t know who you are.

I know too well already.

He licks behind my ear. Moves along my neck and tries to kiss me. I turn away. I’ve got to go.

Nick was too extreme. I am glad to make it home. I try to rest but I can feel him in my bed. I take a shower and am ready for Jim when he comes home. He is surprised by the spontaneity of my advances. It feels so good with him inside me. But I feel that my delight is too caught up in these feelings for Nick.

I am glad that I have already made love with Evan. After dinner I can let him be on his own. After he has gone to bed, I take a long bath. I touch myself and shiver with the presence of Nick. I can already guess about his arousal.

–I don’t want any sort of expectations on your part.

–Nick, I don’t work like that. That’s why I’m with Evan.

–With how. Is he your lover? Do you spend time with him.

–I make love with him. And I love him. He’s my lover.

–And if another man made love to you in a better way.

–Better how? It all depends on how into this man I am.

I strain to look at Nick. I am caught up in my attraction I could coast on this. Here is my satisfaction. Live in this bliss and then go back to Jim as if nothing happened.

–I’m not going to cheat on Evan.

–It’s not cheating. It’s not a game. You give Evan what he deserves. You’re not taking anything from him. You just have more than enough love for one man.

–That’s silly.

–It’s not whether it appears to be silly. How does this make you feel?

I blush. It’s like he’s already getting over on me. How can I hide my vulnerability?

–I better go.

–Did I say something wrong?

He knows what he is doing.

–I just have to go to the washroom.

He grabs my hand when he gets up from the table.

–Are you going to let me go?

–Do you want me to let go?

I’m afraid to go back to the table.

I meet him another day for lunch. I am not expected by Jim until the evening.

–I just shaved my legs. Don’t they feel smooth.

He places his hands on the inside of my thigh. he is delighted as he runs his hand up my legs. I catch his hand with mine, and he grasps my hand and pushes it aside.

He smiles. We stare at each other. Then he kisses me. At first he pushes his lips against my closed lips. Little pecks. Then I give way. There is no restraint on my part.

–You think this is going to any further.

–I don't know. I'm wondering what you're feeling. About yourself. About your Evan.

In another scene, there is no doubt. I have come out of the shower. My skin is still moist. He pulls aside my towel and grabs me. I sigh. I swallow my hesitation. Then I just give way. He draws my legs open and stimulates me. I just give way. I just flow so freely into him. His erect penis just slides into me. I gasp. I surrender, total in my abandon.

Am I still holding back. Letting him guide my passions. I can't wait to see him again. I ache the whole day. My passions become a whirlpool that turns around me. It swallows me up. My touch and all that it implies. I cannot wait, I cannot wait.

–I can taste you.

–You're not even here.

–I can touch you. You're touching yourself.

I'm too shy to admit it.

–I know what you are doing. Use both your hands. Let the motion move deep into you.

Sometimes I have to hide in the crowd...I just have to blend in

I imagine that he's watching

OR

he'll never catch me

so drastic that

if he did

it would just destroy everything..

–I've waited all day for you to come back. It's been so hot in the apartment. Sheer agony. My clothes are sticking to me.

He looks at me. Sees the sweat draw the clothes closer to my body

–I thought that you loved me.

–Evan, I did. I do. You're just making it all come down to a word. A stupid word. It doesn't express how I really feel. Really loving someone means sticking with them even when the feeling isn't overwhelming. Sometimes it's like a loyalty, a duty.

–What are you trying to tell me—that you don't feel it as strongly as you used to?

–I've always felt it the same. I've always felt it strongly.

–So you felt it as much when we first met.

–It's like a blossoming—the full expression is always waiting for the right moment.

–You're lying. All this is for you is a physical relationship.

–You're the one who wants me to come over all the time. You want to have sex from the moment that you come in the door.

–I always thought that was an expression of our love.

–It really doesn't feel that way to me.

I can hear a screeching dog outside by window. Screeching because the noise is way beyond barking. I cannot put it out of my mind. It is an insistent torture. Its torture. My torture. No one really knows who I am, what I am doing now. Does it make any sort of difference.

Am I torturing the dog. Is my frustration overcoming me and just seeping out to confront the animal? I can feel that I am not just getting caught up in my feelings. That I am actually acting them out. To dwell on what is happening to the dog means that I am getting some kind of pleasure in what is happening. If I am enjoying this, then I want it to happen even more. I am increasing the dog's pain.

I am brushing my hair while looking in the mirror. My hair sparkles from the light behind my head. I am mesmerized by this glow, almost hypnotizing me. I feel nauseous. This dazzle sickens and entices me at the same time.

If I can just stay awake through it all. Keep aware and what haunts me would never catch up to me.

I imagine spending all summer sitting at the pool and waiting for Evan to come home from work. This seems like a nightmare. So I get job at Larsen and Hutchins a stock market firm. Evan's step mom has some kind of connection there. At first the idea sort of fascinates me. But on the first day, they have me drowning in paper work. Entering all these paper files in to the computer. The pool starts seeming more and more inviting. After work I'm in tears. And I know that Evan is never going to offer me any comfort.

-I've to go to San Francisco tomorrow

-Maybe you could take me along

-Today was your first day at work. And you want to take off already.

-I thought that you were going to take me places.

-I will. I already have. Haven't I?

-I know. But I need to go now.

-Too bad. I won't be there on the weekend.

-Why don't we do that?

-I would. But I've got a meeting back here on Friday. Maybe next time.

-I'm going to miss you.

He just seems to be getting the best of both worlds. The sex with Evan is starting to lose its magic. With him away it doesn't seem to be helping.

Adam works at the firm. He's a real go-getter. A real cut up. I feel totally comfortable with him. He sees how much I'm getting lost in the new work.

--I've never tried anything like this before. That's why it seems so weird to even think about it. It's not like I even meant any of this to happen.

-Have you ever thought about how it feels to let yourself go completely?

-That seems like one of the silliest lines.

-Silly. You have to take chances.

-But that's just about being stupid.

-There's risk in everything that you do. Get used to it. Learn to walk on that edge.

Otherwise you're not living.

-Why not pretend that there's no risk in this. That there's no risk in life.

-Time is our greatest risk if you stop feeling it.

–Life has risks. Built in risks. You just have to get used to it. Be able to deal with the consequences.

I'm afraid of squandering the pleasure that I have just attained. For the moment I feel that the intensity of our connection is all encompassing. But something still remains outside of our coincidence. This frightens me. It gives him the chance to slip away. But the more that I feel part of his world, the more I feel prepared for the final exile. Or worse, I feel that I have reached a summit that entirely separates him from me.

Is that why I gave myself so completely to him? That he could concentrate on each turn of my body as a step closer in my direction. Not just a recognition on his part, but more like a break, a lock, that prevented him from slipping back. Sure he can see the total openness of the flesh. The degree that he can find solace in our intercourse. But once he achieves that coincidence that nothing else can possibly distract him in his pursuit.

Is he already inside me? Where can he enter? For how long can he affect me so deeply?

His hands cup around my body. They seem to absorb me. I just give way.

I want something more from him. Some assurance. But I already feel that I have offered too much and there is little chance of him giving back any of what I have surrendered to him.

--Have you ever thought about meeting a complete stranger and you're willing to leave your whole life behind for something like this?

He is looking right at me. Right through me. It all says sex.

–I'm not going to do this for you. Maybe in your bed. But not here.

–Do you want him to find out?

–He'd never find out. I almost want him to know. To push it to that point where it's in his face and he just ignores it.

–There's really no risk if he doesn't find out?

–It's just like a game.

–And how does the game end?

–What do you mean?

–You tell him or he finds out.

–He can't ever find out.

–You've got too close to my every day life and I just wish that you would stop somehow.

I meet this stranger.

–**What are you willing to give up to get something greater?**

And now I want it even more than I've had before

–So you have an ALIBI

--My mother's boyfriend molested me.

–That never really happened.

–It just would explain things.

Just let the circumstances govern how it turns out...

- Did you hit my car just because you hoped to meet me?
- You must really think that the world revolves around you.
- What?
- It's silly if you think that I met to run into your car.
- You got what you wanted.

-What do you see?
The stranger is insistent. We are watching two people have sex.

Erin shows up at my place. I want to tell her my story. About the incident. But something is going on.

-Erin don't know what this is but I've got the weirdest feeling that someone has been through my things.

- It's just a feeling, right?
- Feeling. It's worst than that. It's real.
- That's silly.
- Look in my drawers.
- How do you know that it's not something that you did? Or maybe Joel.
- Joel who? No one has gone through my drawers.

There was something so entirely immediate about the impression of his head against my leg. It was much more brutal than my surrender to him. This rawness assaulted my composure. He wanted something. More than I had been willing to surrender to him.

-Your flesh will always be my bridge to yo?
-Why did you bring her along?
-You're trying to hold me. You can't possess me. You can't possess yourself. You are dominated by a desire to own things and collect. You need to see yourself completely. You need to give yourself completely without holding on.

- I want you to take a lover.
- I thought you were my lover.
- I want you to take a lover. And not hold back anything from him.
- I've done that. You're moving a little too fast

-I want you to spread your legs. Leave them like that. Show me that you want it. This is the focus of the sucking.

I wanted to tell him what I could feel in me. The absolutely liberating sense of watching my lover have sex with another woman. I wanted to touch myself. I felt the need to invite someone else into our bliss. What I first saw as common and vulgar now seemed to awaken a spirit inside of me.

-You remember that incident with the babysitter.

–I don't remember that story.

–That other story about your friend. She's the one with the twenty-six year old lover.

–That's just crazy.

–How old is she.

–She's no more than thirteen.

–I thought that he was thirty-six.

–I've done this sort of thing before. Just get things moving up and down.

–The closer that I get to you, the better my understanding of who you are.

--It feels so good all tight and all inside. What I could do to you.

–How long have you been waiting to tell me this. Thinking in your little mind with your puny little dick.

