

I. Aloft

1965 - mid-1968.

My mother and I flew across the sea first; my father was to follow in a few weeks, after he'd closed affairs in England. Then our new life in California was to begin.

My mother's fare from London to San Francisco had been bought round-trip, originally. She'd wanted to bring me - three months old, first-born of the new generation - to California to see her parents, then return home, to England.

Her father'd been dying - in his middle-fifties, rheumatoid arthritis and pernicious anemia for almost twenty years - and in those days to surpass fifty transfusions was to place one's life on the knees of the gods. He'd survived eighty-one. When he'd gone to the hospital for his eighty-second, he'd told the nurses his first grandchild was coming and he wanted to be strong and healthy for him.

A little while after he'd come home, he'd begun having trouble breathing. My grandmother had climbed into bed with him, held him to her, and he'd lain there, helpless, body withered. He had looked into his wife's eyes and said softly, "Honey, I'm drowning." And then my grandfather - once horseman, sportsman, cocktails-and-Charleston intriguer of women, possessor of eloquence and physical beauty and perfect pitch and an easy way with the piano - had stopped breathing.

The transfusion had been too much for his poor suffering body. His heart could no longer keep his lungs clear of fluid, and so, on dry land, he'd drowned in the waters of his own flesh.

We never met.

Days before, my father - district sales manager for a British food concern - had lost his London job. He'd announced plans for American fortune, so a visit'd turned at last minute into a transcontinental family relocation. We were to live at my grandmother's house until he'd established himself.

He never came. He went to France, played golf in the Italian Open, careened about Europe, wrote strangely beautiful letters which spoke of

longing to be with us again.

Almost a year later, he telephoned my mother from Canada as if no time had passed. He asked for money for a plane ticket. She wired the money, and he came.

They separated, not long after.

One morning, shortly before the divorce, she had no child-care and couldn't afford to miss a day of work. He agreed to take me for the day. All I remember is the color-lettered floor-shifter of the car, and his dark-suited neutral presence to my left as we accelerated downhill, away from my grandmother's.

In the years to come, he'd flee contact. I'd trace him - in France, in England, through lawyers, through old business partners - but I never saw him again.



Summer 1968.

A fence of wood separated the backyards - her parents', my grandmother's.

We were, each of us, about three, and liked to look at one another through a little gap in the slats, and talk.

One day, I stood in the wind-blowing sunshine, waiting for her to arrive at a promised time.

I was happy, eager, almost weightless in my body.



Late 1968 - mid-1969.

There were men around my mother until I was four, then came the one. She'd told his name, softly - "Mister Vidouris" - he stood, tall, dark-suited, over me in my grandmother's fern-filled garden on his first visit, laying a wrist-watch on my palm.

I held it, focused my eyes on its face, but my fingers accidentally pressed the right mix of side-buttons, and the thin disk made a low buzz and vibrated in my hand. I'd a wordless sense he'd let me play with it so I'd like him.



I don't remember their faces. But if memory held males by mechanical implements, for females it took emotions.

The car is long since scrapped. The watch, I understand, is set aside and left to me in my stepfather's will.

But the feeling of the souls is as alive as it ever was.

Women were big presences.

They raised me.



July 1969 - 1972.

In California, I'd had playmates. At the apartment my mother'd moved to, her last single year, we'd made mud-pie cake, played hiding-games in hedges of the back common-gardens. But even as we'd played, they'd blended together.

My new stepfather, my mother, and I'd moved to a small New Jersey suburb of Manhattan - house with tall trees, big lawny yards, and next year a curly-haired ivory-skinned baby sister, and two friends from the neighborhood: Lisa and Allison - my first personal friends: the first whose selves I remember.

Lisa Johnson lived in the high-hedged, blinds-drawn grey house of Mrs Castelli. Mrs Castelli was seen each day, no matter the weather, picking leaves and papers from her yard and sweeping or snow-shoveling the walk. She stooped over her property in the very same pieces of clothing - tattered dark-blue raincoat, dark-blue kerchief over her hair, torn dark pants - no matter the season. She seemed, as she crossed the yard of her ranch house of glass and stone, neither happy nor unhappy, but singly, raggedly attentive to her task.

Lisa didn't always live in the house at the corner of Radburn and Har-ristown. Some family disturbance - Mrs Castelli was too old to be her mother - kept her moving between relatives. I don't know where she spent the most time, didn't wonder about the relations of Johnsons to Castellis, but when she was there she was my friend.

She spoke quietly, tentatively - she always got home on time. A 1970 photo shows a mustard-brown coat to keep her warm against autumn breezes, white button-up shirt beneath, a face of gentle mischief and recessive, elusive awakens. She seemed to live in a murmur.

Allison Dimare lived mid-block, other side of Harristown. I knew nothing of her family. She seemed always out-burst from their house - her quickness outran them, her sharp and hectic light put them in shade. A freebooter, able navigator of the sidewalks, driveways, and backyards that are freeways of early youth, she hurled into a future she bore within herself.

She was my first business partner. One stifling burning-sun day we'd brewed strong pure lemonade and sold paper cups on the Harristown sidewalk fronting Mrs Castelli's. We'd done good business all afternoon - near evening two high-school-age toughs walked up, bought one each, then seized our pitcher and kept pouring cupfuls, far beyond what they'd paid. "One for the road!" they exclaimed repeatedly, grinning. We were shocked by these big boys stealing from us under the mask of good-fellowship, and we waited helplessly for them to drink their fill and leave. Allison swore at their backs, quietly and darkly.

Not many years later, she'd be known for being first to smoke, first to drink beer, a teacher of advanced cursing to kids several grades above. A 1970 photo, too, shows her dressed in bright-flowered smock and flare-legged pants of the time, face scrunched up, facing the camera head-on - disregarder of any way but her own.

The in-turned and the outward - the retirer and the advancer - the obedient and the defiant - the good girl of the neighborhood, and the bad.



1971-1972.

My stepfather's sister was never going to marry, they said. No one was doing anything about it, so I'd decided I would. She'd smiled and said we'd wait until later.

Months later, my California grandmother - known as "Goosie" to all - nickname she'd made when I was born, so I'd have something easy to call her - had come visiting. They'd compared notes and found I'd pro-

posed the same solution to my grandmother's loneliness.

"The jig is up," my aunt said, holding back a smile. "We know everything," said Goosie.

"What's the problem?" I said, looking up at them, moving forearms outward. "You can't - propose to two ladies at once," said my aunt, looking at her cohort. "How did you think you were going to get away with it?" said Goosie.

"Simple," I said. "I'm going to marry you both!"

They both dissolved in laughter. My grandmother took me in her arms, held me tight, and whispered that if she could, she would.



Summer 1973.

Maria and I ran across the lawn, hand in hand, laughing in the sunshine. We had until ten, and her cousin at the front of the house had just called "Four!"

We saw at the same time, turned like birds, let go hands, bent down, scrambled in on knees, away from the leaf-filtered light. We turned, sat, pushed back until elbows hit the rear wall. We clapped hands over our mouths to hold in giggles.

Her cousin yelled "Ten!" and began to stalk. We listened to her stomping in the side-gardens, then the backyard itself, bellowing deep-voiced threats of carnage on discovery. The sounds were nearer, then further.

We pressed to the wall, looked out. We knew that if she looked in, we were finished.

Then, together, Maria and I looked at each other.

Our eyes met in the gloom. Her head was over me, brown hair in curllets over her cheek. I froze.

She leaned forward, canted her head to her right, and touched her soft lips to mine, not outside to outside but in-of-lip to in-of-lip. A wave of pleasure surged in me. She pulled away, quickly, smiled, and turned forward.

We said nothing, but the monster's eye could've shown in the opening and I'd not have cared. I was stunned. My body was warm, tingling - but

conflict came - a feeling of shame, as if I'd done something bad.

I remember nothing more of that summer day. I don't know if the cousin found us, or what other games we may have played. I'm sure I saw Maria again - we'd met in exercise, at YM/YWCA, where the kids sang out "Maria Maria Sangria" at her - she was tall for her age and, with some geographic confusion, Italian - and I do know our lips never touched again.

That night, I puzzled over the alien shame. I disliked it, found no reason to put a bad feeling over a wonderful one. Before long, the thing called "guilt" disappeared.

I don't know what became of her, nor, through the glowing indefinite clouds of childhood, exactly where in Ridgewood her house was.

But I've imagined finding it again, walking around the side, into the back, seeing if her and my long-ago redoubt is still, by some chance, there.

I was eight years old. It was my first kiss. And it happened in her family's doghouse.



1972-1973.

In books I sailed far from second grade. Not assigned - chosen. What did school's words on paper and sounds in air mean, when my mind could take wing and soar?

I snuck books in constantly, often two at a time: hidden in school's books or my notebook, or one in shirt, against-chest, another down my waistband, held by underwear.

One day, my math teacher paused in mid-lesson. She looked right, to the thin-aluminum-framed windows opening onto the weedy old trolley right-of-way. She said, as if surprised, "We didn't have to call that 'window.' We could've called it 'elephant,' and if we all agree it's 'elephant,' that's just as good as 'window.'"

Her words went into me. I began to think on them.



1973-1974.

A few weeks before fourth grade, a letter from the Board of Education.

They'd assigned me to a new school.

As I and my new classmates rode the minibus and played and sang, I didn't know this was "special class" - or that I was diagnosed as hyperactive, defiant of authority, unable to concentrate - or that my mother and stepfather'd appeal it, to no avail.

One spring morning I sat down a few rows behind the driver - single seats, that side. She was in the seat ahead of me - tall for her age, with straight brown hair. She kept to herself, and seemed to know things without giving them away.

I wanted to feel air on me as we rolled through leafy streets. I slammed the metal-framed window forward in its track.

"Fuck!" she said. She twisted left, swiped up her right hand, smashed the window backward. I grabbed the seat-back, pulled myself half-up. I saw she'd had hand trailing out - I'd mashed her fingers between window and surrounding metal frame. She had them to lips.

"God, I'm so sorry!" I babbled. "I didn't know your hand was there! Are you okay?" She turned toward me, removed fingers, regarded me. "It's alright, you know," she said. "It's just pain."

No one'd spoken to me like that before. It confused me.

"What?" I said.

She turned around, hiked herself up in the seat, looked into my eyes, and spoke, with small gaps between each word.

"It's just pain."

She smiled, then turned forward.

I stared at her head, thrown into a depth.

I don't know her name. I've no more memories of her. But I'd think of her, in years to come, of her smile of enjoyment.



2. First Sight

1974-1977.

My parents wore down the Board. I was returned to my old school.

On the first day of sixth grade I'd pedaled down Harristown, late, past right-of-way - coasted down school sidewalk - against rules, but no one outside in bright hazy air - thrown bike into the stand, went through front doors, turned left, and, breathing bit fast, through double-doors into a lofting space.

First gym-thing was attendance. I was among last to arrive, and all'd gone into a long line, height-ordered, backs to stage - faced me, jostling and talking, boys and girls together - I crossed the fresh-wax-smell hardwood, scanning right to left, shortest to tallest - familiar, almost routine. I half-looked, half-attended, as I reached the end.

A shock.

The lights grew brighter.

I stopped walking without realizing.

I did not move or breathe.

I looked, wildly, inside me and out, for the cause.

Then I knew.

In line, at left - second from beginning. Dark, straight hair. Unmingled with those about her. Haughty, quiet - new. In that gymnasium was a line of children - but here was a woman. And suddenly, I was a man.

In that moment I discovered passion. Before I took my place in the line, I worshipped her.

When I turned to face forward, with everybody, I stood - and trembled.



We didn't speak until weeks in, but I learned what I could. Her family was new in town, her father a Swiss physicist, of all things. She, their first-born.