–Are you telling me that you're not interested?

–I'm telling you that you don't know what it's like for you to get turned down

–You act so much like an adult.

–You keep saying that I did something to you.

–This just isn't working.

–That's what you're telling those other guys.

–I really haven't done this before.

–So you think this is going to cause me to want to stop.

–You just do what you want to do. It really has nothing to do what we say about it, does it?

–The worse part is that no one will ever believe you. My wife will figure that you came on to me. That you were making things up just to draw attention to yourself, Jst because I refuse you.

–You've been looking at my body every time that you pick me up. You're just staring at my legs.

–Did that story really happen?.

–The one about the babysitter or the other one.

–Either one.

That's how the **jealousy** started on his part.

–You'll just bat your eyelashes at him and give him your bedroom eyes.

–What are you saying?

–He'll peel back the folds of skin. Roll over the crevices. Let the tongue follow its certain path.

–Is this about me?

–It's getting that way.

–There's nothing going on.

–I should have listened to Robert.

–Robert who?

Do you play the piano.

–**Oh no!**

I looked at the Steinway.

–**You want me to play.**

–**I need an accompanist**

–Are you alone?

What did he mean?

The mirror that reflected sex for me frightened me more and more. That I was held in awe before this fear. What I wanted more than anything was brutality. Not entirely raw and immediate. I could easily resist such an appeal. but a brutality that addressed me in its tenderness. That called my name. That spoke to my beauty, or my lack of it. A brutality that expressed my physical being while totally denying it. Before his desire, the entire self was seized. Frozen in excitement, unable to contain itself. Just to be wanted was my aphrodisiac. To be taken, stop it and don't... Take what you will.

Under its spell, my will molded to his. I drowned in his body as I drowned in his desire. And in this explosion, again not recovering. Taken over. Dizzy, twisted. Come to me. Becoming you. His body was everything for me. After these waves of excitement that he tore from me, he yielded his body to me. And I drank it up as my refuge. Where my hand could hold him. Beckon and direct him. Draw him into me. My kisses seemed to submerge me more in his currents. Until I just knew it. Until I had no doubts about it.

Here I found myself in the extreme intersection of all these desires. Gasping. Reaching out.

–I want to have oral sex with every guy in this room. Eat me out. Eat me raw. I want to go home with a different guy every night. To find the clarity of the essence of all of them. All the time.

–You're pathetic.

–And even if I am it doesn't change a thing

–I need someone to talk to

–OK, just talk

–Come on in.

He pins her hand against the wall

She looks over at him

–I have someone waiting back at the house.

–I'd really like you to stay.

–Maybe we could get some breakfast sometime.

--I took you from a situation where you were confused to one in which you were certain.

–I want to talk about the promise.

–It wasn't a promise. Just a way for you to get over your guilt.

–There wasn't anything more going on.

–I'd go over to his house and help out when his wife wasn't there.

–Ex-wife.

–What are we talking about?

–We took a vacation together. The perfect couple on the beach..

–From the beginning it was a fantasy.

–But it helped me recover. I'm on the path to recovery. I don't want to look back to that time.

–What time?

–The time after Evan.

–While slipping back, you still made stride?.

–That's how I want it to feel.

–Even if it still seems more threatening.

–Even more so.

–You won't hurt you as much?

–I tell myself that.

–Does it work?

–More or less. But why—why can't I make this happen on my own... I wish that I could turn on some device to make me feel the way that I did. Or how I might turn it on in a way that could surprise. Or do it exactly in the same way so that it would surprise and it never did surprise in the least bit. Where my passions would be enough to overcome every fear that I had

–Maybe that's why I'm here.

–I've discovered that no one else could capture that drive. Once I had crossed that threshold, every return made it harder for me to resist its appeal and I felt the rush of that passion pull me along. And the intensity of the passion made me forget everything before and after.

–What are you doing?

--I didn't feel like eating.

–Why are you just playing with your food?

--Not only has his behavior been detrimental but you were attached to him for that.

–Who are you talking about?

–Evan? No the other guy?

–No one can tell me what to do!

–I thought it was getting worse not better.

–I'm attached to him.

–In spite of what you know.

–Why can't we just be friends? Quit prying into my personal affairs.

–You said that he wanted to hit you. Did that turn you on?

–I never said that. He just had this ugly look in his eye. No one wanted to get in his way.

–But didn't Evan used to choke you.

–I never said that. The sex was so intense.

–On your terms.

She had really silly plans and really silly dreams for herself. And now she knew none of them would come true.

–You seem to see all this as part of this grand destiny. Things just happen.

–What about something like a temptation?

–Would you let me say no? You’ve turned into some kind of scum, someone that I don’t even know. If you care for me, you’d leave right now

He touched me in a way that gave little doubt as to his actual intention.

He meets me at my favorite café. This is all so expected. As if he is waiting for me.

–I didn’t even call you. How did you know that I’d be here? You haven’t been waiting here all day have you?

–I know your habits.

–What are you trying to tell me?

–That I know things. Things that you don’t want to admit to yourself.

–You can’t really say those things.

–I am saying it. You’re just putting yourself in places that make it too easy not to see who you are.

–And who is that?

–That’s not my role.

–What are you supposed to do?

–To challenge you.

–I feel like I’m back in school. What do you want me to do?

–These are all suggestions.

–I feel imprisoned by your suggestions.

–You are imprisoned by our own desire.

–That sounds original.

–It is real.

–What do you want from me?

–It’s what you want from yourself.

–Can’t I figure that out on my own.

–You’ve been compromising your desire to your petty concerns. And then it just assails you at the most inopportune times.

–And if I give in on your terms, then how can I do anything else.

–Then you admit that its pull is all encompassing.

–It’s a drive. But there’s other things in my life.

He’s inside me and pumping away and I’m going along. And I don’t even know who I am. Some addict who needs her sex fix. Just to feel the bodies slamming together. I’ve felt this way before. And I’m trying to concentrate. But it’s like I’m not really here.

And he's just getting into it so much. I'm going along. Never having been this close to him. If it feel that good for him then it must feel great for me. And the more that I go along, the better I will feel. And I really do feel like this is something fantastic except it isn't that great, not at all. I feel split in two. Part of me is going along. Gasping for air. And the other part of me is waiting for something incredible.

The more that I feel this way the more that I feel like I'm watching myself. That I'm not really in the room. What held me here was the feeling that I couldn't leave. That I had gone too far by betraying Evan and I had to make the best of this for what it was worth. It's not that I really enjoyed this all that much. Although it did seem to respond to some kind of need on my part. I almost enjoyed any pain or abuse that went along with this experience because it made up for my doubts about me and Evan.

I'm at home resting after a long day working. Reading other people's novels. It would be so easy for me to put together something. Just go through my journals. The phone rings.

–What are you doing?

–I was resting. Why are you calling?

–Did you get my package?

–Yeah.

–You didn't open it.

–I was too tired.

–I want you to open it.

It's tied in a black ribbon. Black silk panties—size 5 and a bra.

–I want you to put them on for me. Imagine that I'm there watching you.

–You seem to offer me that same scenario.

–I want you to put them on and meet me at the Grand. Room 420.

–I don't like those scenarios. I just need to rest. It's going to be a very difficult day tomorrow.

–More difficult if you don't clear up things in your life.

–These games aren't working on me.

But I am not being up front with him. The games are starting to have their effect. Sort of a reminder. They make me see a constancy of my experience. Something frightening, almost ravenous.

We are alone together.

–Are you wearing the panties?.

I nod.

–I want you to show them to me.

–That wouldn't be very nice.

–You are wearing them.

–Yeah.

–And you want me to touch you.

–Is that what you want?

–You do don't you?

–What do you want?

- What if I tell you that you can't. That frustrates you.
- No, not at all. It gives you confidence since you think you have discovered what motivates me. You hold it out for me to see. You want it to be recognized.
- Are you telling me that you have played these games before.
- You want your experience to be unique. Your denial is what you're resting on. No, you can't touch me there. But I have gone way beyond there. That is what I want to touch. To create.
- You are a monster.
- And you called me to your presence.
- I seem to recall a phone call from you. A package.
- Didn't you send the package to yourself?
- I want to choke him with the black ribbon.
- Even your anger is part of the fantasy that you have worked out for yourself. But it's the same fantasy over and over again.
- You're telling me that I want what I can't have. That makes me the most incense. That I want to be wanted just so I can be denied. That just seems so preposterous.
- I'm just listening. It sounds like one of the novel that you've been reading.
- The lights of the room go down. A curtain opens. I can see a couple in the next room.
- I want you to describe what you see.

An eager tongue glistens as it glides its way along the stomach. It is a reality and a promise. It drinks up in satisfaction. The skin comes alive. The swirling motions engage the lover. She tingles. Loses herself in the spinning ecstasies. She gushes in her pleasure.

She opens her legs slightly. Tugs at the elastic of her panties. Moist. His hands edge along the border of the panties. She shivers with the clever suggestions. Her whole body shakes so suddenly to resist surrender. She accepts his invitation. His tongue curves around her navel. It penetrates the center with its lapping. The gentle licks culminate in his more direct kisses. His lips fit around the rim of the navel. The tongue seeks the sweetness inside.

He sucks the skin toward him. His efforts draw in air and flesh as he becomes aware of the precariousness of this geometry. The ring of the kiss is almost suspended in air away from the body. He feels himself slide into this region.

She has sensed a giving way. And her former resistance is being submerged in his forays. She is on fire. His hand move along her panties. It is engaged by the relief of the flesh. She shifts to accept the rudeness of the gesture. It intensifies the conflagration. Her forehead starts to sweat. The panties catch slightly as he smoothly moves them aside. Her legs contract and stretch out to match his gestures.

Her luxuriant hair extends below the line that the panties had marked. Withheld and now offered. His kisses circle this space. Already he can sense the hypnotic pungency. Stunned by its intensity. His lips feel the roughness of the hairs. His mouth waters with the touch of the tongue on flesh. He is impressed with the warmth. Seduced by the liveliness of the skin.