I'd learned her name: Sabine Marolf. I'd say it to myself through the

days, whisper it in bed at night, stressing a vowel here, shaping a rhythm there.

Nothing was too small. This was a sweet field of meaning I had not known.

Sabine was my first love.



She did not return my feelings.

I was untroubled - I'd never thought she would. I asked for nothing - picked no flowers, gave no valentines. This was admiration across distance, a special tension just seeing her. It blew through me like autumn wind: to know her, be near. I didn't badger or tease. I wanted to earn her recognition, be let in.

She was out of school the first half of one week. That Friday, as she chatted with a teacher, I caught mention of Epiphany. That, I reasoned, was why she'd been away.

That afternoon, after last bell, I caught up with her on the school sidewalk as snowflakes fell from grey. "Did you have a good Epiphany?" I said, too eagerly.

"No," she said, holding my asking invalid. She walked forward, not looking back. I watched her go, admiration darker than before.

I didn't want another, so I kept distance - though one day followed her home, ducking behind trees. I knew not if she knew.

One spring day, she closed the distance.

I came home and announced I was taking a shower. My mother told me, years later, she knew instantly I'd fallen in love.

Sabine, I continued, speaking as if I were to be made king, president, and chief justice in one, had invited me over for a game of chess.

I remember but that. There's a brief flash of her living room, but as our families'd become friendly, it may be of another occasion.

For some reason, however, that once - she reached out to me.

I hope I played well.



About twelve years later, I found my sister's 1983 yearbook. I went to Sabine's page.

She wore her hair long in a light flip, smiling, relaxed. She looked like other clear-skinned girls - except in her face a slight exotic length, her cheekbones a bit prominent.

I read through her long list of activities, then a list of liked-things - the brief telegrams by which we, at that age, try to assert who we are: "sunsets ... pina coladas ... kissing."

I felt a small crumple. Where was the icy refuser? The unreachable, impossible? Kissing this one then that, easy sunny evenings of pina coladas, the one boy, the next.

Then it came to me: she'd many sides, and the easy-smiling girl could exist with the cold-eyed princess. And though I wished my lips'd touched hers, I was glad for her.

Perhaps, had I stayed in town, our minds would've grown together and one day, Junior or Senior year, we'd have stood somewhere, a sunset before us, and shared a delicate coconut-tasting kiss.

But that was not to be.

The Board refused to expunge their psychological evaluations from my record. My parents feared this would block me from college and, thus, career.

And so I was sent to military school.



3. Plebing

September - October 1977.

My stepfather slowed for the turnoff, took it - straight road, rough-surfaced, bit uphill at first - and parked. My mother asked, and a cadet walking by told us where to go.

We entered a tall corn-colored Art Deco building - calm world of straight corridors, floors of marble and linoleum, high off-white walls. On the third floor, a cadet in black uniform, clipboard in hand, told me to stand before a door of pine.

"Listen. When you go in there, stop in front of the Lieutenant's desk and say: 'Sir, Cadet Vidouris, Second Company, Plebe, reporting for duty, Sir!' Then just stand there and listen to what he says. Don't speak, don't move or look around. If he asks a question, answer as briefly as you can and start and end with 'Sir.'"

I looked at him. "Why shouldn't I look around?" "Because they don't like that. Now repeat what you're supposed to say when you go in." We did it several times.

The door opened, a boy about my height walked out, then it was my turn. The door clicked behind me.

At a desk, a young man. Someone at the right, leaning on a radiator, arms crossed. There was a window in back of the desk - dark tree-branches and sky beyond.

I reeled off the words. The man at the desk smiled.

"Vidouris, I'm Serge Arensky. You're now a member of my Company, the 'Roaring Second'" - faintly ironic - "and I intend to make us the finest in the Battalion." He turned to the leaning cadet. "This is my JG." The JG nodded. Arensky leaned forward. I looked down surreptitiously, met his eyes. He didn't seem to mind. They were merry, persuasive.

"Listen up." His voice was quieter, as if for only us. "Plebing is not easy. When things get tough, remember this: winners never quit, and quitters never win." He paused. "Now get out of here - and make me proud of you." No one'd ever spoken to me like this. I felt inspired. "Yes, Sir," I said.

Later, I stood in afternoon sun by the car - grey river, downhill past road's end - hugged my mother, shook hands with stepfather. I crossed the lawn, walked up black steel staircase on side of Farragut Hall - great rambling wood building, once shore hotel, now dormitory - waved from landing. They waved back.

I turned and went into dim corridors, noise, and chaos.



Our world was the varying wills of the cadet officers.

We were to run when outside, in straight lines. At corners we were to halt, shout out wish for defeat of our prep-school football rival, turn ninety degrees, then run again.

When they told us to yell we were wiggly worms, were dirt, were trash - we obeyed.

When they told one of us to stand on a chair, stick out arms, make pt-pt-pt sounds with lips, pretend to be propeller plane - and another get down on knees, pretend to gun the plane and make rat-tat-tat noises - we obeyed.

When they woke us before reveille bell, told us do push-ups and sit-ups until shower-time - we obeyed.

When, one night after taps, they burst into our rooms, yelling to report to showers - and, there, had us strip and shower with hot water tapped almost off - we obeyed. When a Lieutenant named Diaz splashed icy water from a pitcher on our naked bodies, his laughter echoing off the tiles - we shivered and tried not to cry out.

The officers trained us to march in formation, spit-polished shoes falling in one blow, starting and turning and stopping as a unit, answering the cadences in a single voice. Upon command we, the Plebes of 1977, shouted out, as one, "Sir, yes, Sir!"



They were forbidden to punch, but it happened on dorm floors - out of adult sight - and consequences of reporting were unpleasant. Much was

thus: there was an Administration, but they were far away - and between them and us stood those charged with interpreting, enforcing, reporting violations: the officers themselves.

I didn't know how to handle the punches, then remembered reverse psychology. I began walking up, challenging them, with a smile, to punch my upper left arm, hard as they could. The first ones hurt, but I discovered that tensing that arm only and relaxing my mind and the rest of my body made the momentary pain-shock easier to bear.

Soon the upper arm was solidly black-and-blue - and numb. Whether punches hurt or not, I'd keep an untroubled smile, ask if they'd like another go. For a time they brought football players over to land smashes. I never broke - became known, even slight respect, as seventh-grader who'd not only not run crying to the Administration, but smile. Soon it paid off. Hitting of me stopped, even the normal. It was no fun, for I didn't suffer.

I began finding such clearings wherever I could in the all-thorned forest-world of the military school.

On the concrete parade-blocks, as we fell in for evening meal, I'd look at the western sky. My arm buzzing- numb, I'd stand, head lifted to yellow-and-blue horizon as night rose at our backs, and see the first stars, and for a few moments pass far away from the Academy.

Then the command would come through the evening air for us to march in and eat our suppers.



4. The Darkness

Autumn-Winter 1977.

We of the Junior School - fifth through eighth grades - were housed on the lower dorm floor of Farragut Hall on the river, directly over corporate offices and mess hall. Some of the Upper School lived over us - on top floor - but most were on two highest floors of corn-colored Dupont Hall, toward back of campus.

Our floor was managed by a few Upper School officers who roomed there. The physically-strongest Upper Schoolers - generally football players - held almost equal sway.

Junior School was also ruled from within.

In the first weeks, a pack of the most confident, aggressive seventh and eighth graders had formed - five or six in number. It centered on an eighth-grader named Matthew Mellini.

Tall for his age - narrow long face, light olive skin, full lips - voice deeper than others, quick with pointed words - had youth's quick detection of pretension or weak spots - could project a silent, cold malignity by eyes alone - carried himself as ready to attack, though I never saw him land a blow. His air alone scared.

It began one day in mid-autumn.

On a Tuesday afternoon - we were given several dollars' allowance - he took me aside, said I was to give it to him or he'd beat me. I put the two one-dollar bills into his hand. There was no question in my frozen heart of defying him - then or weeks to follow. He came up, I handed the money, and he went away.

One day, something moved inside me, stronger than not wanting to be beaten up.

{ *no more* }

I ducked him, long as I could, but one afternoon I was walking over leaves, parking lot back of Dupont, between gymnasium and the audito-

rium-chapel. He appeared as if from nowhere. No one was around. There was no expression to his face. He spoke coldly and quietly. "Give me the money, or you're gonna get beat."

My heart pounded, but I shook my head. He looked at me. "Come with me," he said, and walked away from the gym.

He opened the metal door, walked beside the elevated stage (wrapped in grey curtains), straight to the door to the white-wall auditorium proper. He stopped, looked out at seats under broad windows - quiet, empty, unlit. He shut door, then turned stageward and went up - held curtains open, motioned - let go folds - they rustled, falling into place.

We stood on planks in dusty stuffy air - radiator on far wall clanked, altar and chaplain's chair stacked neatly beside.

"Since you don't want to give me the money," he said, "this is your punishment. Take down your pants."

I pushed them to ankles, crouching, then straightened. I didn't feel my heart anymore.

"Take down your underpants." I did it. He took a ballpoint pen from his pocket. I stood there as he walked. He pointed it at my stomach, then lower, then touched it to the side of my penis and began to make squiggle marks.

I looked down and watched him make shapes along it and on the tip. It didn't hurt. He said nothing. His face wore the same expression as always.

He poked it a few times with the pen, looked up and said, eyebrows going up, "You know, your dick is quite small." "Yeah, I know." "There's a way to make it bigger," he said, softer.

I looked at him, suspicious.

"Will it hurt?" "No." "You promise?" "I promise." "Okay."

He put the pen in his pocket, told me to pull up pants, said "Come on," left the stage, went down stairs, opened metal door.

He walked over leaves, up gym steps, through door, left, immediate right at closed door of athletic director, then up stairs. I'd never reached Robison Hall's top floor - was off-limits - but I knew from trying that the door was locked.

He reached in his pocket, pulled out steel loop tight with keys. He stuck one key out, guided it into lock, turned, opened door and walked

through. He turned left, walked down a creaking wood-floored corridor to a door half-ajar.

Pieces of yellowed paper strewn - little writing-desk, veneer-strips peeled off, against a wall - by it, two old wooden class-chairs, one atop other - window over football field - beyond, frontage-road, river behind - good view, came distant thought - walls streaked brown - air close, hot, unmoving - smelled of cooked dust.

He shut door, then pointed at my pants. "Take them down." I did it.

He nodded at a far corner. "Now go there and piss." I was recovering some of my mind. I wondered what it was supposed to do. I didn't think I had to go, but eventually went until he said, voice harder, reflecting off walls, "Stop. Now come over here."

I stopped - wondering dimly if he'd wanted me to so I could turn it off - and turned around. He was standing in the same place, but now his pants and underwear were below his knees.

His dick stuck straight out from between his legs, a little hair around where it came from the rest of his body.

He said "Come here."

I walked to him. His face had the same non-expression. He said, "Now get down and suck my cock." I crouched with my pants and underwear still down. The grit stung my knees.

I looked at the thing pointing. It was pale mostly - red-pink rim by the front part - whole thing arced up. I opened my lips, leaned forward, felt it enter my mouth.

Its stuffing my mouth made my stomach tight. It was near the back of my mouth, I smelled an odor like cheese from his body. It tasted cheese-like. It went further, almost back of throat, felt weird, then bad, and I almost threw up. Gagging, I pulled back.

"No. Not like that. Stand up."

I stood up. He got on his knees before me and put his mouth round my dick.

His lips and inside of his mouth and his tongue felt warm and wet. No pleasure. His head moved - I knew he was trying to show me. I hoped I wouldn't have to again. He stopped after a while and got up.

He put his hand on my cock. "When I'm not around, do this." He moved his hand back and forth, roughly. "Do it yourself, now." I did it.