She opens her legs further as he moves closer to his insides. The heat overwhelms

his face. He nibbles her walls. Saliva mixes with her flow. He melts in this pool. She is stimulated by the incredible immediacy of his actions. The rawness. He spaces out the skin. Find a place of engrossing intensity. She has guided his way. His motions are now bursts of arousal. These are followed by the release and maximum bliss. She gives in completely. She rolls in the waves that sweep across her entire body. As she stretches out so completely, she recoils to extend even more. The earth quakes beneath her. The universe opens up and streams.

She takes him inside her. As he enters her, she loses all control. Awash in this ROAR! Cascading down. She free falls wondrously. JOY!

She moves with him trying to find a more profound explosiveness. IT!

She abandons herself completely to his pleasure. He rolls inside her. The movements attain crescendo. She gives way to the physical exertion. The two throw themselves completely into this effort. She feels something within her break open. A pain that is followed by this all encompassing delight. Wave after luscious wave.

They adjust position to more easily accommodate their thrusts. And the strain seems all the more extreme. Every fiber of their body aims forward. It is all immersed in the effort. Mechanical in its drive. And the pleasure seems to disengage from this endeavor. They so throw themselves together, that the excitement appears to rise above the movement.

She stretches out more to accept his push. She gives way to reply with a resistance of her own. They rub against each other. Her feet dig in to rock him more. Tight and then release.

The tautness of the connection amplifies. The flesh is pulled in the cycle. They bury themselves in the rush. Her to him. Him to her.

The bodies shudder in their embrace. They pull closer to absorb the physical combat. They strive for a continuity that will entirely absorb them. They turn to face each other. Lost in the purity of a kiss, struggling to attain that depth of their embrace!

When the lights come up, the room is empty. I look through the window of the other room and it appears to be deserted.

He is at the café the next day.

–Were you excited by what you saw.

–Is that what you want?

–This is not about me. Did you get excited by what you described?

–I did what you told me to do. Did it satisfy you?

–What did you realize?

–That I could see things that I hadn't noticed before. That my words could bring a world to life.

–What other people are doing for your every day.

--Think about your words.

He played a tape recorder:

An eager tongue glistens as it glides its way along the stomach. It is a reality and a promise. It drinks up in satisfaction. The skin comes alive. The swirling motions engage

the lover. She tingles. Loses herself in the spinning ecstasies. She gushes in her pleasure.

- Stop it. I don't want to hear any more. Not here. Not now.
- Don't you want to analyze what happened?.
- I watched them. I told you what I saw. That's enough for me.
- He already knows what he wants. He knows how to convey his ardor to her.
- What are you trying to tell me?
- That we think that our couplings will reveal what we already know.
- We've talked about that before.
- And you wanted to join them. To lose yourself in their spinning ecstasies.
- Isn't that why you put on the performance for me. To show me. To frustrate me. It worked. But it could hardly work again.
- What if it was your lover. Would you watch with joy.
- Are you telling me that I'm subject to jealousy. That hardly is a revelation.
- How about trying to retell the same story?
- Here. Now. Another vision.

The mountain sparkles with the gentle touch of the sunlight. Even in its presence, it offers so much more. My thirst is quenched by this image. I lose myself in the glitter and am tossed around the marvelous spectacle. My body shakes. I can feel my spirit engaged by the immensity.

- What is that?
- That is your future.
- What are you talking about.
- The tongue moving along your stomach. Finding its certain revelation. And you give to him like you have given yourself before.
- What I do on my time...
- ...is what you've always done on your time.

The tautness of the connection amplifies. The flesh is pulled in the cycle. They bury themselves in the rush. Her to him. Him to her.

- Do you know where this touch situates itself? You can't see it just by looking. You know the barrier that they have passed. It's like that third drink that you down in twenty minutes—something to just get you going. The buzz.

I gain my wings. The rush is inside me. It shakes me from within. A rumble that tears me. That grips me from within. Only to release more profound waves of energy. I can see the summit. I can feel the summit. I am the mountain peak.

- I have to be out of here. I have somewhere to go...a plane to catch.
- You're not going to be OK by yourself. You want to fly. But your outside world is a

more amplified inside.

I return slightly drained from a long night. I disconnect from the reality of what I see. I am a squid moving in a giant sea. Being tossed about. All these silly preparations. It all comes down to this. My memories.

Not really mine.

I'm sitting at the bar. He comes over to sit next to me. As he gets up, he touches my back. I shiver. His reassurance.

I can smell the antibacterial soap on his hands.

I am thinking about the lesson. How is it to continue?

–You're greatest fear is that you are being watched. But that is your expectation. You don't want that gaze to leave you side. It is your sunshine.

–You look really sexy. Where have you just been.

–I went out for lunch. I worked out and then I went for lunch.

–You look great. That light green suit looks really stylish.

–Thanks.

–Where did you eat?

–The club

–What club?

–The Tease

–What kind of club is that?

–A man's club.

–There are only men there.

–By no means.

–And what do the women tell you there.

–That I look killer.

–You do.

–How are the women?

–They're hotties.

–What?

–Drop dead gorgeous.

–Maybe I could work there.

–You probably could. You'd earn as much as your present gigs.

–You can't say that for sure.

–Let's just say that you have something that everyone wants there—boys and girls.

The work offers flexibility that few other forms of work do. The performer often can chose what nights she wants to work. If something else interferes with her work, then she can opt to stay home a night. Often the only factor that controls whether or not she

come in is how much money she needs for that week. As well, amateur nights and other contests provide a another level of alternative income for her. When money is tight, she can find a way to relieve that stress. In fact, the very nature of the job appears to counter the traditional stresses of other jobs. Slight adjustment in schedule or performance and the dancer can come up with the money for any unforeseen emergency.

She is always available to the highest bidder.

The dance entices the customer. The dancer makes him believe the dominance of his point of view. He can feel a certain purity in the image of the chosen dancer. By removing her clothes, she makes him contemplate how she has exposed herself. She leaves herself open to his desire and risks degradation by his gaze. She attracts him by considering how she is *stripped to the self*. To call her a dancer assumes her the success of performance. To call her a stripper is to give the customer too much control. Even the provocative character of the dance appears contradicted by the term *customer*.

When the performer gestures to the viewer, he feels that she has picked him out. He feels that she is talking to him in her dance. As long as she continues to discern his interest she will sustain her performance. Thus he can feel his interest has touched her without actually being touched. Her gestures can imply his touch, but she can resist his touch. Ultimately, she can touch without being touched. The money keeps the dance going. He believes that he own the dancer. At the same time, almost in contradiction, the performer works to maintain the impression that her interest is genuine.

The physical presence is ominous and everything else is indeed a fantasy, parts and acting out. She has touched a limit and when she hits against its edge will return to some other space in her cognition. Her fantasy became the money-supported reality and everything else is too fantastic.

–The worlds between us stand between us.

--You don't have to wait for me. I can a get a ride

–Are you sure?

His persistence bothers me. But I can see how he is totally deflated by what is happening. He is getting really pale. The blood seems to drain from his entire body.

–I really don't want you waiting for me.

He won't let go. Won't let me be. And it's starting to piss me off. I want to do something, anything to hurt him. Anything silly.

–I just wished you wouldn't follow me the way you do. You look like a lost dog. And I've spent my life rescuing too many lost ones.

–I can wait.

–Here take my purse. Watch it while I get a drink. You don't want to dance. I might dance. I'll be back.

He takes the pure reluctantly. Cradles as if he doesn't want to touch it. I run off to get a

drink. I have this weird sense that I'm free. Weird because I feel like I'm dangling on a string. Some guy in to band catches my eye. The bass player. I love bass. I dance in front of him. He stares at me.

–You want me to get you a drink.

–Aren't you guys going to play some?

–We're taking a break. Darling, I love the way you move.

He drapes his body over mine and we start to groove to a song on the juke box.

–What's your name.

I tell him.

–That's a pretty name. I've never kissed anyone by that name before.

He gives me a little kiss. Just a peck. He tries to kiss me deeper but I slide away from him. I look over to see if Robert is watching. Part of me hope that he is. I really want to hurt him.

–Get me a drink, love.

The bass player looks at me strange. As if he knows something. We have already crossed that line. He just has to wait his time.

–I'm going home.

Robert is in front of me.

–Just go.

–Are you sure?

–Yeah. I'm sure. I'll talk to you tomorrow.

–Here's your purse.

–Are you going to sleep with him?

–Robert, I'm not like that.

Why do I have to maintain that illusion for Robert? I know what I want at that moment. I can feel the bass player going down on me.

–Well, you better go.

I hug him but I can sense the contempt in his attitude.

My phantom is waiting for me at our café.

–Do you like how the story is going.

–I'm not the crazed person that you're trying to portray.

–But you did sleep with your lover's roommate.

–Evan didn't have a roommate.

–Was it Nick or Adam?

–What are you telling me?

–That there's rumors about you going around town.

–It's not about me. I changed my name. Besides, I'm leaving town. I'm going on a vacation.

The intimate partner is always on notice that there is someone in the club who can provide what the lover can never offer.

NEVER!

Again the body is further broken apart. An action or part of the body is reserved for the lover.

The performer offers the viewer levels of intimacy. Once the fee is paid, the interaction is over. But so is the whirlwind of her temporary celebrity. It is under these conditions that she assumes an alias. Becomes a star while on stage and off.

Once the performer has arrived at the insights provided by her ordeals with her audience, then she needs to make these insights into clues to read her interactions outside the club. But along with her insights the performer often brings the strategies that she used inside the club. She often highlights that unbridled lewdness in the actions of men she meets. She needs that initial rush of flattery and then becomes immersed in a cat and mouse resistance to its inroads. All the while, she is constructing an iron-clad defense against the cunning of her adversary. Structures of intimacy are laid on top of this already contentious guarding against affectionate gestures. In this state, sexual appeal for her is at times cut off from her other emotions. She finds herself accustoming her lifestyle to accommodate that desire. In the end, she loses all the savvy that she appears to have developed on the stage.