Something happened. My cock stirred of its own accord. Warmth flowed. It stiffened and grew and rose. It became bigger. Little pleasures ran along its length.

"You're popping a rod," he said, and smiled coldly.

I was regaining more mind. Strange, I thought, something from working on cars. As I continued, I looked up suddenly. "That's masturbation!" I said, knowing how naive I sounded. He smiled contemptuously.

He pulled up pants, told me to do same. He walked out onto creaking boards, opened door, went down step, turned, pulled out loop, locked - went down, past coach's door, out, down steps.

He stepped down from concrete sidewalk, stopped on asphalt, near where he'd caught up with me. He pushed his finger into my chest, not hard, looked into my eyes.

"Don't tell anyone about this," he said, "or I'll kill you."

He walked away.

I remember nothing more of that day.

This was my introduction to sex.



5. Pieces

Winter 1977 - Spring 1978.

Amid the great memory-plain of the rest of seventh grade stand six pillars. There is little else. Here, in order, are the inscriptions.



A freezing riverside night of blue-white stars. It was a few dozen minutes before taps.

He saw me in the corridor. He quietly said "Follow me." He walked outside down a grey-silver steel staircase, paced around campus a while, then returned to Farragut. He stopped beneath the stairs which rose on grey-silver poles. He told me to lay on a concrete pole-foundation and take down my pants.

Little rocks stung the skin of my ass. He went on his knees between my legs and sucked my dick into his mouth. This time the warm wetness pressure pierced me in sudden shock of pleasures and I became hard immediately. Space elongated, as if lower body were far away and feeling-pulses had to travel great spaces to mind. I raised my head, looked at him as the new sensations continued. I saw his lips round my dick, his eyes turned down to task. He pulled back. I saw teeth in night. He made little bites up and down shaft. It made sensations stronger, better.

I put my head down. I didn't moan or move. I didn't climax. I lay there. He stopped after a while, got up, and told me to get dressed and go back inside.



I'd returned from leave - an officer'd said my roommate was being held in infirmary for pick-up by parents. I learned he'd knocked a hole in our wall, hung bathrobe over, for weeks been digging down with broom-handle and packing the resulting small crypt with matches and papers. His

confessed plan'd been to fill it with inflammables and blow up - or at least incinerate - the Hall.

Thus had I become the only Junior Schooler with a room of his own.

One night, minute before taps, Mellini appeared at door, whispered he'd return. I lay rigid under wool blanket - heart hammered - radiator ticking, hissed - hoped he'd not come, had fallen asleep or forgotten. But once floor silent he put head in, whispered for me to get up - walked silently down fully-lit corridors, opened his door - dark inside, neither roommate there - must've been weekend, they home on leave. He shut door, told me lie in bed, strip off pajamas. His mouth on my dick again - pleasures again, not as intense.

I heard him say, in higher voice, "Do you like this?" I knew what he wanted to hear. "Yes." "Does it feel good?" "Yes," I said, without emotion. I don't remember him stopping or how I got back to my room, but it wasn't long.



A sunny day, perhaps on spring's earliest edge.

Clark Hall - an old dormitory, part-way converted years before to foul-weather parade-blocks and auxiliary basketball court. Small section of dorm floor'd been retained - abandoned, locked. He'd told me to follow, walked up black steel staircase against Hall - exposed across center of campus - reached black metal door, pulled out keys, unlocked, looked over shoulder, stepped inside, shut it.

Stale air, dim shapes. He went left, through doorway into suite of rooms. Years of dust on everything - desks and chairs in jangled piles - afternoon light slanting from smeared windows. He looked around, as if new to him, went inside shower stall jury-rigged from plywood and pipes - teacher must've lived here - told me to get on knees. He opened pants, took out his dick - big, sticking out like first time - said to suck. I took in my mouth, gagged again, pulled back.

He said to get up, voice sharp, and walked to pile of desks and chairs by southwest window. He told me to take down pants and underwear and

bend face-down, over desk. In buzzing numbness I felt him stand behind - something poke my ass - then thrusts, on and on, him silent - squirting, wetness running down ass and legs, then he stood back.

“You tell anybody about this,” voice flat, taking his pants up, “it’ll be your last day of life. Pull up your underwear. C’mon, let’s go.”

He opened door, stepped out quickly, locked.

As he walked down steps I wondered why I floated in blankness - why light of day seemed so bright - why nothing seemed real.



Weeks of deepening silence. He hadn’t touched me but the four times. I carried it with me.

Each allowance-day, I’d handed the money.

One day, as spring was starting to come, he walked up on the dorm floor and stopped.

I knew what he wanted. It would’ve been easy to give.

Something that hadn’t to do with safety or ease moved. It rose. It pushed aside the paralysis of obedience, quietly stemmed the tide of fright. I shook my head.

His face went blank. “Come with me,” he said. His voice was colder than ever. He began to walk - past central inside stairwell - left, into bathroom - past white-enamel sinks with chrome spigots - right, into long room with floor of small black and white tiles - toilets - white-washed open stalls.

He pointed to a toilet - on right, near rear wall - said, “Sit there and jerk off until I come back.” I sat down - he turned on heel and left - unthinking, unfeeling, I unzipped - took my dick, jerked off, looking down - no erection, no feeling - only motion.

His steps sounded in the sink-room. He rounded corner, stood over me.

His face wasn’t blank.

It was tight and cold with fury.

The world became an unbroken snow-field.

“You know what’s going to happen now, don’t you?”

Time stretched. There was all the space in the world to answer, and I answered quietly, so quietly and easily, my word a raindrop falling on a vast lake without a ripple.

“Yes.”

Time halted.

There was screaming.

It was coming from me.

I stood up as if eight feet tall.

I brushed past him, roaring wordlessly.

I rounded the corner, passed the wash-basins.

Steps pounded outside. I walked out the door shrieking.

I was met in the corridor by a growing phalanx of cadet officers.

“What’s wrong, kid?” “Calm down.” “Hey, what’s wrong?”

I didn’t stop screaming. My knees felt like water.

My head was empty but clear as empty sky.

I saw him slink into the hallway.

He hid behind the officers.

I pointed at Mellini.

“Him!” I shouted.

Stairwell doors slammed open - usually-stern face of Donald Langen, supply officer, now worried, intent - his office far from stairs - realized how loud. “What’s going on here?” barked Langen.

“What’d he do?” an officer asked.

Words wouldn’t come. I swallowed, then could shout. “Bad things! Gay things!”

(I’m sorry, gay people of now. It was the only word I had back then.)

I began to scream again.

Mellini whined, turning head slightly aside, “Aww, the kid’s lyin’!”

An officer whirled on him, shouted, “Shut the fuck up and get out of here! *Get out!*” He slammed hands against Mellini’s chest. Mellini staggered back, then melted away.

Langen looked at an officer, told him to take me to the Commandant, turned sharply and went downstairs.

My screaming was diminishing. In its place was coming crying - and laughter.

Two officers slung my arms over their shoulders, half-led, half-carried me down the grey-silver staircase, across campus as I cried, laughed, gibbered - drunk on air on my face - telling it all, telling it true, into open air, echoes off Shepard Hall of Music Department and Canteen, Clark Hall across tennis courts and pool, the high walls of Dupont. My voice sounded across the Academy.

We walked through Dupont's front doors, I quieted, tried to breathe. I reflexively felt down - pants zipped, no idea how - then through lobby, through Administration offices directly to an inner office I'd never seen.

They sat me in a chair and left the room. The door shut. I was looking into the broad leathered old face of Captain Fredrick Jenyss, retired of the Navy.

I didn't know what he'd say, didn't know if I was in trouble. He looked across the desk and smiled. It was not of pity, nor of irony. It was of strength and caring. And he spoke.

"Vidouris, I'm an old salt. I was in the Navy for thirty years and there's nothing that's going to shock me. So you just tell me what happened - and we'll put it right."

I looked into his eyes, felt my body relax, and knew that somehow this was going to be okay.

I told much as I could - mentioned key-loop several times, doors it'd opened, what was inside rooms - for evidence.

When done, he wrote on a paper. "This is my home number. If anyone gives you any trouble at all, anyone even looks at you *cross-eyed* - call me, day or night." He asked if I felt I could go to rifle-drill.

After sitting with him and finding nothing but dignity and acceptance, I felt I could do anything. I rose, he rose with me, and he put his hand on my shoulder.

I walked, shaking, to the armory in Robison basement. As I exited, rifle in hand, I heard hushed voices and a snicker from a pair of cadets walking ahead. One said, so I'd hear, "He thought he could get pregnant - that's why he messed around with Mellini." I thought of the paper in my pocket. No, I thought. I'm going to be strong for Captain Jenyss.

I joined drill. Nothing was said - but careful silences, quick looks from corners-of-eyes.

I'd stowed rifle, was walking into my room - noticed door ajar - saw, in window-light, something different on its outside surface - drew closer - letters, carved into pine -

QUEER

"My fault, eh?" I thought. I felt contempt for them. I walked in, stopped, sniffed - looked at my bed.

Someone, or more than one, had pissed - sheets, mattress, pillow yellow-spattered. Thus'd they answered my charges against the leader.

He never touched me again.



A day in blooming spring - the finding and reading, in the Academy library, of a book.

I came across a heavy old hardcover in fiction under "H" - front jacket a stylized railroad scene - two rails disappearing into tunnel portal below mountains - outsized red stop-signal hanging in space - photo at back showed a spiritual-eyed woman looking toward the ceiling, seeming ready to float. Dust on book-top.

I opened at random. My eye fell on a railroad disaster. This writer knew her stuff. Her description thrilled me. It didn't sit on the page - it was as if written in electricity. For weeks I'd find the novel by looks alone - was always there - and I'd open to the wreck.

Curiosity stirred. I went to the beginning.

It took me by the throat. It became my world. I'd no checkout privileges - too young - so spent every minute I could.

Three or four days after, realized that day I'd finish it. I turned pages, frenzied, unendurable tension, feeling as if my head would split from the growing light.

I was taken, taken as never before.

The end came, and I fell back against the library chair.

As I sat, dazed, I heard a voice in my head. It was not my voice. It was of an older man of great authority.

“Remember this,” he said. “Remember this moment always. *This* is important.”

Misfiled, unlooked-at for years - I'd found *Atlas Shrugged*.



A day in late spring - full leaves, sky brightening toward summer.

I was walking to gym - had exited auditorium-chapel, cut onto parking lot - thought came of what'd begun here - then flow ceased.

Abruptness attracted - I tried to get details - felt something resist - tried - felt myself shy back from what I wanted to do.

I'd never felt so. I realized, confused, I was trying to forget.

She'd said in her book to never evade. I didn't want any of me left abandoned, locked. I vowed, standing under sun and leaves, to stop it.

I began to force myself to remember. I tested details for clarity every day. If I found them fuzzy, I sharpened them; if I retracted, I pushed myself forward.

I fixed realities in my memory. I ripped every difference between them and me.

I bathed in them.

In less than a year, my mind no longer tried to forget.

I'd destroyed the reflex to pull away.

I told no one.



II. MASTERS AND MARRIAGE

1978-1998

You meet the other.

... Neither of you say anything.

Who or what you are is paper-thin. The veil is torn.

- Janwillem van de Wetering, *The Empty Mirror* (1974)

I. Kendrick

Autumn 1978.

In September, I donned the uniform of black serge.

I'd wear it through that grade, then the next, and the next, and next, and the next.

I'd walk the campus, watch Plebes running and yelling, hear officers shouting and laughing - and remember.

Whether he was quietly not invited or some other reason, I do not know, but he didn't return after my first year.

I never saw Mellini again.



June 1980 - December 1981.