I am hanging above the precipice and can sense the incredible uncertainty of my situation. The rope reassures me, helps guarantee my foothold. In this it reinforces my ascent. But I feel this utter precariousness, a mixture of risk and possibility. I can do nothing less than let myself hang this high in the air, and look for some kind of reassurance in my dexterity. The mountain is becoming part of me. And I part of it.

I have always felt that I am floating in air. Worse that I am falling. I won't look down. Won't admit to the heights that hold me, my whole life in mid air. I need to give in to the fear. Come back to the world. But I have been too spread out in the sky.

Now I feel that anchor. Gravity penetrates every inch of my body and I know who I am. What I have wondered about all my life. The air, the rocks, my hands gripping the ropes. I can feel it all so clearly. As I grip hold, as I balance myself I resolve my wonder. The rush makes me tingle all over. I have not conquered the heights. They still remain somewhat elusive. But for flashes, I am part of an excitement that I can never have any hope of completely controlling. And I must let myself slip in between these stark and awesome possibilities. This is an invitation about which I can have no doubt. Just as I am filled with this intense power, I am made aware of its reality. Its independence from me. In a way I feed off this discrepancy. It puts me in the middle of things. It increases the energies that surround me. A magnificence to which I surrender. I am in its presence.

Immediate. So quickly that I can be brought back down to the ground. Hurling against the rocks. The scrapes and bruises are a reminder that I can't get over confident. That I have to be always aware what the surroundings are telling me—ripping me inside with this realization. The rope hugs my waist, a reminder of my solitude. Even when I am with a partner it this

affirmation that I alone feel. It connects me to the tangibility of this environment. It is so real. Like the only real thing there is. It gets deep inside me and seems to shake me. I am stabilized in this interplay between me and it.

I note my path among the rocks. I weave in these twists. I am part of this place. I merge with its contours. Never before have I embraced the summit of my aspirations. I can now feel the sky press down while I am pressing back. And there is no strain in our embrace. The strength seems to rain down and then flow up in my ascent and enter me. I reach. I extend. And each motion is certain in reply. But I also feel the overall effects of this endeavor. I am victorious in contest. Without any remnants of envy. An utter salutation. I gratify my wonder. I create my landscape. I weave in and out of its crevices. I hide in the resting places. I stretch out in its expanse. I breathe in its majesty. I am the rock and I am the wind.

I attain a patch of flat rock. I survey the heights. The sun bakes the rock and I soak in the heat. All doubt is burned away from my body. My muscles expand over the surfaces. I am a bird who asserts its wingspan. My lips kiss the rough edges. No longer resisting the brutal floor, I glide over the crude outlines. Flesh and stone.

I can feel myself sculpted by my locale. I chisel away at the twists of the topography. I see myself submerged in the overwhelming landscape and am the creator of the canvas. A sort of suspense gets me going again. Driven by the desire to persist in my quest. Sudden replies of rocks jutting out in my way. And I make them part of my path. A give and take by what I encounter. Everything yields so easily under my intent. I seem to move aside these immense boulders. Or I insinuate myself into these unassuming crevices. I string together the schemes of this architecture. The edifice reflects my intention. It lies as a tribute to my aspirations, to what I have accomplished. I am the builder.

A light mist envelops the mountains. It is ringed with an air of depression. I am more firmly tied to my present location, but cut off from the expanse. I reach but am immediately rebuffed in my attempt to soar. This enclosure weighs down on me. I almost feel that I will not escape these confines. The rocks do not suggest passage. They draw my limits. They take away my wings. I envision the mist as a thick fog and the atmosphere reflects my turn. I roll in these waves. I am held down. Immersed in this thick eternity.

As the heat of the day starts to melt the fog, I am not easily heartened. Where the sun had previously been a beacon for me, now it seems to cut into my composure. A sort of tear. And the cutting just gets deeper as the heat intensifies. I cannot adapt to the change as I have on other days. The abruptness strikes me. A sort of brutality of the day. It is not the gradual encounter. But an explosiveness without any denial.

I brace myself for such an intense encounter. I recognize the imperative that the day has offered for me. This is not a invitation. It is more of a curse. Now I see my position as so entirely precarious. A slip of attention. Too much eagerness. A reaction to a gust of wind. A sudden adjustment and the protection that the rocks afford transforms into my mortal enemy.

I have already prepared for this moment. But now I am face to face with that part of the day that is my challenge. Where I previously felt anchored, I now sense myself as dangling in this nowhere. A more exaggerated mood of being turned upside down. What is immediately before me just becomes a path to a remote confusion. I reach out, but that move seems to spin the world around. Everything could right itself if I could just combine the sequence of these

gestures. I slip as I grip hold. My supports are firm. But they seem to disturb an overall positioning. So a little miscalculation makes it all look so much worse. I grasp for a certainty. I want to smile through this. Search for guidance.

I maneuver in this inner space. What I see is only illusion, distraction from what I surmise. In this mystery, I confront a new certainty. I grope within this narrow space. There is no comfort from the sky. It only submerges me in the spinning mass. Even the former supports contradict the urgency of gravity. Am I slipping up or falling down? I can't take a chance to find out. Now my errors are all too serious to expose. They will only cause me to hurtle further into this morass.

I am reforming the hillside. Enfolding clumps of vegetation. Letting the mud form into cakes. Using the rocks to mark my journey in its permanence. Following the marks of a former traveler whose repetitions formed this location. We too are creating as we remember.

I respond to my muscles. Find centers of energy in continuous action. As if my eyes are always closed. I see by my feeling. These feelings spin deep inside of me. In these twists I find solid form. I learn to project far beyond the immediacies. I have vision. It is not the landscape that I see. It is the concrete form of my yearning. Rock folds around me. I weave through these obstacles. They are the monuments of my struggle. I pull them all towards me. I hug their form. I squeeze a spirit from them and make it mine. I again melt in this immensity. I am inside the stone. I am the beat of the warm sun warming up the day.

Down below the river still roars its way. Rapids gush and entangle. I toss myself in this flow. It is at the heart of my flight. It curves up and engages the heights. It is the sweet sap that enlivens the mountain. Desire molten and compressed.

This rip of the valley is now internal. It paralyzes me. Then it offers me dynamic to again tempt the sky. The progress of the peaks now seems uniform. This continuity quakes inside of me. Together we conquer the heavens.

I am inspired. Mentally, I sketch this landscape. My hands become my pen. I caress these ascents. I nurture these mountain crests. Stretch my fingers along these peaks. I swirl around the ridges. Shimmer in the vegetation. Weave my way along mountain streams and rivers. Shake the heights in my embrace with the sky.

To capture the landscape is to embrace the golden reflections. In the play of sunlight, the locale answers back. The crests are so much more defined. The peaks scream out their achievement. I aspire after their pride. These rivals to the sky.

So the light captures my concentration. And the shadows, the resistance of the country side. This is what has invited me in my ascent. But more than that. There is a spirit to my quest that can be best captured in the motivations of the sketch. Of the free hand held by the insistence of the ink. And my drawing flows in black outline. Or awaits a charcoal shading. The interplay of definition and blurring. The rivalry only more clear. Between flight and mass. The bird and the mountain lion. I am both. Trekking so high until I need to toss myself from the precipice. I need to begin my flight.

The drawing lets me knead the two intentions together. The light uncovering the dynamics of the paper. I am tossed along in sympathy. What the paper only whispers is made so clear in the trails of the pen on the paper. The considerations. Lines in parallel streaming down

to suggest the threat of the cliff face. Craggy mountain tops. Entry ways. And gates locked to entry.

The challenge embodies in the curves and cool lines. A slide along the cascading levels. Let shine a motion that is too massive for the crawls of the climb. I map out the full aspirations of my endeavors. Effort that get lost in the missed foothold. That get submerged in the refusals of the sheer face. The hammer and the nail, the hand and the rope. The pressures of the midday sun. The bleeding of a mountain stream just dripping down in its thin rivulet.

The deeper balance. Sky and system. The peaks speaking in one loud voice. And the utterances of the cloud. All substantial in the outlines of the sketch. The storm. The angry answer of an assaulted sky.

My imagery truly comes to life in this reversal. Water scooped from rivers and tossed back to the peaks. Low flung clouds with their new agendas. To push down the peaks. The erosion of swift water flows. Beating down on the magnificence. A deflating in the rounding.

So the demon rises again in the drying out. The winds push the clouds away. And in the tides a new power is blessed upon these temples. And my worship is intact.

My line rises from the bottom of the page to the top. Diagonal energies invigorating vertical challenges. Countering the interferences of gravity. The inspiration. This is what attracts me to the rocks. What makes the two of us coconspirators in my evolution.

And the drafting hand forming intention in these rotundas. That beneath the ceilings I can set my sites on encompassing these defined regions.

Already I offer a new route for the journey. What slips off the page. What needs to be more highlighted by the shadings of the charcoal. Where light is glittering in its vanity. What obscures the glitter is the form of a new treasure. A brighter glow. These curves of the mountain side and valley twist seek another light.

So the sketching hand moves faster to accommodate all the variations. Bubbling forces that extrude from beneath the rock. So I come to admire the facets of the stones. Each is made precious by my admiration. Even my drawing hands end up becoming part of the landscape. I immerse myself in the climb.

I can sense myself enveloped by the entire surroundings. I can not even feel my extremities except to the degree that they mirror the excitement of the heights. There is something so entirely immaterial in my journey. I could not realize this except by inflating the challenge. I have already started to mutate, to acquire alternative limbs and organs. I have attained an elasticity and now am contemplating wings. But even that only suggests a limit to my flight.

I am the sky!

The new realization excites me enormously as I start to stretch out into the awakening of the day. That globe of fire now competes with my wonderful leaps. And if I arrive sooner than its rays, this shows that I am more eager.

There is nothing that restrains me.

And if I look down at these patches of countryside, there is nothing forboding in the expanse. Trees that arch up into the sky stare back at me in their puny efforts. This might easily assault me. This turn around. What was so high is now so low. And I am there to regulate this

new balance. This imbalance. I pushing out farther and faster than my competitors. Faster than the speed light.

So I uncover the shadow behind these resemblances. A thin layer of reflection peels away to greet me with the truth of its density. What I could not see before is now a part of me. This is my new marrow. Beyond light. Beyond flight. Even the ancient flow of lava could not equal this actuality of the shadow. Light cannot see, can never see this secret.

If flight had only conspired to exclude me from the heart of the matter, I have now breached the subject. I am an invitee into this new colloquy. There is a delightful wrath in its asymmetries. The boldness of the rock is the immediate reply to the haphazard meandering of light. But this affront is so much deeper. And in these roots I engage that primal sap before image. An elemental murmur that will not desist in the falling away of the echo. A conversation that will not be silent. I have brought to life the hidden electricities. But they move at such imperceptible frequencies. A low bass. To my ears I could accelerate their effects. No wonder the heights had this fascination. Their initial gestures, the immensities, were only the glimpse of some other symphony that was always part of me.

Now I can sense the rumblings of the bass. It is material because it is immaterial. It is at rest only because it spreads everywhere. It anticipates. It is a forever because it does not fade in the initial glee of conflict. So sly. So primal. So permanent.

To scurry up the sheer cliff face is so automatic. A gift of the sympathies. I let it be. Draw strength in the power. But that alone is not sufficient. The rock eludes me.

Where are my former fears? The companions that I used to deafen these cries. There is no muting the sympathies. I need to ascend just to hear the tune. But my success only gives lie to the actual strains that have turned my whole body. I hear with my hands. My feet. I kiss the rock. Pull it closer to me. It is not itself until it accepts the light and accepts the day. But this molten heat can only mimic the solidity of the place. The rock has to melt away before I can touch the weight of the shadow.

I squeeze. I divide. I break apart. The burdens balanced on two hands like a scale. It burns inside me. The rock grows inside me. The shadow assumes my form. I am still. Too much disturbance to hear my new vibration. I feel the need to slow myself down. I push up the cliff face as an antidote to the celerity of the rock.

I am the sky. Volcanic. Exploding. Shooting out. Drawing in. Slower. Slower. Before the molten.

For an extended moment my attention is drawn to the immensity of these peaks. The gestures of the trees below. All reaching up to touch the sky. I am exhilarated by this massive throng. Each tries to rival the other. Each aspires after an ascent attained by none. And I follow their lead. But my view takes it all in. I soar above them all and merge with the sky. Canopy suspended above all that I survey. I stretch it out to cover all of this relief. At the edges, I reserve my final touches. Tippy toe and terrible, catching the last of light's promise before descent below the horizon. This spot is most cherished. I arrive with an excess of desire.

There is no fear in letting myself go. I am not afraid that the dizziness of the heights will only provoke a deeper hollow inside of me. That gulf has been replenished by the immensity of this big sky. I throw myself into its expanse. The dive encompasses all that I see, all that I ever see. My grasp reaches outward, an arc to this mass.

The panorama reflects what I experience on the ground. It propels me outward. Solid in rock. I counter the hollow. I flow. I reproduce this joy everywhere. It grows inside of me, and I come to life everywhere around me.

Outside of myself, myself. Admiration in this mirror. Too aware and then well past awareness. Entranced.

For so long I had shied away with this confrontation. I hid my face before this more dominant mirror. My limbs became weak before the burden of identity.

This new WORLD! I squeeze its solid form. I hug its solidity. With this assurance, I can again take off again.

I burst through the shell of sterility and let this life root deep. Let it sprout. Let it wander. And I follow in its path. Even in these climbs where nothing can grow, I make my way. Not a symbol of barrenness. I distribute new life.

These peaks entwine in harmony. I bounce along with their melody. I reach hand over hand with such confidence. My body springs out of itself. And then returns with such dexterity. I find my double that I use to maneuver to my next pose. A gradual unfolding of these figures. Like a string of paper dolls, I expand myself along the expanse. The link so precarious for a moment, but I attain that lost unity. I gain the promise. Almost in ritual, I sacrifice myself for a regeneration. In this flowering, I disperse further and upward. A sunflower in its gaze, I seek my rest. Satisfied. Look down on me! I look to you. All light. So I shoot up more.

Clinging, covering, caressing, hugging—the embrace supreme. I arrive at my hope. Burn again with the rocks. Find life in these corners. Explore these edges. Stretch the skin. Mold around the stone. Draw in its firmness. Turn around in its sheer challenge. The rock!

This is not just excitement. This is deep. This drinks of the quenching waters. This is rooting. This is heading up to touch the sun.

I will touch the sun. I will burn with its desire. I tingle. I shake. The tremors are so full of shock. I hold my position. I dream with the shattering pose that they present. I smash against the rocks and am recomposed. I am the mountain. I am stoic in my disregard because I am hedonistic in my participation. Take of me!

I feel the divide between image and viewer. I draw from what I see. I soak up all its energy. I am driven with the multiplicity of image. At the same time, I resist. I am majesty. I am confident. I will not be swayed by storm or wind gust or meandering wanderer. Gaze on this peak. Draw life from this valley. The hollow transformed into the explosive burst.

I invite myself to cross that divide. There are no supports on the other side. Formerly, I would be dashed against the rocks of the valley. Now, I just pass beyond!

My movements are candid and direct. They are as constant as a machine. I can feel the whirr of the dynamo. I extend my arms into a space already prepared by previous motives. I continue this path. The reply is certain. It is with such ease that I seem to swim upstream. I crawl and keep pushing myself upwards. With practice each step is automatic. The sun glistens off my body. It accentuates the muscles that I have developed with the repeated tasks. the determination is precise and leaves no doubt. Each shift is a reply to the last. I pull myself up within my own desire. I reference what I have done, what I will do. The insistence guarantees a continuity among all the moves. I relax in the flow as I am propelled along. I weave my web and

take shape in its intricate design. Even the rocks seem to make tribute to my craft. Delight surrounds.

Is there something tricky about this admiration? The seeming lull in this persistence. I can watch myself from afar and feel impressed. The mass of the edifice lies in entire tribute to my effort. It exists to take my imprint. Come with me. And if anyone else sees me or accompanies me in my endeavor then they can shine in the same sparkle over which I reign. I do not feel cocky. This is entirely natural with the progress that I piece together. It is all a piece with this landscape. In the most extreme way, I am only part of what is there. I only continue that lineage, and so I too soar in this complexity. Ah! I can detect no limits to my aspirations. I admit no limits to my accomplishment. I do not even need support. I am anti-gravity. I am anti-matter. I move without any sustenance as I have become movement itself. I sigh with the brilliance of this communion. There is no pride here. I cannot separate myself from what I admire. I am the thing about which I marvel. I am prostrate before the splendor and thus infiltrate myself in its intricacy. OH!

So I fly, not because I wish for flight. I am now too light for the air. I almost float away in its presence. We interpenetrate. Without form. Sheer desire. So I again curve into the ceiling of my aspiration. It would seem that I could not overcome this summit. That each peak would only circumscribe my hopes. It would limit my reach in an inevitable resolution. Not at all glum. Rather, I have already exceeded this point.

Behind me are those with the same attachment to this majesty. But they get lost in the grandeur of their own achievement. They try to hold me down in the same way. I cannot be caged. The vision in no way represents an enclosure. I am a wisp in this expanse. As such, I am always trailing off. In this trail, I cannot be held back.

An absurd jealousy accompanies their observation. They see me give and give again. Where is the remnant that they can cherish. What can they hold? What can they collect? What can they own?

I feel like I am returning to my reservoir. In this ancient well, I draw my source. I drink deep and replenish myself from the arduous journey. This is what I have always wanted and now it is available to me.

Beyond the demands of the flesh are the errant ways of the heart. In my new strength I surrender to a feeling that is not lost in the petty whims of satisfaction. I am entirely engaged by the wonders that the body has tapped outside of itself. Even in talking back to itself, it seems to extend its query way beyond the twist of muscle and bone. I am attuned to the interplay as these twists guarantee my position. I merge with the setting around me.

Acquiescing the body is filled with this surge of energy. I do not feel the surge. That is who I become. I am transported to this other place. Where the surroundings had served as the inspiration to the body, now I project out of myself.

The higher up that I climb, the more that I feel an admiration for the countryside, my new domain. This admiration is focused on this totality. Not some glimpse, something I can hold but something fuller about this vision. The overwhelming blast of light and splendor. So entirely all encompassing

Where the contours had originally suggested their dominance, the immediacy of the spirit

touches me at this moment.. I have surpassed the limits of form and now apprehend the brilliance. It has a sense of reassurance. It is no longer material. In this the self is utterly engaged. Almost a cosmic laugh and I regenerate in its ripples. Sure my movements have enabled me to come in contact with this power, but now I am beyond that initial contact. I move to escape the body. There is no fear that illusion will drown me. The automatic quality of my every gesture leaves no room for error. I respond to the playfulness of this spirit so that I am in constant reminder of the accuracy of my actions. But then I can move past this attention to detail because it is incorporated in the overall vision.

Have I lost my wonder before the majesty of a specific peak? Not at all. That is how I continue to make contact. But this first invitation always takes me over the brink. So I let myself shine along with the marvelous reflection that surrounds me.

The business of everyday had become too much. I had to get away from the grind of work. The temptations of the city. I needed the clarity. Mostly preoccupied by the conflicts that immediately face me, I have little time to dwell on my beleaguered concerns. The activity engages all my faculties. There is little time for anything else. Aware of an ever present danger.