In the first few weeks of summer vacation, reading my way through library railroad stacks, I'd found a book - the stories of the old trolley line - not just the cars, but the people who'd ridden and run them, so warm and knowing I'd felt them - and he who'd written it. He'd been one of them - worked in the 1910s as conductor, then motorman.

Now I stood, waiting for him to answer my touch on his doorbell.

After I'd absorbed the book, desire'd stirred. I had to know him. I didn't consider he'd been born in 1894 or that his book'd come out in 1968. I knew only it was special, that the old dust-jacket placed him thirty miles away, and I *would* speak with him.

One day, riding my bike, I'd gone to a deli payphone and dialed Directory Assistance. They'd found listing. He was there! I'd pedaled home, told my mother.

"Famous writers don't like to be bothered," she'd said, a bit prim - told me not to contact - I'd promised - run upstairs to grab quarters and dimes - flown back to deli - dialed.

Many rings, then a quavering strong voice'd said, "Ahoy!" I'd said I was calling from one of the towns on the old line - I'd found his book in

the library and loved it.

Within five minutes he'd given his home address.

Few days later, I'd told my mother I was off to ride trains all day - ridden to Hudson's shore, then west on the old electrics. I'd walked the quiet streets of Summit, past the grand old wooden houses, turned at two white rocks, walked into a garden, up a few stone steps to a door, and rung a bell.

Footsteps - louder - then an open door and I'm looking into sparkling blue eyes under shock of pure-white hair. "Hello, Mike!" he said, grinning.

We shook hands, then walked through an entrance-hall, then left, along a hallway through a vast pipe organ he'd built into his house, and out into the music room.

Floor of marble - soaring ceiling - toward center, Chickering concert grand piano - in corner, harpsichord he'd built with his own hands - in another, concert harp (his wife's, he said, smiling) - on wall behind, oil painting of ship at anchor by jungle - painted it, he said, while exploring Pacific on a tramp steamer in the 1910s.

We sat down on cushioned couches to talk.

I was 15 years old and E. Jay Kendrick was 86.

It mattered not. We were friends.



I visited as often as I could - through summer, then whenever on leave from the Academy.

We spoke of our lives, the things we'd found, inexhaustibly, as if driven. We spoke on equal terms - he said more than I, but to all I said he listened with complete attention.

I brought my family to visit. First my sister and mother (who'd laughingly forgiven my lies), then my stepfather - Kendrick was the only person I ever saw him treat with respect.

One October day in 1981, I'd brought my Academy roommate, Stan.

When it came time to leave, he'd walked down the stone steps with me. I turned in the garden and said, "Well, Commander, I've nobody left to introduce. I've no more excuses to come see you."

He looked into my eyes. "Mike, you don't need any excuses. If you want to come over, just ring me on the phone - and come."

"Okay. I will."

We held the look, smiling, then I turned and walked forward. At the road, I looked back. He'd gone forward in his garden and was looking at me, autumn colors behind, muted but strong.

We waved, then Stan and I walked back to the station, talking all the while of he whom we'd just met.

He died, suddenly, the next month. We never had that unexcused visit. Yet it was as though it had already happened.



A few weeks after, I called on his widow. She pointed to a pile of leather satchels and suitcases on hardwood floor in a room-corner upstairs. "What are those?" I asked.

"Oh, they're for you. Jay wanted you to have them."

I went over and opened.

My breath stopped. My eyes grew wet.

They were the last records of the trolley company - and the manuscript and photos from his memoirs.

He'd left me his life.

The rest of his bequest, more precious yet, was invisible and inside me.

He'd taught me how to live.



2. Rand

1980-1981.

Before I was sixteen I'd read all the books. I knew there was much I did not grasp, and a tensed tone kept me away - but her voice cut through everything.

She still lived, elderly and reclusive in Manhattan, and I grew curious. I did research, found address at which she'd published her last periodical.

I rode in one morning, walked down 34th, past Empire State, then further, wondering what I'd find as address-numerals went up. I stopped at the little doorside plaque: "120 East 34th Street." An apartment building - my heart went faster.

I went to bell-box - columns of names, apartment numbers stamped over each. I read down - toward bottom left, old red Dymo tape, white-lettered, peeling at one edge, slightly grimed.

F. O'CONNOR

Her husband - dedication of *Atlas Shrugged* - two men - him and her young student, Nathaniel Branden.

I wondered if she'd answer, talk to me for a moment. I felt she'd disapprove of one uninvited. I didn't want the faintest mar. I backed away then ran, as if stung, all the way to Penn Station.



That weekend, I rode in, walked 34th, light slanting ahead, stopped in front, looked up.

The doorman came out, asked if he could help - I asked, as if the most natural thing, if I was pointing to Mr O'Connor's. He moved my finger a little. I walked across 34th to the bus kiosk, near Lexington, leaned against it. As sun descended, I waited.

I stood for about two hours.

The Empire was an unlit bulk against orange dusk when the lights in the apartment went on.

Unbidden, the thought came: Ayn Rand and I are looking at the same light.

I stood for a few minutes, looking, then walked quietly up the street.



In the next few months, I went back several times.

One evening, I spoke in my mind.

You'll never know I was here. We'll never speak. But you have changed me, and I do this in respect, and gratitude, so that I can carry it with me into life - so we'll have had just this ...

One evening, I knew it was done.

At dusk, I watched the lights go on.

I said, inside me, "Good-bye."

I turned and walked west, wind shifting against me, then behind, fluttering my coat about me, beneath the buildings, as I headed back.



3. Branden

January 1982.

They'd been together many years, then broke a few years after I was born.

I'd learned he was running a psychology workshop in Manhattan over a weekend. The Academy'd granted special leave, and on Friday afternoon I and two hundred others had entered a hotel ballroom and begun exercises - individually, in pairs, in small groups - shocking in their revelation of self, others, and life-potential.

It was Sunday afternoon, and soon it'd end. I stood by a table, staring as he signed books and talked to each person. It didn't occur to me he'd see me - I felt like a camera. The next person - an anarchist with whom I'd tangled a few hours earlier - set a book before Nathaniel Branden.

He signed with flourish, then looked up, brows up, funny pursed-lip smile. "So, Robert, what do you think of" - his eyes went to my name-tag - "Michael here?"

My breath caught.

"Eh," said Robert, glancing at me with some disdain, "he's too much of an Objectivist." "I can tell that," Branden said archly, "from the way he sits." A piquant game, I saw, had begun.

"All right, Dr Branden," I said. "How do Objectivists *sit*?" He leaned back, looked me in the eye, and said, with theatrical relish, "With in-n-n-sufficient relaxation."

I begin to think into this, to find my unrelaxes.

At its end, he opened the floor to who wished to speak. I told of the impact of the exercises. He answered from the platform for a long time, and I stood looking at him across space. His eyes were intent as he said to me, "Our consciousness is our *core*."

This went into me, deeply.

My mother would tell me, years later, that this weekend began my introspection.



January-July 1982.

I became friendly with a woman from the workshop: Babe Stephens, broad-shouldered, determined - walked into New York evening, black cape, hand raised in farewell - worked in neurology in midtown hospital. I'd ride to apartment, talk, play records, look through floor-to-ceiling bookshelves - reverently touch autographed paperback - "To Babe Stephens - Cordially, Ayn Rand."

Babe looked up at me from couch. "She'd have liked you, very much." I swallowed.

"Are you serious?" "Oh yes. She loved young men."

One day, she was reminiscing about old days. "It was an incredible time," she said. "Everything was expanding. Nathaniel'd come out with the Theory of Psychological Visibility." (That each human consciousness has profound need to experience its values and aspirations mirrored in another consciousness.)

"What a revolution!" I chirped.

"And an evolution." She paused and frowned. "I was at the NBI dance where Ayn saw him dancing with a beautiful girl, about 1965."

"You were *there*?"

"Oh yes. Frank held the elevator for me, and when I got in I found Nathaniel and Patrecia - that was her name - and Barbara and Ayn there. We rode down together."

I listened, fascinated. "What did Ayn say to Nathaniel?"

"Nothing. But she was looking daggers. And the body language - it was easy to read."

I began to wonder about "body language." How could you talk without words? She told me of a psychologist named Reich - he'd said the body has a language, a wordless one you can understand on its own terms, but you can't be tensed or you get it all wrong.

Reich's and Branden's words flowed together. I remembered my self-training at the Academy. All the same, wasn't it? Non-resistance.

As time went on, I'd think of the beautiful dancer who'd made Rand so angry.



September 1982 - January 1983.

I'd seen five Senior classes stand for nine months, graduate, and leave. Now it was our turn.

I was the longest-boarded of my class, and the Plebes looked at me as if a Pre-Cambrian marvel. They'd come up, tentatively, ask what it'd been like, old days; I'd try to tell.

I, alone of all, was given a room of my own in Farragut, still home to Junior School. This private room, unheard-of in any's memory, was their silent recognition of my endurance.

It was few doors from where I'd slept, first year. It was next to the bathroom.

I'd kept my heading on freedom those years. I'd wanted to run, badly, but something that hadn't to do with present advantage had bidden me stay.

I would make it through.



I'd known no more sex - but I knew sex in me. I'd begun masturbating in eighth grade, and I did it every day, several times - in my room, covertly in study hall or bathrooms or on home-bound bus. I'd no guilt, no shame.

I didn't imagine sex with persons. At times I'd remember his teeth on my cock - it was a dark thrill. But for me, in the main, sexuality was third force, unattached to gender. I wouldn't have called it such, but I took it as ambient energy.

Streams of heteroporn flowed along the dorm corridors, up and down the floor-levels. Sometimes - not while masturbating - I looked. The books did nought for me, but I liked the pictures - when women looked strong, alive, themselves.

I felt nothing for men in them - yet was in grip of something I couldn't shake: a passion for one of my classmates. Ted Sanders - golden-haired green-eyed smiling horseman - and fellow taker-lightly of the Academy - had my heart. When he was near, I could look only at him. Each of his words was happiness.

No girl'd ever made me feel that. I wondered if I was gay. I tried to

imagine sex with him, but it didn't work. If I were gay, I reasoned, I'd want to - wouldn't I?

If I was gay, that'd be that. I'd accept it. But I'd been surrounded by males - my first experience'd been with a male. To turn out gay seemed too easy, too pat.

Yet how could I know what I was, without experience?

And having sex with a girl seemed as far away as Andromeda.



Her eyes caught me, then the golden twist of hair falling down the tan strong bikini'd curves of her body - it was a magazine photo, tacked up amid cans of anti-fouling paint, power-drills, and scraps of old wood in the boat shop.

I decided to have an experience with an icon's help. I looked round, pulled out the tack, pocketed photo, left.

That night, winter winds without, it was time of pleasure. I kept my lamp on and held the photo.

As I neared electric surge-out of orgasm, I focused my feelings upon her - imagined breaking through distance, through not knowing her - imagined being close to her, our talking, our skins touching, out-struck curve of her hip under my hands - and I came, eyes locked on the sun-flooded self of Christie Brinkley.

He'd brought into my life what I'd not asked for. He'd willed me toward men.

I willed myself toward Woman.



4. Horowitz

October 1982 - Spring 1983.

One windy Saturday, on liberty, I'd walked several miles - next town - ambled up garage-sale driveway, seen classical albums - one dollar each. One, ornate from 1960s, spoke of great pianist making historic comeback after twelve years - first piece, Bach organ work on modern piano. I'd handed over an allowance-dollar.

On Monday, I dropped Music Department needle on first track. Applause, then silence - then sounds I'd never imagined. Who was this man? How could he do this? I saved allowance to buy every album I could.

One Friday afternoon I ran lines outside Shepard Hall, rigged amp cabinets to record player, blasted the imperial chords of his 1978 Rachmaninoff *Piano Concerto No. 3* beyond campus.