About halfway up the slope, I am struck by the most inopportune pangs of hunger. Not a physical hunger. A sense of loss. A longing. The cliff face seemed to swallow me up. No longer poised in brightness, I am faced with a flashback to a former time of risk. I brace myself as these flashes roll over me. The day's shiny presence is tarnished by this brutal eclipse. I hold tight.

I am in a tunnel. A dark tunnel. I recognize this place. A place that I occupied a couple of summers previous. The light ahead recedes with my apparent approach. It only underlines my frustration. From the certainty of the day to the vagaries of twilight. An eternal twilight. Why did I let this place continue to exist? Did I realize about my eventual return. What a terrible place for this recollection.

I cannot snap out of it. Even the heat of the day only increases my recollection of the freeze of my soul. A stillness that does not reassure. A constant echo reverberates to a sort of twisted silence. I just remain here suspended.

I imagine that some pain might release me from the abstraction in which I am trapped. The weird shadows. The monstrous phantoms.

I remember the solitude. Not a liberating encounter with the self that I had been experiencing the last few days. But the extremes of exile—imprisonment. I slipped deeper and deeper into the tunnel's heart of darkness. The light just kept getting more and more faint—was there no end to this loss.

What have I done? The pain seems to mix with the real heat of the day. Drenched in sweat I again become aware of the climb. Pulling myself up. Setting a pin and using it to extend my path, I take solace in the renewed efforts of my body. What had left me so exposed on the rock? Now, I feel so much more at ease with the liberation that wafted over me. A cool breeze seems to convince me that I had escaped.

But things become more bizarre.

I seem to free fall for a second. In fact, I am moving upwards. Topsy turvy and dangling. No point of reference. The spinning of the sky and the turning of the ground.

How can I find a way to reorient myself. The muscles seem to draw themselves apart. I

float in the air without a center of control. I wash over the waves of this dream.

So I am reminded of that same hunger. I wonder in a deeper way when is anyone free from this threat. I have entered into this sacred ceremony with my surroundings. They have given me such confidence for the last few days. And now they present themselves as more extensive than I could have every imagined. This vortex is the real threat as I work to keep myself together. There is this fear that I have never really shared with anyone else. And I see this wonder in dangling high in the air and looking down on this utter expanse.

If I really fall, I will simply vanish. Not leave a trace at the bottom. I will not shatter. I will burn up in my own lack of certainty. I have stretched my resources to this point. At each stage there was an affirmation. I moved on further with such confidence. Here, there is no such trust. I am held. I am possessed by this thing that is now so foreign to me. I retch with the disgust over how I have been invaded.

Can no one protect me?

Even in finding my answer, I have been so fundamentally tricked. I grope in this penumbra. My cocoon which I never really left. And I am so cared for by its warmth. Whoever left it for me, I rejoice in our communion. But I am aghast at an intended betrayal. I hang from this cliff, until the walls free me for flight. I nurture myself in my confusion. On this I now feed and dull the hunger. The core. So still. So dark. The preparation. And if I leaves its defenses, how will I survive. I will not. I cannot.

So I stay a prisoner of my indeterminacy. How to pose that fusion that will carry me over the threshold. Where is flight possible given such a severe grounding. To stretch my wings is to risk free fall.

So I burrow deeper in these walls. Walls that I thought had long ago dissipated.

And my hunger which is so elemental to all of this. Not so much a fear, but a satiation has brought on this bewilderment. For me to act on this swirl, my hunger emerges as all the more ravenous. I needed this trip to liberate me from such appetite.

This is the heart of the sacred ceremony. The rock possesses me. I am its possession. I am possessed. The alchemy brews in bubbling of the volcanic flow. Utterances long still that have been rekindled by my curiosity.

In the reversal of the day, the peaks have carved out a pocket within the sky. There, I conduct my holy service. Ravenous. I draw all that lives, all that fluctuates, all that sparkles into this hole. Thus, the freshness of the day invites its counter reward. In this brew, I make up my own mind. I have surpassed the constraints by admitting them as part of me. The walls of the cocoon stretch. I peek out. I stretch. I engage a warmth beyond the sun. Absence of time. Absence of turning.

The floating. I start to fly.

Closer and closer to the heat. But my wings will not melt. I am on fire.

The mountain sparkles with the gentle touch of the sunlight. Even in its presence, it offers so much more. My thirst is quenched by this image. I lose myself in the glitter and am tossed around the marvelous spectacle. My body shakes. I can feel my spirit engaged by the immensity.

I give way to the image. I brace myself against the walls and begin my ascent. With my

efforts the heat of the day engages me. A layer of sweat forms on my forehead. I feel a part of something. The heights already penetrate an urge deep inside me. Where the rocks seem to resist my forays, my insight pierces this resistance. I encircle my desire. I engage the steep path. The reaches speak to me. I answer back. I intrude upon the complacency. The abruptness of my sweet thoughts.

I become part of this place. I welcome the risk. I lose center in order to become part of this immensity. I give in completely to the insistence of my journey. My body finds its way joined with the contours of the rock.

The sun heats the surface with a greater intensity. I am part of that fire. It invigorates my muscles. It warms me to the bone. I am erect and proud in this sculpting. And the flesh seems to wind its way around the mountain. Somewhere inside the earth, the lava is molten, and the heat pours out. It joins my intention with my success. My muscles contract as I grip the rope and establish an uncertain foothold.

A slight breeze works its way through the passage. It does not frighten me. I let it blow my hair. It cools me down. I seem to turn around in its whirl. It suggests power as I make my way further and further up the sheer face. I am overcome with the loftiness of these aspirations. I am thrust further into the air. I am the fire that burns all around. My skin tingles with this engrossing elation.

As the climb becomes more and more precarious, I do not give way. I use my guide line to guarantee and fortify my path. It is now so automatic that I seem to rise above the sequential steps. I am becoming part of a single line. The flow of the mountain now is reversed as I resist gravity. I glide my way up. With the clarity of intention, I seem to flow upwards. A rush to the top and I am carried along. I don't fear looking down. I am in flight. I am soaring. Further and further into these waves I toss myself. The thrill spins around and I rise above the whirlpool. I float and am tossed upwards. The whole surrounding reflects my surge. A tremor shakes the locale and propels me along. The majesty!

It explodes and I merge with the danger. I am the cliff. I am the sky. JOY! WONDER OF WONDERS.

Caught in the splendor, my speed accelerates. I am hurtled into the complexity. I seek the top of the world.

The physical task becomes more and more daunting. And my muscles have been prepared for this task. Miraculous. But so solid. I now drive deeper into the rock. My monument. It encloses me. It challenges me. It pushes me into the gulf. And I emerge unscathed. The impossible is within my reach.

I gain my wings. The rush is inside me. It shakes me from within. A rumble that tears me. That grips me from within. Only to release more profound waves of energy. I can see the summit. I can feel the summit. I am the mountain peak.

As I stretch outward, the top is within my grasp. I pull myself up and rest on the rock. I remove my sweatshirt and let the sun bake on my flesh. I lie down on the rocks and let the warmth burn away the last remaining fears.

I immerse myself in the grandeur of my accomplishment. The heights are mine. I lose myself completely.

What I see is a reminder of something that I have seen before. But in its presence, it seems so much more. In its own way it disturbs my memory. I become convinced that this is the only thing that I have ever been destined for. To attain this summit and gaze down at my regret. In this my fear seems all the greater. For this ascent seems to place me way beyond myself. Perhaps in this overreach, I am placed back square with myself. I am cold with this sense of emptiness. And as I touch the extremity of my nature, the cold absorbs. Even the least glimpse of the sun, is an inferno to me. And in these furnace blasts, I brace myself from being overcome. These shifts in temperature seem to fluctuate through me. I can barely sit still contemplating the roar.

In my heart, there is no place for me here. But I cannot separate myself from an attachment to the twist of time. The sure path in the rocks is a rebuff to my bewilderment. It aggravates my confusion as it can offer no solace. Only a deeper illusion. The cascading form are dizzying as they have always been. To immerse myself in their midst is only to make it harder to escape. I am displayed in this randomness. Prey to the vultures. And I can feel my body torn apart by these desires.

At the heart of my effort is a desire to escape a sickness that has become too dominant in my experience. I have become convinced that the only way to break my fall is to end the sickness that besets me. To end the dizziness by falling to the my inevitable end. Because this place is not my cure. And I am absorbed as part of this place while I also am suspended above this place with entirety of my being.

Even in my escape I am still surrounded by that same fear. As I soar above it, It touch its actual limits. So the intensity of this form is the very immateriality of what I feel.

From this place that I have vanquished, there is a refusal. I look down at this cataract. It is so extreme in its greeting. What I cannot conquer. What is utter denial of me. With these waters hurtling down, crashing on the rocks. Such severity that I cannot overcome this immensity. So concentrated, so given to the heights.

If my progress has no room for doubt, then the question is embodied in the architecture. Now, it impresses itself by its intention What had been so secondary. What I cannot ignore. The thrill in the grandeur is attached to my negation. It is too obvious. It has always been too obvious. From the initial challenge. It exposed a raw vulnerability. It gave me the form to overcome the threat. Now that I can so easily weave my way through this place, I have become the very thing that I fear. It hardly made the fear tangible. Less than that. Misery of miseries. I fall to my knees in exhaustion What had been without effort now rings to the bone. That there is a summit that goes beyond the clouds. I now feel this burden of the earth in my flight. I carry all its aspirations in my ascent. To descend I am struck by the pressure of the atmosphere. Even the shadow is palpable. Where I formerly had uncovered the mystery of the altitude, my new realization pointed to a rock beyond the rock. This new connection makes my inner doubts into an external structure. The dizziness is not the same. There is nowhere to fall. The monuments conflict. The skyline is ambiguous. I work to turn this new balance on its head. I am in the valley. I feel the wailing wind. My cries embolden its trail.

As phantom, I have not overcome. I am within the give and take. It churns me up. There is no escaping. Escaping tosses me in the novelty of the morass. I submerge in the mix.