As the music went out I looked at downhill road, autumn river beyond, and knew in time I'd make it.

This musician of tremulous sensitivity and electric power became my hero. As winter ended I asked the music director how notation worked, began teaching myself.

Six weeks later I debuted at the spring concert - Beethoven and Bach.



June - September 1983.

On graduation day I told Ted my feelings. He heard with grace, and we remained friends.

I went home, and it was almost dazing: no Academy in fall - not again.

I was off, instead, to a small college of philosophers, ponderers of the Western canon, in Annapolis - across the street from the mansard roofs and vast marching grounds of the USNA.



September 1983 - June 1985.

My own copy of the Academy's blue-bound rulebook was in a box in a closet, back home. Now ideas came bustling. As Rand had enjoined, I went to fundamentals.

The problems of Western philosophy rose before me. I glimpsed a great and troubled architecture.

There were moments, too, of something other than theory.

One was in a Plato-dialogue. A man setting up a drinking party declares that none shall be forced to imbibe.

I move, in the next place, that the flute-girl, who has just made her appearance, be told to go away and play to herself, or, if she likes, to the women who are within.

I felt dislike. Who was this Eryximachus, man of Athens, to say this? "Here," said a voice quietly in me. "They went wrong." I wanted to defend the flute-girl, somehow. I told myself one day I would.

Another was listening to people enthuse over Socrates' examined life - thought came, and I dashed a note.

Perhaps a period of leading the unexamined life is necessary, so the self will have some actual content.

Socrates' way seemed to contain a turning-in, self self-examining, a vacuum emerging. Thought of Branden and Reich, though I didn't know why.

Another was reading Spinoza. He said there had to be direct contact with truth, for with an infinite number of steps we'd never arrive. Immediately I felt at home with the world - though I'd not have called it that.

My mind-ideal was expanding.



15 December 1985.

He'd walked out, and we'd stood.

Amid our hails, he'd moved his gaze across front row - brief eye-contacts - my heart'd begun to pound - then we were looking at each other.

Something'd stirred in me - I'd shot my arm out, given a thumb's-up
- his eyebrows'd leaped up, he'd grinned and pointed, waggled hand back
and forth.

We'd continued, in between-times, gesturing, looking into each other's eyes.

In the mid-time, people'd come, asked how we'd met, become friends
- I'd said I'd never seen him before this day.

Now he was directly above - taking last bows.

I looked up at him, waved.

He looked down, smiled, recognizing.

Our eyes met, deeper this time.

Something stirred in me.

I pointed with my index finger, jabbing a few times: first my breast,
then my heart, then up at him, mouthing it - "I - love - you."

And he, who'd looked into the eyes of Siloti - who'd looked into the
eyes of Liszt - who'd looked into the eyes of Beethoven - who'd looked
into the eyes of Mozart - pointed to his breast, then his heart, then to me
- mouthing the words - and bowed to me, one last time, smiling.

At that moment, a light flashed.

The photograph appeared in the *Times* the next day.

He walked off the stage of Carnegie Hall.

I never saw Vladimir Horowitz again.



5. Beth

1983 - 1987.

At the College, among girls, my feelings for Ted lessened. Yet I felt no passion for any person. There were ferments of intellect, but never was I finally, completely roused.

Passion was what I wanted. So I stayed apart, cautious - picky - and waited. I knew I'd know.

I and the College were dissatisfied, and I left after two years. In the last week, passion-words and looks with the guitar-slasher punk Dani from town. We talked endlessly that summer, by phone vowed our love, but as autumn came she faded - I visited, she was hostile, ignored all she'd said when times were good, abruptly denounced me - I wasn't a real musician, wasting time with books.

I hoisted my travel-bag, and we parted. Back home I wrote bitterly.

A strange ecstasy, that is not pursued.

I began making philosophic notes on scrap paper - in outer life, plunged into working-class world - liquor store, shoe department, lumber seller. As I lifted kegs, measured insteps, drove forklifts, finally came contact with women.

Regina, who taught seething truth of woman-sex - yet not proof against religion-guilt.

Claire, who taught bright sweetness - and not to glide over depths.

Judee, who taught sweep-of-time, brush-of-darkness - and never to stand frozen in oneself.

Nancy, who taught necessity of passion - not let life grow grey, slump-shouldered.

Each began with warmth, care - yet felt incomplete. Some part of me was always out, so I never fully committed to them. I did not pretend to.



January 1988 - September 1998.

Left home - rented room - day I arrived, landlord's wife left, final time - he embarked on epic drunk.

Nights later, he tottered in - pressed phone to my ear - personal ads - thrice I refused - he pressed, insistent - suddenly, a voice - deep in pitch, light in merry.

I began to laugh - she was ugly - often frightened children and dogs - mainly listened to others' problems - outran bill collectors - didn't drink, as people hate when you vomit in back seat - was drug free - today's prices! - and last time had sex, they hadn't discovered AIDS yet.

Then, serious voice - "If you can read between the lines of this ad, and *think* you're capable of independent thought - perhaps you're the one I've been - holding out for."

Her ad skewered every I'd just heard. She stood out like the sun in a banal sky.

I asked landlord for a beer, wrote letter of cheeky color, mailed. Five dollars to service meant two days' breakroom cream, sugar, and coffee for food.

I called, to hear again - wondered what she was like - sometimes called before sleep on mattress on floor - didn't know what intrigued, exactly - some unusual poise, how she put things together.

One night, recording gone - I called service - they could tell nothing - no, couldn't relay a letter.

Weeks passed. I almost forgot. Night-ship, no trace.

One evening, she left message with landlord. He called my work - I rang her instantly on lumber department's dime - she'd received my letter, forty-three more the day before.

I was the one she'd called.

In the next two weeks, we talked endlessly. We called it an era of surfaces - thin, mendacious, unpassionate. She spoke of growing up in mid-1970s - born in '58 - in a world of sexual and emotional freedom come and gone - spoke of marathon-running and disco-dancing all night as if a legendary age.

We expanded in the joy we took in one another's being. One night, after we'd talked nine hours, I told her I loved her.

She gasped.

I'd seen no image of her. I felt no need.

We met on a Sunday morning.

I found within this well-curved, redheaded woman with huge green eyes a spirit so large no one moment could bear her. She overflowed the present.

We made love that night, time upon time.

It was my homecoming.

I never went back to lumber.

I proposed that Tuesday morning.



She'd told me, before Sunday, she'd been abused.

Mother'd stopped with beatings, chokings - father'd used her for sex pleasures from an early age. There'd been damage - but there was also powerful will to life, to health.

She told what it'd been like to be smart and attractive - men who disregarded the mind, coveted the body - evils committed upon children - women's history classes in '70s - monogamy as patriarchy's attempt to keep women as property.

I began to ponder what it meant to be male. I discerned a great disturbance between genders - would look at quiet houses, wonder at secret shatterings behind closed doors, drawn blinds.

I saw the path opening, broad before me. I'd walk it with her, through the good and the bad.

We married, five weeks after first-touch.

At Academy and College, the world of women'd seemed unreachable. Now we cleaved to one another, were as one flesh.



In autumn of '88 my mother left him - next summer, Beth and I followed - California - lived first with Goosie - known thus to all - in same ranch-house in western hills above Peninsula - where my grandfather'd died.

Leaving New Jersey provoked crises in Beth. Long-suppressed memories rose and stayed. Sex for her became frightening, complicated. Our incandescent happiness turned occluded.

I'd known first erotic happiness with her. I would not believe it'd gone. The damage had been caused by force, by uncaring - so patience'd solve, heal.

We turned to the paths of her life, further, further back into incomparably complex story. I summoned all I could from my reading and living to help her find the way back.

We stretched our fingers to the elusive wholeness.

In meantime, we worked to establish ourselves in new state and culture. I found my way into mortgages, Beth into the writing for which she was so naturally equipped.

We loved, we explored, we battled - and slowly, healed.

On October's last day in 1992, Goosie took Beth to regular medical exam while I worked. I drove in evening light to Goosie's to get her. I drove uphill - she was standing by mailbox, face haunted.

She got in, said she needed mammogram. The doctor'd found a lump.

Radiologist walked out with the same paled face.

A knife in the hand of a great surgeon cut it out.

Eight weeks' searing radiation - six months' nauseating chemicals - near-deadly staph infection - more of her breast excised - then, at last, tests showed no more active cancer.

She took it as spur - strategized entry into writing - first several small novels - then massive one - emotive tearing-bare of Northern California - then yet-longer life-memoir - "Can't see how I'd bring it in anywhere under 2,000 pages" - then skies'd be clear.

She began them all, at once. She turned, effortless, between. When I came home she'd unfold worlds to me.

I'd never known such pride in another person.

Amid the far-planned working, in March of 1997 her back began to hurt. She tried walking, stretching, liniments, bed rest. Nothing helped.

Pain worse - walking turned difficult - mid-June, she fell, couldn't get up - ambulance came.

Cancer had returned in spine and bone marrow. Radiation stopped spinal - but not before it stole her legs. She was paralyzed: void from hips down.

It was inoperable. There'd be no recovering.

She was in hospital for five weeks.

On her birthday, she returned home. Strange new thing in living room - invalid's bed, wheelchair by side. A nurse taught me to inject blood-thinner.

We didn't speak of death directly. We'd fought so much just to be together.

Her bearing was Stoic. She wouldn't permit loss of self-control. If the cancer spread to brain, she said, she'd end her life. I prayed to the universe the day not come when I'd have to help my wife commit suicide. Anything but that.

She'd cheated death before. I prayed she would again. And she forged on - worked on the first small novel.

There were rallies. Blood transfusions helped. In time she could get herself into wheelchair - immediately insisted on cooking, housework.

I prayed for deeper healings.

As summer came, paleness began to spread across her. At a check-up, what she'd thought summer allergies turned out a collapsed lung.

She began to spend time in hospital. Yet she pressed pen to notebook, intent, blue ink almost black against white of pages, approaching last chapters.

She came home, took break before tackling climax, then end.

One Sunday in mid-September she felt dizzy. She went to hospital. Next morning I went to work, as usual, to keep fragile bark afloat.

In afternoon, a call - doctor - she'd started to feel drowning - received morphine - in coma - a process'd begun - in their opinion, irreversible.

I raced up-Peninsula, to her room.

Morphine counteract - some words - but she wasn't there - gradually, words left.

She breathed, quietly - her face composed - pale and beautiful.

Next day - a Tuesday - around noon, kissed her cheek, said'd be back from lunch in an hour. I went home, ate, restorative time at piano, then

traffic on way back.

I arrived fifty minutes late.

I went to her, touched her hair, said I was back, spoke with nurse at foot of bed.

She stopped breathing.

The nurse looked at me. "She waited for you!"

I went to her, touched her face, kissed her, spoke tenderly.

I felt the whole span of our life together.

After twenty minutes, death-changes advancing.

I knew our fight for life was done.

I walked out into a world blank, foreign, and trembling.

I returned to our little apartment of seven years.

I stood amid the wreck of our hopes.

Her books were all unfinished.

We'd had no children.

I fell upon my knees.

I howled.



III. THE FRIEND

1998-Feb. 2001

Dilly: *When you've been at Belmarsh for a little while, you'll understand what you want. It isn't me.*

Allen: *No? What is it, then?*

- *Love Letters* (Paramount Pictures, 1945)

I. Floating

September 1998 - May 1999.

My mother'd asked what I'd do if Beth died. "The old me," I'd said, "would die, and a new one would begin."

It was so.

Yet I was unborn, unborne. I lingered in interstices. I seemed alive, and the end of her suffering was a sort of liberation - but in the primary deep things I was a motor suddenly without load, suspended under dirigible balloons.