I again stretch out so far. But there is a far that strikes me so immediately. Now

proximate in its twists.

I ask myself what I have seen. When will the world know what I have seen?

–Tell me what you see.

I'm sitting in a bar. Back in the city. He wants to know about my journey.

–Does it still burn inside? The image etched in your memory. This remembrance as your only reality. As it is!

–What do you want me to see? I see what I have seen. I made my own mind up to get away. From everything. From you. From everyone. And I saw something that has nothing to do with you.

–So what have you seen. Tell me.

–I saw a place of such majesty.

–You made a place of such majesty. You assumed that you touched something that cannot be touched. And once you had that taste, you were hooked. You sucked from its replenishing flow because it told you that you were alive.

–I really was alive!

–You never saw anything that I didn't let you see. It was all part of my lesson.

–That's crazy. Tell me what you saw.

I am faced the ugly realization that the basis of my creativity has been sapped. Something that I had is gone. It has now evaporated away.

Sure I can keep a journal. Copy conversations that I hear and rearrange them to create little situations. But I can hardly get to the heart of the matter. Hardly move beyond the surfaces of these exchanges to examine actual motivation.

I don't want to expose old wounds. That would be too much. And my confidence is a little shaken by the transparency of my efforts.

–I saw things too deep to put into words.

–Deeper than your hunger.

–You know that there is nothing deeper than that. That is why I can only deny you a glimpse into what I actually saw.

–What you actually saw was your attempt to escape that drive that just leaves you desperate. The majesty is your failure to overcome your own desire. You just needed that same form.

–I saw a mountain. Even as I submitted to its reckoning, it seemed to evade me.

–It was not a mountain. It was the monument to your apprehensions. Your knowledge of what is to come. When you just surrender yourself to its energies.

–How can you say that?

–I know what you desire down deep. And so you just threw yourself into that gulf. You let your fear wash over you.

I needed another drink. Maybe two. Something just to swirl around the bloodstream.

–You gave yourself to the mountain because you felt its power deep inside you. And you let that power get away time and time again. That's what you needed to feel on the mountain.

–What if I did. That doesn't make me less for it.

–But you never escaped the hunger.

–I did.

I drink up the second cocktail.

–You know what it meant from the beginning of your ascent. But you wanted to feign a challenge to erase that hollow. But you only made a shrine out of that same pursuit.

>>So you felt it penetrate every muscle. Down to the bone. It was real. More real if it threatened to shatter your dreams with one fall. You had to be always vigilant. Sacrifice all reflection to the mountain. Otherwise the fine rock would exact its toll. I told you what to look for. It was all part of the lesson. You had the score, and you learned it so well. The tinkling piano suggesting the mountain stream. The gruff bass chords. I anticipated all of that.

–But this was so much more real. I got rid of all my inhibitions. I didn't think at all about any of that bad shit. None of your bad shit.

–You think that it was that easy. Tell me what you saw.

–I saw everything. I saw it all.

–You saw the need to scale to the top! Period. Every other desire submitted to the summit. I was there. I gave you the signs.

>>You felt the inferno. That is what you sought. And the waves of heat spread over your body. They burned off any remnants of a winter chill. But they burned off something more.

–The sweat felt so good. Tingling in the cool breeze. And I worked so hard to keep going. Fatigue. Distractions. But I concentrated on that one goal.

–And that part was so easy. Picking out an end to our hell. That was why you did all of this. To make it all end.

–You don't know.

–Pulled towards the rock. Hugging its solid form. And then projecting off of this.

>>You found the marrow. You sucked on it. Sucked and sucked until you got that juice. I know that you are a vampire. What makes you tick. What you live and die for.

–It's not like that.

–It's that same emptiness that haunts the night. You are looking for others of your same nature. When you find it, you can't resist. You see it, and you have already given in. I should have left you on that operating table. The one thing that they could never give you was a heart!

–That's silly.

–Like a light burning on the peak at night. This is what you strove after. Not what you saw but sheer touch. That tickle. The curl. The glee. the laughter. You live for it. You lived off of it.

–You salivated like a dog seeing its supper. And you floated in this flow!

–That's gross.

–Tell me about the mountain. Did you become it?

–Of course.

–Then it never existed. You conquered it because you went out there for a conquest. And now you come home for another one. I know the way of a predator.

–I can't kill on my own.

–But you love the spoils. That way you can sustain your life. You make your victims

make the first move. As they fall, you strike. You entice. You capture, and then you destroy.

–You yourself say that I follow your script. You kill and expect me to devour your victims. I’ve sworn off meat.

–You are a carnivore. That is what you are made of!

–All about hyperbole tonight!

–You really are a clown.

–And in that enticement, you feel like you know. Until that thing is exposed. And you push away at it for its own sake. The caresses. The initial excitement. You feel the body is stronger. But you want that resolve. That push. That excitement.

–You are no different. You are feeding off of me now.

–You like it raw! You haven’t sworn off of anything. I am on your path. You just want it raw. You are the fire. Let the flesh burn inside you. So you stripped off that outer layer in making contact with the rock.

–You can’t say that.

–I know all too well what IT is. How you tried to make peace with that part of yourself. But it would never give in. The ecstasy just kept getting more and more weighty. Or the pain when you could not draw on it. So you threw your whole being into IT! You became so machine-like in your pursuit of pleasure. had to get yourself jacked to the right level so that there would be no doubt that you were in it for the long haul. And even in coming down, you became convinced that the high was the only way out. So you committed yourself to nothing less than that. Once that became you, you couldn’t come back.

–You can’t know that. I mean you really can’t.

–It fits the story. You on the slope. Denying everything that had brought you to that point. Thinking that you were finally getting so far outside. Where did you encounter that lesson before?

–What do you want? Because if what you say is true, there’s really nothing left for you.

–I had what I wanted a long time ago.

–You really are a monster.

–No, you are. And your exile is only becoming official. You can see who you are. All around you. Your world. that is your mirror. The sparkle of sun on the mountain. It is so much less than the glow that you know surrounds you.

–And you notice it. And that’s just what you can’t have.

–Haven’t you learned the lesson? You just go for what glitters before you. The fool’s gold.

–I’ve learned to get practical. And this gives me the greatest reward for what that is.

–Once you’ve gone so far, you can’t pull back unless you face the devastation. You just have to put that part of you to rest.

–You just try to take control of people. Find their insides and create this parasite. And the parasite just takes over the host. It eats away at everything that makes someone personal and special. You’re sick!

I lunged forward almost to confront him. He laughed.

–What are you going to do? Kill the parasite as you say. It’s deep inside of you.

–There you go with your metaphors. Just because you understand them doesn’t mean that

you know anything about me.

–I see where the balance has been disturbed.

–There’s more than the physical, more than the sex. Things that you can’t see.

–But they fit so well with things that I do see.

–You want more than what you’re allowed to ask for.

–That has always been your calling card. It will continue to be.

I was beset with this dumb fatigue. Maybe my vacation. Or an uncomfortable reminder.

–I need to go.

–For now.

–For now. Forever. Why don’t you just go. Go away.

–We still have some unfinished business.

I realize that I really do have some unfinished business. My dinner had been good but the conversation is wearing me down. I take some time off. Stay in after work. Sure work is getting to me. But it’s better to take a break.

I have to get out of the house. I head downtown to the Sidewinder. Sparkling people all tripping over each other to impress.

I watch him from the other side of the room. He observes. He takes it all in. He plans out his night.

He cradles the glass with such over confidence. He looks me in the eye. No shyness here. He feels his charm can melt me. But I can sense the utter crudity in his gestures. He liked to fuck. Period. No cares. No after thought. Just inside so deep. Smothered in his own desire.

He wants to talk about work. About how his efforts can dominate the women in his office. Even the men seem to crawl at his feet.

–You are married?

–What?

–What are you doing here?

–I just needed to get a drink

–And you’re married.

–I love my wife. She’s the center of my world. And she feels the same about me.

–And what would you do if I took you now into the bathroom and pulled up my skirt and shoved it in your face.

–I’d eat you out until your world just broke apart like a kiddie toy.

–Do you have some coke?

–Huh?

–You want to rock my world. Here’s your chance. Or do you want to crawl back to the center of your little hole.

I rub the remaining powder on my gums. A small price to pay for a quick high.

He’s going down on my as I spread my legs across the stall. There’s something so empowering for me and so entirely humiliating for him. I can tell his dick is hard as a rock. But his arousal will be short-lived. Too weak to do me much good.

I just throw myself into the experience. There is something so clean about the experience. And his wonder tongue has been trained. I like it how he has just shoved his face in

my crotch. It is my joy and the garbage heap of all his self-disgust. All this energy just flows into me. I can see my reflection in the sparkle of his watch. The neon lights of the bathroom are so harsh. I hook my heels into the metal supports at the side of the stall. He wraps himself in the flow of my skirt.

I let him dematerialize before me as I give in to my ecstasy. Even here, it is so easy to transport myself elsewhere. This gives me such a jolt. I love it. He is utterly compliant. Accepting the flesh of some stranger who he has no hope of getting to know. This is wonderful. He thinks that he is getting what he sees, what he has seen. I just get what I want so immediately.

I can feel myself soaring, and I glide through the air. There is no fear of falling as the high is so amazing and constant.

I am electrified. I sizzle with each burst of energy.

He matches his incursions with more and more of these explosive gestures. Lapping it all up. Lost in my flow.

But I myself ride a tidal wave.

–I want you to let me inside of you.

–That wasn't part of the agreement. Wipe your chin and we'll go.

–Can I see you again?

–You're married.

I slide my panties back on and smooth out my skirt.

–You give good head. But you're basically just a piece of shit.

For once maybe I'm rising above all this. But the high just lingers. Maybe too deeply.

–Do you have any more blow?

–You've hoovered it all up.

–You can get some more.

–Not now.

–I might let you... put it...