When I wasn't mourning, the world was beautiful, really new and simple, also dissolving. Yet, though nights were anxious - I'd bolt up, certain breath was stopping or organs'd come loose - would leap from bed and run about the house, blindly, to break the terror attacks - by day I faced it in innocence.

I wasn't alone. Beth and I'd had few friends - did most living between ourselves - but during the descent there'd been two strong souls.

Gwen lived in British Columbia. A moment's pass-by on the 'net had brought, in time, friendship of earlier era of honor. We spoke daily - our drive to cross-pollinate minded me of Kendrick - took planes to visit when we could. Without long daily confidings by 'net, many moments of busy-living years would've gone unrecorded.

Gabrielle lived close-by. In that last spring she and Beth'd come to care for each other deeply. We went on car-rides, and for brief times troubles weren't. After a warm day's trip to Luther Burbank's gardens in Wine Country, Beth told me if anything happened to her, Gabrielle'd be there for me, and she didn't want me to be alone. I said that untoward events weren't an option.

After, I was little more than an incarnate desire to understand. I walked down five hundred paths, one after another - and Gabrielle went with me, to each's end, all the while keeping in her hands what I'd needed to forget for a time: the thread back to the outside world.

She listened with unending patience, helped me see whole - and in

the old way of people, I reached for her, across gap. When she held me in the night, talked until dawn, I felt able to return. But I couldn't find the bridge.

We'd bonded. Her ties with Beth - she'd seen us together, knew what'd been lost - made it stronger. Yet as I came, she dispersed. She didn't leave, exactly, but neither was she passionately there.

Aspiring opera-singer, possessed of a startling rapid intuition, twenty-seven - she seemed made to be deeply responsive to life. She told me without reservation that she loved me - yet, this fading.

I could not leave - didn't want to, for I couldn't stand another death - yet I wasn't fully alive, and neither was this.

I knew not what to do.

We turned to her past, and there were likenesses to the one just gone - sensitive child in conflict with surroundings - adolescence bloomed - men to mete out same treatment - self didn't exist, body to be immobilized and used.

She'd turned inward, become deeply, complexly introverted.

I couldn't reject her.

It was maddening. Yet even anger wasn't hearty - was reflexive, reflective.

I felt myself turning pale, too.

It was in the spring of '99 I thought of Rand. I'd turned from her as from adolescent flame when I'd married. Now I was curious about others who'd received the strange touch of her mind.

I did a 'net search on her, read down the list, clicked on the first personal website.

It was in that moment that it began.



A girl's picture came on my screen - she'd broad shoulders, wide-spread cheekbones, dark straight hair, dark eyes like pools - eyes and face raised to a sphere of pure white light a few feet above her.

She didn't shrink in fear or worship. She seemed friendly to the light, anticipating, ready to rise, touch fingers to it. A sound file loaded, began

to play - a man's voice, weary, bit stuffed-nose'd: "a pin-up girl ... of the spirit."

I knew just what this was - crackly moment from old movie - Joseph Cotten - 1945. One of my favorites. Screenplay: Ayn Rand.

I clicked on the photo, and a new page invited me into the precincts of Jocelyn Berl. I accepted, and entered complexity: overflow of essays on everything from classical philosophy to anime - page upon page of photos, from Pre-Raphaelite art to bondage to flowers - enormous collection of personal journal entries, open for all to comb.

She offered direct contact on messenger system - ICQ - so I wrote *in media res* how good Cotten'd been in the whole monologue. Came back a single word: "Indeed."

Nothing more. I smiled. A challenge.

Her site provided username and location on a live-chat server, and I entered the place called *#rational* with the thought, "Jocelyn, I'm going to win your friendship."

There she was, at the list-top.

We began talking instantly, with slight-startled curiosity. She was quick, suspicious, sharp - seemed made of Christmas-tree lights and razor blades. Still, I felt us shade, through weeks, from strangers to beginning-to-be-friends.

She was the guiding spirit of a group - a few Colorado friends'd used 'net to stay in touch - it'd grown - mail list, chat rooms, personal journals - debated, analyzed one another - sought life-way of more color, romantic adventure, self-knowledge - without evading modernity.

They called themselves Citylighters - from Rand's evocations of romantic possibilities of cities lit lofty against the darkness.

And it apexed on Jocelyn: she'd started list, hosted the chat channels, journaled ceaselessly, challenged all to grow and become more.

I and Jocelyn talked inexhaustibly - didn't always agree - far from it - was not the point.

In one talk, I urged need for multi-level psychological depth. She held that happiness for male was setting a rational goal, achieving it, then repeating in series. I'd found it repellent, robotic.

Yet also provocative. I couldn't deny many males seemed so - or many

females found it alluring.

It didn't ring for me. I mused on why.

I began to remember the potential - and limitations - I'd found in Rand.



June 1999 - April 2000.

A steady visitor-rivulet wound through *#rational* and *#citylights* - drawn by her website or the spreading-word. Old regulars abided, often and long as could, and greeted new-come.

Each of the old - intense glowering presence named Mick Halvorsen - quiet steady program-code expert named Bin Nuan - boy named Taylor who came in once as I was leaving and to whom Jocelyn seemed to take a sisterly shine - and the others - was a distinct personality.

Yet, for all that, their coming-together yielded surprising, sometimes-tender camaraderie. And I - by Jocelyn's vouch, or versedness in Rand, or native aesthetic bent - was with them if not of them. To be without being submerged, to linger at point-of-interface, suited where I was.

I was eldest by years - Jocelyn was mid-twenties - and their young edges kept me from fully engaging. But the ideas batted were striking, and something valuable always took place between Jocelyn and me. She called herself post-Objectivist - took Rand's passion and aesthetics, left ideology behind.

I took inspiration from her - began keeping site of my own: began 'net journal, made pages about interests, memory-page to Beth, found long piece I'd written in '96 - *Dani* - it told story from inside - and put it up. Small offerings, to any who might find.

Nine months in, Jocelyn reminded I'd never subscribed to list. I read-and-wrote for a few days. The thought - none of it by her - seemed blocky, torpid under rapidity. Without personal contact it was pointless. I unsubscribed.

Jocelyn was divorcing her husband, moving to California with Mick - but we talked happily on ICQ of meeting once she'd moved. Knowing our friendship was becoming realer, I carefully gave reasons for leaving list.

I'd half-expected raised quills from her, but she took it easily.

After that, silence.

No letter, word from friends. The rapid-fire exchanges, synchronicities, targetings where each needed to grow - but a memory.

They read each other's journals daily - effective jungle telegraph. I investigated - she'd gone silent with all.

I revisited her site - reread essay announcing as only proper sexual paradigm male dominance, female submission. I remembered Halvorsen's brooding.

I hoped this was nothing bad.

I sent out the call every way I knew.

There was no reply.



It was bad timing.

In mid-'90s, Goosie'd moved a hundred miles south, just in from Monterey. My mother'd followed several years later. On April's first day in '00 I'd driven to Goosie's for lunch - my mother'd been late - unusual - didn't call - unheard - made my stomach tighten.

After hour-and-a-quarter, phone rang - she'd been found wandering, dizzy and confused, by ocean, brought in by ambulance.

We flew uphill to hospital - I walked in, looked down to her green eyes - they moved back and forth - I asked, tender, how she felt - words floated out - meaningless - held her fingers in mine - no answering touch.

Tics began spreading through her body, then all-convulsing seizures. She was in a quick-spreading electric thicket.

She'd almost lost - but medicines from doctor-minds given by nurse-hands brought her back - arrested lightning, soothed explosive pressure in her vessels.

In few days, diagnosis: brain cancer, from unsuspect lung tumor, sourced from breast tumor cut years before - she'd always laughed off, called almost-no-cancer. Tumor cut from her brain in perfect operation - radiation and chemotherapy aimed at lung tumor, and it shrank.

But it would not go.

There would be no recovering.

She sat straight in hospital bed, looked me in the eye, brightly said she'd survive five years, do all she'd put off - London and Paris again, then sail to the land whose history she'd studied for decades but never visited: Egypt.

I thought of Beth's pressing pen to paper.

I hoped my mother'd live to taste her plan-fruits, and that their juice'd be pure and strong and sweet.



May - August 2000.

Months passed. Jocelyn's site vanished.

Citylighter things began to wither.

I resigned myself to a long siege of unknowing.

Months later, I wrote Taylor to check in.

I stared at his reply.

Jocelyn was alive and well. She'd moved to California on schedule. She'd simply dropped most of her friends.

I was angry.

Memory came of Rand's high-flown ideals - and her lies to the world about her affair with young Branden.

I waved a dismissive hand.

Good riddance, I thought.

Goodbye, Citylights - goodbye, *#rational*.



2. Becalm

September - December 2000.

My life was in a bright calm.

I had goals - at work, home with Gabrielle, my mother's care - and I achieved them.

The sails of my life hung slack.

I stayed busy above and below decks.

I delved not into the past, nor raised my eyes too far into future.

It was the Horse Latitudes, and I knew it.

I waited.

In the last week of November, air began to shift.

Not enough to move me, but I felt it.

After a week, it stopped.

It left me achingly expectant.

I looked, inside and out, for the cause.

I'd made a friend in the East Bay.

Was I coming to love Ingrid?

That I did not feel.

But what?



9 December 2000.

One early afternoon, sudden light.

I *knew*.

Someone was coming.

I could feel her approach.

I went to my journal and wrote of it.

I wanted to reach my hand to the future and touch hers, but I couldn't.

So I set the words, so she'd know I'd felt it, that very hour, that very day.

At end - "Come soon, dear friend. I loved you before I knew you."
I'd a sense it'd be vast.
I was not wrong.



Several hours later, a pull to my website's guestbook.
I hadn't looked in weeks.
I glanced down.
At end, an unfamiliar entry.
I read the name.
A little tremor through me.

*Greetings, I don't think that you and I ever spoke on #citylights, but it was through my interactions with that group of people (and most specifically through my boyfriend, Taylor Brandt) that I found your site. I've looked at your site before, but I have by no means explored the entirety of it. I tend to look at in-between times, and every time I look I come away with more to think about, more to learn, a feeling of expansion and joy, no matter what it was that I looked at. Thank you. -Mira Graham
Posted: Saturday, December 9th 2000 - 10:52:38am*

I leaned back in my chair, in my home office.
I did not know of her.
Yet I felt her. Not recognition - hadn't been enough of the personal yet - but the action of her mind.
Fine things played through persisting light. She'd brightness, clarity, awareness of social groupings. Exact mind. Strongly differentiated. She'd understood my writing-intent. I felt abundance in her.
I hesitated. 'Net friends were flitty, and I didn't want another disappointment. But I liked her and her unique sound. She wasn't responsible for Jocelyn's perfidy.
I looked again, trying to read back into the wordless. I looked for clichés, awkward, conventional. There were none.
Through simplest means, a personal expression. I wondered if she was in art - seemed to have creative energy. I tried to trace her thoughts -

couldn't, was blocked somehow - so I went to intuition.

On the first level, I was to know she was there.

On next - to let her in.

Deeper - faint - beckon - come closer.

Further, I could not go.

I surfaced. Here simple enough: from Taylor, she'd learned my site. But how she wrote felt intimate - spiritual space in which boyfriend was acknowledged but not included.

And so, in my depths, without reason, I wondered if we'd be lovers.

I set it aside. My faith was good relationships shouldn't be molested. She didn't seem to be in anything less.

I cleared my conscious self and began to type.

First - her full name.

Second - she'd understood perfectly.

Third - further correspondence'd be welcome.

Last - my full name.

I hit "send."

When I told Gabrielle, that evening, she smiled.



10 December 2000.

Next morning, small shock: her answer. I inhaled, cleared myself, began to read.

She was feeling bold this Sunday morning - gone with friend to church - chamber orchestra's performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* - harpsichordist, organist, two trumpeters she called marvelous. Bach did joy so well, and it'd been good to return to his mathematic precision after recent excursion to chaotic lands of rock n' roll.

(Bach - my first musical passion.)

My site'd impressed - she wanted to see what more might come of direct contact with me. With that, she confessed, boldness was at end. She pantomimed laugh at herself, declared she'd leave before embarrassing herself further, thanked for my note, and was gone.



I went to her site - a journal, poetry she'd written, favored links, profile page - to journal first - begun past September - recuperating from injury sustained while dancing -

{ *dances?* }

- been nursed through by Taylor - some entries detail-teemed - plunged one into middle of her days - sometimes short-breathed rushes of fact - then moments of wisdom in which mind and feeling'd never gone apart - unbroken, beneath the come-and-go phenomena, a steady light-mind and the expressing of it.

To poetry - less depth, still good - more obscure, involuted, darker-tinged.

To section "For the Curious" - the profile.

I turned very still.

My new-found correspondent was no scholarly *literateuse* of twenty-five - or forty - turning out eloquence in a dusty library.

She was a ballerina - on her own in Boston - journal'd mentioned roommate - train at School of the Boston Ballet - received college degree just after turning seventeen.

She'd just turned eighteen.



The first thing, after, was a memory.

I was in a darkened movie theater, Beth - companion on hundreds of screen-voyages - at my side. We were watching a documentary on a father of electronic music, Leon Theremin.

Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys was on-screen, struggling in an idea's birth. The mind guttered and smoked, but under clumped ashes the force was still there. He moved his hands and shoulders, stuttered, then rushed: "Children of God are in their twenties ... the twenty year olds, not really rapidly approaching thirty ... not quite adults, really, but - kind of flam-

boyant, a little bit whimsical.” The moment passed, and I do not know if any other sitters knew the insight that’d just emerged. But Beth and I knew.

At that age, the start of standing forth, a clarity and passion come that most lives never see again. A painter once said, “Every child is a great artist - what do we do to them?”

Came memory of Jocelyn, our best talk. She’d been working on a long essay in college on the meaning and importance of the triune passion in adolescents for ideas, for romance, for the aesthetic. Of that, she’d told me impassioned, one must never, ever let go.

I wondered at allure of sex. I felt none. There was attraction between us, energy-swell when I’d read her age - but not specified to libido. This was far from the dark and humid, as if all’d taken place in upper air.

I felt something very good about her.

I replied, and went into my day. Now and then, I wondered what would come of this.

I felt no conflict about Gabrielle. When we’d first talked relationship-philosophy, she’d denounced monogamy more forcefully than Beth ever had.



11-31 December 2000.

In our letters of that month, no overt emotion, no finery - and nothing less than perfect clarity. We spoke with complete freedom about our minds and lives.

We spoke not of each other, weren’t conventionally friendly. Like strangers who’d met on converging paths and walked to a vista, we looked at this, then at that: outward, what was to be seen.

Early on, she asked if she might link to my site on hers. I didn’t tell how honored I was. When it was up, I looked at the adjective she’d put next: “brilliant.”

Few days later, note from Taylor - his girlfriend, he’d heard, was conversing with me - was she behaving? I wrote back - unsure if friendly or territorial - asked what manner of misbehavior I might expect.

There was no answer.

Our flow continued, undisturbed.

I didn't read her every journal, past or present. I preferred to leave a variety to enjoy.

And so, only years later did I read early-November entry in which she'd spoken of one of my journals as having a transcendent beauty she wished to take into her own voice and write in during that chilly autumn night - and an entry of mid-December in which she called our letters one of the joys of her life.

I didn't know any of this.

So, when I'd written just before Christmas and - first time - no answer for days, I'd thought - day when few friends'd turned oddly silent - our thread'd snapped.

Annoyed, I deleted the directory that held our letters.

I never told her, and later, as I asked if she'd copied, lied that I'd lost them by mistake.

A few days after, she answered, clear-bright as ever.

I didn't know that her relationship'd been in serious trouble for weeks - and that during the time she'd not written, she had broken up with Taylor.



3. Breezing

1-7 January 2001.

First of the month, I'd told her I was flying to British Columbia, would be off 'net. I'd arrived on the second, stayed five days, then prepared to fly home.

After check-in, I'd walked to long plate-glass window, aluminum-framed, saw white body of idling jet on plowed tarmac.

I looked at blue sky, then turned to waiting area.

My eye fell on 'net kiosk. I walked to it, bought time, read news, letters. I wrote Gwen I'd enjoyed our visit, loved our friendship. Still driving - would never expect it. Wrote Gabrielle I couldn't wait to see her wonderful face and bright eyes.

Almost no time - wondered if I'd left anything unsaid, anywhere. And Mira came to me.

From the start, I'd kept things impersonal, at clean moderate distance. Now, I questioned. If I suddenly died, she'd never know I'd enjoyed her letters, had truly liked her.

No time to think. I took dictation from within: I wrote I was flying back, no time at all, never told her I enjoyed our contact, would be on-line next day.

I closed with a quality we shared.

*quicksilverisbly,
michael*

I hit "send," got on board, and flew.



8 January 2001.

Going personal carried risk. I didn't want to lose quality. As I drove into work, I was edgy - and eager.

Mira'd written - hailed my return - began life-update - been at parents' over holidays - returned same day I had - been met at Boston airport by her friend Harris - despite home's restorativeness, she'd found Colorado narrow, not supportive of joy and openness she felt in Boston.

She spoke briefly of breakup - she'd been unhappy for months - put all her energy into relationship, and ended up so far off her path it appalled her.

She'd asked family doctor to prescribe something for depression - ran in family - hadn't kicked in yet, but good doing something for her own benefit - resolved to make good life for herself in Boston, was energized at prospect.

She said Gwen reminded her of her best friend - they'd visited daily in Colorado 'til Andrea'd gone back to Oregon - Mira'd almost visited Jocelyn and Halvorsen, but with breakup hadn't had time.

Our contact'd been one of the best things in recent life. Taylor'd left her feeling small, unimportant, moreover in Boston she'd often been alone. But my enjoyment of her letters, my finding something in them, meant much - the trip home'd renewed her, but my letters'd sustained her.

She was sure I knew how hard it was to find one who consistently challenged, who inspired new thought-directions. That was what my letters did, and she loved it.

Were she modest she'd probably blush, but she'd learned from Jocelyn the all-importance of honesty.

She had to go, and hoped to hear from me soon. She closed, as she had several times before, "Hugs, Mira."

I smiled as I closed it. Being more personal hadn't ruined things, at all.



9-13 January 2001.

Over the next few days, we told of our lives - not slow, not quick - just right.

She spoke of Colorado - long backyard with pond and trees, flower beds, vegetables growing - I saw them - spoke of Boston and Colorado cats - felt them - spoke suddenly of this friend or that, and they rose before

me, limelit - Andrea and she liked to touch things together - being near Andrea was like standing in sunlight.

That part of her sexually drawn to girls - I drew in breath - we'd never spoken of sex - wished she and Andrea were lovers - they worked so well on every other level - it'd be such fun.

As I mused - the women with whom I'd been deepest - Dani, Beth, Gabrielle - were bisexual - I saw Mira's passing mention of Celexa for the depression.

She told bit of romance-history: before Taylor, been Matt for a year - after split, she'd sworn to stay single for some time - within three months was dating Taylor - now swore to stay single - this time, because she was stronger, she'd keep it.

I wondered how long it would be until she loved again.



14 January 2001.

In her profile she'd mentioned her faith. I'd always thought Unitarian Universalism gentlest of all. On this day she went into detail.

She told of UU youth conferences - sometimes more than a hundred people. After rules'd been explained, small groups would form, go off, get to know each other, then undertake some assignment or discussion on a set theme, such as facades and masks, or sex and gender - they were called "touch groups."

I thought it beautiful. It was what I'd sought.

Jocelyn, who'd also abandoned her, was sending letters offering renewed fealty. They were ignored.

At letter's end - followed by colon-dash-parenthesis smile - she wrote that whyever I liked her, she was glad. She announced beginning of a "MiraEvilCampaign" to persuade me to come see her in Boston - her apartment, she wrote, had air mattress of surpassing comfort - my name all over it.

She wished me a beautiful day - expressed hope she'd hear from me soon - closed with hugs, from her to me, and signed her name.

I felt her touch.



15-16 January 2001.

Her first journal-entry in several days contained merry mention of long letter from me. As I read it, her posting it seemed of some significance. I didn't know why.

The next entry - after muse on sharp beauty of life in its complexity, completeness, chaos, and synchrony - ended on something new: "I love being alive."

Something seemed happening in her.



17 January 2001.

I began a letter shortly after midnight, told Mira I loved her beauty-of-life entry, added some of the beauties I'd seen during day-just-passed.

Each weekday I drove on Great Highway to work. That morning'd been clear light-blue-and-touch-of-yellow sky to south - ruffled light from sun rising to east - to west, beyond ocean breakers, far down-sea, fluffy cumulus clouds on lip of horizon - ocean and sky-cloud merged - everything in clear salted air just as it should be - not what'd been waited for, worked toward, or planned, but what *was*.

it can be said. it's nonsense to say it's all some mysterium that words cannot penetrate. it can be said, but not directly. there's endless more to say, so i'll end here. more before long :)



Later that day, a letter. I'd to look twice at the address.

Jocelyn asked this stay between us, but didn't expect me to do so. Then she got down to business.

"Mira. Lovely, sweet, charming, girl. Not woman. Girl."

I knew this, she said - asked me to remember - hold Mira's hand as brother, nothing more, in her transition from child to adult. In years to

come, things might change, but for now, “from one soul to another,” I should respect “her current levels” as the gentleman she knew I could be.

She closed “with tenderness,” her name - and postscript that no reply was necessary.

I looked at it and felt my temper rise.

“Nine months,” I thought.

In dangerous amusement, by return note I made it clear Mira wasn’t to be discussed.

Jocelyn said nothing more.

For the rest of the day, my temper bled into everything.

I was less careful.



18 January 2001.

I walked into work in anticipation.

A letter from Mira, longest yet.

She’d loved my description of driving, answered with evocation of quiet pajama’d mornings in Boston. Those’d change, though, with job, landed just day before, at college bookstore. She was excited by prospect of even more activity, meeting new people, extra cash - which, saved, would help with all the traveling she’d be doing in the next year to find dancing job.

She spoke of strange power of dreams, remarked notable side-effect of Celexa was remembering dreams again. Two years before, she’d had most powerful of her life: she was Death, fallen in love with mortal girl who’d little time to live. In aftermath, Mira’d made it a novella, and though it needed work she deemed it best thing she’d ever written.

She’d read my letter just before rushing off to ballet class - praised it as a beautiful thing to receive in early morning. All day she’d wondered how to reply, but when she’d actually sat down it’d been easy and just flowed out.

And though she’d to write journal, finish viewing movie and sewing pair of pointe shoes, then get out of house quickly as possible, she wondered if I’d computer chat program so she could talk to me sometime. She gave contacts on ICQ and AIM, offered also to chase down cash, or get a calling

card, or use Dialpad if by chance I wanted to talk voice. (She'd told that, as her and roommate's budget was hair-thin, she'd no long-distance access.)

She advised she'd be on 'net less and less, for new job began in few days, so if she took a bit longer to write her replies to please bear that in mind.

She closed with hugs and wishes for more beautiful dreams, and signed her name.

I finished in hilarity. Nothing stood in the way. I wrote at once, told of Jocelyn's advice, mocked mother-hen pose, told Mira she knew things Jocelyn never would. I closed saying once I'd sent I was going on ICQ or AIM to find her.