I don't know why I'm wasting my time.

My composure is slipping a bit. I need a drink. I let him go out without me. I stay in there and straighten out. I run my fingers through my blonde hair. I fix my lipstick and go out and face the night. That was good!

My phone rings. It disturbs an afternoon nap.

–Hello. How are you doing?

–I'm doing great. What about you?

–Were you resting?

–Yeah, but that's OK.

–You're really doing great.

–More or less.

–Are you going out tonight.

–I'm going to the A.

–I am too.

–Great.

–I’ll look for you.

In my half dazed state I don’t even realize who I am talking to.

I wonder. I wear a demure blue summer dress and head over the A. Where is he? Who is he?

All this confusion is going to my head. I am hit by a sort of nausea. I feel so ill at ease.

Brad is a diamond merchant. The distraction that I need.

–I like things plain, doll. No bull shit.

He was drinking scotch and water–no ice.

–I had a lover who thought she had discovered sex.

–So what did she teach you?

–Something about those ice cubes in your drink.

–What?

He gives me that weird smile. I know.

–I just told them, give it to me straight.

He laughs at his own jokes. His clipped delivery.

–I just needed to dry out.

–I know how that feels.

–I needed a vacation. The tropics.

–You know how that sounds.

–We could get away.

–I just got back from a vacation.

–That’s the best time to take another.

–But I’d lose my job.

–There are others.

The temptation is so great. I need a change.

–I have no money.

–Business is good. As I always say, share the wealth.

That’s just what I want. I pack for the beach. From that first day, I have a chance to get away from him. Sitting on the beach that is just what I need.

–What’s your name?

–Vanessa.

I make up a name. He is sitting under an umbrella.

–Mine’s Phil. You have a nice tan.

–Thanks. I just got back from vacation and now I’m on another one.

–How do you work out? Your arms.

He seems a little embarrassed. But not in the least.

–I do a lot of climbing.

–You’d be a wonder at sail gliding.

I laugh.

–You have to show me how.

I like how he touches me. He shows me the technique. Brad’s still away on some deal. The afternoon sun and sand just cut deep inside me.

–I need to get back.

Brad isn't around, and I meet Phil for a drink at the hotel bar. It is nice and dark. A welcome relief from the heat of the day.

–I already ordered us drinks.

This is going too fast. All of this is. Brad. Phil.

–Bill. I mean Phil.

We both giggle.

–It takes a while to really get to know me.

–That's what they say about me. That down deep I'm a cold fish.

–So that's why you swam south. To get warm.

He stares into my eyes.

–Why don't we finish these drinks upstairs.

Alcohol and an afternoon of sun is getting to me.

I collapse. Back alone in my room. The phone rings. It wakes me from a slumber. There is a voice on the other end. So soft. Like a cat's voice. This is getting too crazy.

–What? I can't hear you.

The whispers continue.

I can't remember whether I'm really back at home or just in a motel room.

–If I want something, I just let them know.

Brad's words echoes in the darkness. I could feel Phil's body work its way over mine.

–Phil, you're just moving too fast. I didn't want to do any of this.

My dream won't wear off. I need to get up but I can't. I feel like I am running in the woods.

–Someone's chasing me.

–There's no one there.

I pull up my skirt. Phil makes his way down on me.

I pull the covers over me and turn over. Pull the blanket over my head.

–I don't really like to do that sort of thing. I'm sure there's a girl at the bar who's more willing.

–And able. You've got such a beautiful...

–Don't say it.

The dream is becoming thicker and more pronounced. I am now running through the woods.

–Why are you chasing me?

–What?

–Leave me alone. I told you that I wouldn't tell anyone.

–So you saw some guy when you were down in Mexico.

–It wasn't Mexico. It was Trinidad. Besides, you show such concern about the guys that I see,

–Guys?

–It's not like I betrayed you. We don't have anything going on.

–We never did. So what do you want. You seemed pretty disgusted the last time that we got together.

–By the way, you don't know some guy named Phil. You don't have someone following me.

–Me. As if you need my help.

–Someone who'd just steal his way inside my room at night.

–I told you that you don't need any help from me.

–I'm having those dreams again.

–I thought that they stopped. All your exercise.

–They did. But they started up again.

It is dark. We move so well together. I can feel him inside me. He finds his track. his tongue feels so good. Little tickles. The a constant stimulation.

–Phil, you're going to have to go!

–Now?

–Not now. I want you inside of me.

I reached for my drink.

–It's weird. Like I keep having these flashbacks. And it all seems so real. Too real. You're sure that you're not doing something.

I feel that I am stimulated by how he spaces out the skin. So methodical. All is so automatic. Once I have gone this far with him, there is no turning back.

He radiates this immense warmth inside me. And he loses himself in the furnace. Sweat seeps across his body as the two of us slide together. There is such ease to our actions. I am so into his body. So taken by his motions. As if this is what I have been destined for all my life.

–Hold me close.

–I wish that there was someone who could really hold me close.

–It seems that you have had no shortage of that. And in those intensities of passion you assume this intimacy.

–It affects him as much as it does me.

–That was supposed to be your lesson.

–I just think that I got caught up in the pleasure.

–And now you can't take back yourself once you've given it.

I draw him inside. So deep inside. And in the fever, we cleanse each other.

–I never knew that it could be so good.

–What you're doing is having less and less to do with you. And more and more to do with things that you can't control.

–It's not really like that. I think that you're jealous of something that I have.

–You have. You have nothing. Is this some kind of challenge. You have all that and still it is not enough for you. Is it?

–You can't say that.

–You asked me to meet you. I didn't ask to come. I knew that you needed me. I'm here. But I'm not going to submit to your game. I taught you. You didn't teach me.

–Are you saying that I have nothing to teach you.

–You have volumes. But all of it just stays pent up in you.

–That's why I need the sex. The adventure. The challenges. I make my own world. I make up my own mind.

He separates the cheeks of my ass as he pushes me down on the bed. His cock slides inside of me. I just feel such a rush. I can hardly restrain myself from climaxing at that point. His ultimate fantasy. I am so tuned into his penetration. I let it just slide so comfortably deep inside of me. I want it all. He has positioned himself to thrust with such intensity. I love it. My resistance only adds power to his motions. The two of us just find it. IT. That thing. I am a machine, and I just want him to take me out of myself. This is the portal. He knows it, and I just let him rev it up. He pulls my hair, slides even deeper in me. I love it.

I love the purity of the fuck. No illusions. No distractions. It is wonderful.

I dig into the bed. Recoil and send these waves back in his direction. He obliges. We are so fundamentally together.

–I know now. When I'm there, nothing can get in my way.

–And when you're not there.

–I can get back there! I will get back there. AH!

–Are you taunting me?

–I don't have to. Look at me. Can't you see what I have?.

–The two bodies move together. You can't look him in the face. But you crave his kiss. Not the pecks that you had become accustomed to. Now you let him mimic the coupling that you crave.

–What?

–Lost in the purity of the kiss trying to regain the struggle of their embrace.

–What are you trying to tell me?

–Alone on the mountain. Do you remember that same struggle?

–That's silly.

–Think about it.

–I am. I don't understand.

–You will. What are you most afraid of?. What if you can't hit it hard with that same accuracy? Or that is what you are teaching the body? What you first needed artificial lifts for, you can almost get there on your own. Dangling above it all, you just pull closer.

–It's not about that at all. It's about my friends.

–And their challenges. The story isn't over. It's just beginning. They all can't adore you.

–I'm the one to be adored. That's your job to let them know.

It is becoming harder and harder to sit down with him. He infuriates me. Evan had been so much easier to get over.

The night is young and I have places to go. I leave him with his drink and his certainty. I

don't need his conscience any more.

Maybe it was all connected to a lack of confidence in my body. The muscles are so sleek. My abdomen hard as a rock.

–I was watching you from the other side of the bar. Who's that guy that you were with? Your lover? Your Dad?

I smiled.

–So you think that you have stamina?

He buys me a champagne cocktail. Later on, my feet dangle outside the window of his sports car.

Some people just have that air of success.

–You are so sweet. So they still call you Vanessa.

I gave him that weird look.

–I've got to go.

–Not before I come with you.

I remember the conversation in the restaurant, but everything after that seems a blur. I need a long shower. What about work? My adventures with Brad had blown my whole world up. I say adventure, but he really wasn't part of much.

–Hello, hon'. This is Brad. I'm back in town and thought maybe we'd have some dinner tonight.

–I really have to rest. Take a little perspective on things.

–Nothing a good drink wouldn't cure.

–It's before noon right now. Maybe, you can call me later.

I am in a bar. Wandering from the lounge to a quieter place. From the other room I can hear a familiar tune. Now I recognize the tune. A tune that I thought was mine. In the presence of the composer. But that is off in another room.

Here I am lost in my life. Where I had once accompanied the main theme with such flourish, now I am getting lost in articulating the variations. And the accompaniment still prompts me to virtuosity. My hands are trying to keep up. But the melody just continues to get faster and faster.

I sip from my drink. Is this anything to worry about. It's all too silly.

I wear a silver dress. It hugs my body. I smile. I hope someone sees that smile. My confidence. What I really can share. I just have to let my past go. It's no longer really part of me. Every day, I need to tell myself that. Just change the channel. Like a scary movie. It's not real.

Maybe this evening will offer me some delight that will convince me that I am right. The air conditioning just rolls off the edge of the heat. The twilight of passion. The skirt of the dress brushes my leg. My posture shows my certainty. I take another sip from the drink.

I'm not drinking much tonight. Maybe it's time to switch to a bottled water. Some lime. What's good for the body.

All this stuff needs to come to an end. The bad feelings. The things that hold me down.

It all needs to finish. I rearrange the straps on the dress. See it in the mirror. It does look magnificent. That lovely sheen.

There's a luster in the silver touches in my lipstick. The same gloss on my finger nails and my toe nails. Sleek.

The movement of my hand catches the feel.