As I brought up ICQ - very program, on very computer, on which I'd had my best talks with Jocelyn - our past five weeks came, solemn-joyful, to the fore.

I added her, not knowing if she was still home, not knowing how long I'd have to wait.

She added me back, near-instantly.

She was there.

I took a breath, and brought fingers to the keyboard.



We greeted one another, admitted to smiling.

She was happy - had my letter - one from Andrea - talk with second-oldest Citylighter (irascible critic, about thirty, named James Roque) - now talk with me - and night before in her bed "a warm body."

I felt surprise, slight arousal, jealousy-flash.

Warm bodies wonderful, I wrote, hoped this'd as-warm soul. Very warm, she said - not always good at letting others see. I exhaled. She wasn't stony about sex.

He was better at showing it to her than to others - made her happy - loved exploring people's unplumbed depths.

It reached my stomach, then spread - trickle of desire overflowed a low internal wall - wondered what she'd be like as a lover, find in my depths - told her that'd opened door for me - couldn't discern what was inside,

but it was open.

She was strongly people-centric, she continued - even when indicting some for mundanity, found them fascinating, deep, beautiful - so she liked coming to know and understand them.

She asked why I was smiling.

I sat up little straighter - with slight sense-of-risk, told: filled with our starting to interact - nothing else much existed - was answering phone and handling duties with greatest rapidity to get back - asked her how that suited - long pause - felt slight nerves - she said it did nicely, confessed to being awfully smiley.

Vapor of dangerous humor rode up on happiness' tail - I wanted to push boundaries - affected innocence, asked why so smiley - she called me silly - was certainly not her poor cat, who'd just gone into heat, or her cold apartment in Boston winter - it was I.

I denied the possibility, called myself good Objectivist, stuck to facts strictly.

Why, then, did she get the feeling I could be as wacky and Puck-like as her friend Palo if I so pleased? He, it seemed, was a traveling jewelry salesman, inveterate punster, given to sending people on treasure hunts to locate him when he appeared on surprise visits - "quasi-believed" in faerie, as Mira herself did - she believed, too, in dark power of owls in woods - and he'd taught her and her parents how to play hearts when he'd recently come to visit.

This felt like playful mutual joy.

She suddenly broke in with pantomimed poke and tickle. I knew directly were going to become flirtatious - I pantomimed elbow-nudge, declared tickle fight could be brutal - no prisoners, I warned - she bragged she always won, then admitted more like almost always - I said she was arousing my competitive fires - she laughed, declared she'd still win - I punned on beating her well, emerging victorious, victory'd be mine - she asked when I was coming, so she might hone skills.

"Soon - soon," I said, smiling.

"Alright then," said she.

It was as simple as that.

Shortly after, she fell quiet - I asked how she was, said I wasn't pull-

ing Jocelyn-waif routine but we'd just talked intensely - she was fine, had turned bit contemplative, but intensity didn't scare her - what scared her was apathy.

Sometime, I said, I'd tell how I'd grown in intensity, how aversion to was one of my biggest social dissatisfies - she replied, briefly indicating interest - fell silent once again - I pantomimed looking for her on far horizon - she wrote instantly - yes, she'd become distracted talking to too many people at once - focused on one another afresh - talked through morning until she'd to go forth and dance.

I felt lighter on my feet, rest of the day.



19 January 2001.

I walked into work the next morning, curiosity in my veins.

A letter awaited - glanced reflexively at time-header - she'd been up late.

Boys, she'd concluded, were trouble - she'd just told the unnamed warm body "let's just be friends" - he'd reacted badly - this meant no more cuddles, no more touch for a while.

{ *did you feel it too?* }

In other news, she'd had very good ballet class despite problems with turning - months of turn-problems, actually - silly, since in summer they'd been fantastic - things seemed to be improving, though, and she was having fun in class.

The joy from talking'd bled over into class. It'd made concentrating easier, so that she hadn't just gone through the motions, but truly danced.

{ *you felt it* }

She'd spent rest of evening listening to music with Harris and her friend Hank, who'd fantastic sound system in miniscule space - they'd listened to Bach, Tchaikovsky, Copland, Vivaldi, Apocalyptica, Tori Amos, Dar Wil-

liams, Indigo Girls, Nine Inch Nails, Handel, and very many others.

“Do you know Dar Williams, Michael Dear? And do you know Gorecki’s *Third Symphony*?”

She’d class in morning, otherwise’d have written pages upon pages more - hoped I’d beautiful dreams and she’d get to talk to me soon.

I looked at what she’d called me, for a long time.



The girl who’d closed with hugs and her name didn’t know that a few days before, on a drive into darkening evening, I’d spoken of her to Gabrielle.

I’d shown letters as they’d gone or come, told how everything’d felt, but now, as we’d passed San Francisco’s airport - dusk-light from over Pacific, land about us dark, Gabrielle’s pale attentive face turned to me - I told Mira’s world: on her own in Boston, active, attending the School, focused determinedly on career in dance, free of dating miasmas, love of beauty - her views on Jocelyn, her values, how good it all felt.

I finished. Eucalyptus trees passed in their glooms against still-bright sky. The car went into a banked curve. Gabrielle looked out the window, then back, smiling. White lines of headstones in Veterans’ Cemetery wheeled behind her as she spoke.

“You know, if you were in love with her - I think that’d be completely wonderful. I wouldn’t feel any jealousy at all. She’s got her own life, she’s really *on it*, she brings lots of good things to you - she’s a totally positive thing in your life!”

A thrill moved along my shoulders and chest up into my head. Mira and I in love?

“You really feel that?” I said.

She said yes, that she knew it could be: from how I talked about her, from how Mira and I spoke to one another, from how I *was*.

We rode over toward sea, then by shore to home. We talked of it, held hands, fingers curling, until we got out of the car in front of our apartment-building.



But she would know, this day. For she hailed me on ICQ, soon as I signed on that morning from work.

“Michael...” she said, “come and play with me...”

I asked where she wished - flowering meadows of daffodil and asphodel? or a city at night, with street lights above dark streets? Flowering meadows, she said. She wanted sunshine.

She produced some of her own.

Mira: - gives you a great big good morning hug-

Michael: - curls his arms around you and holds you close-

She declared I'd to come see her that summer amid Colorado's mountains she missed in the East.

We spoke of Wilde - she'd first read *The Importance of Being Earnest* at thirteen, almost fell off chair laughing - of imaginary friends, whom she called self-manifestations - she mentioned Jocelyn'd sent a warning-letter to Harris, too.

Spoke of music - she said we'd to take over one of the studio pianos at the School - told her she'd to come to California - see Wine Country, the Water Temple, cliffs at Davenport - she would, just as soon as she'd saved the money.

We began to speak of love-experiences - I told of Gabrielle's singing, her passionate Italian-Armenian blood, her beauty - tumult of our early days, discomfort - and growth - of pushing buttons. Mira said, yes, “jealous” was word she sought - wished she'd a connection like that.

She told of Matt, who'd been comfort - Taylor, with whom there'd been spark and passion but not of healthy kind - a boy named Nick who'd feral connection to nature, probably her healthiest relationship of all.

She wished to change subject but didn't know to what. Had I any suggestions?

Because it was about our new friendship, I said, and shed light on my lover, she might like to hear of a recent talk.

She invited me to go ahead.

As I began, I knew this would decide the future.

She sent nothing but brief indications of listening - “very attentively, I

might add.”

I was done.

She pantomimed a sigh. She was glad - didn't want Gabrielle to feel jealous - called me a big spirit - expressed harmony and comfort at non-exclusivity - had decried society's ideas of love to a friend just a few days before - how was one supposed to get all one needed from one person? - how foolish, thinking love a finite thing, only given to one person at a time - love was large, she said, compassed so much, no matter what kind it might be.

Spread wide one's mind and heart, I said - inspire others to do the same. “Exactly,” said Mira, smiling.

Mira: And now, dearest, I must go into town and dance.

I thanked her for another happy day. She expressed gratitude for the same.

She went, and I sat there, looking at what she'd called me.



We talked that evening of favorite fictional characters: I spoke of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* - she, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* trilogy. We spoke of imaginary friends, of ghosts - she told in detail of the ghost Michael in the Colorado house.

Later, of music.

She wanted to hear me play sometime. I mentioned I'd phone by the piano.

She sent a string of digits and logged off.

I walked down the hallway, to Gabrielle's office, to tell - she smiled, wished luck. I went back, closed door, sat at piano, took a breath, and dialed.

A voice - medium-pitched, clear and intense, quiet - said “Hello.”

I said nothing. I set it on floor - brought fingers to the keys - thought of the ghost and her telling - began to improvise in F# major.

When I was done, I let a few beats of silence go by.

I put it to my lips.
"Hello, Mira."
"Oh Michael - hello!"
We began to speak.
All that'd been in our writing was there, and more. I remember not a
word of what we said.
But it flowed and sang.



4. Turning

20 January 2001.

My mother'd always gripped life tightly. She'd left hospital in April '00 - not to her high-shouldered rose-garden house in the hills, but Goosie's ranch house by the river in the valley.

Now the hill-house was to sell, and Gabrielle and I were assigned to rent a truck, drive down Coast Highway, load sofas, televisions, computer, other of my mother's worldly goods, take them to San Francisco for our own.

My mother'd been determinedly upbeat - talked of moving out of Goosie's, buying condo in the valley, driving again when seizures'd gone.

But I felt that truckload would be the first installment of my inheritance, delivered not far in advance.

So the friend-gift shone especially bright.



21 January 2001.

As we lurched onto Great Highway, Gabrielle's face tightened. She asked what I thought was happening between Mira and me.

I looked - Pacific surf behind her - said I felt myself coming completely alive, a living whole to my toes - no idea where it was going, but right now friendship like no other - a stream running both ways, open and fresh - assured her it hadn't harmed my feelings for her - in its balancing some of our clashes, I actually felt closer.

Some worry stayed. As we reached Coast Highway and began great Pacifica descent, I told her nothing'd happen without her full and free consent. She need only say no, and what she didn't wish to happen - would not happen.

She eased all the way, then.



A few hours later we were visiting with my mother. She hobbled stiff-legged, hair cropped, smiling brightly, forgetting stray details but warmly grounded at last.

She insisted on making lunch - at table Goosie held forth - defending, then challenging, the status quo - willful and mercurial as ever.

After lunch, Gabrielle and I drove up to house - locked, unoccupied going on a year - wrestled the truck full.

Driving back we spoke of non-exclusivity, of my and Mira's possibilities, and stayed easy. Small winds pushed, and I thought of things - of life's passingness, of my family, of Beth, of Gabrielle by my side, of a girl in Boston far away.



That night, hauling-up done, I looked at Mira's journal - entry of day before - wrote of joy of great music, sensuality of hot baths, beauty of her favorite E.E. Cummings poem - and at the end, addressed me directly.

"Michael: My moments of contact with you are thrilling and rich. What adventure are we going to go on next?"

On ICQ, more, to me alone, through day - earliest a note saying she was bursting with energy - hoped we could talk - on the phone, if I pleased - didn't want to be a pest, however, so tell her buzz off if I liked - later, sad we'd not talked - but it was alright - warned she'd sent letter she called mildly paranoid - signed off with hugs and a "bye..." that sounded distinctly morose.

The letter began with a quote, asked if I could guess what she'd been reading. She pantomimed a smile.

Of course I can, goof. It's only a book I published. You've been nosing around my site.

She told of buying music (including Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1* - my first classical record and she wanted to hear it) and possibly doing some singing - did Gabrielle have suggestions for her?

Then, she said, had a secret little Mira-neurosis to confess - was, for various reasons, terrified she was making pest of herself - didn't want me to think her unhealthily obsessed or big intruder - if I felt any such, I was

to tell her to go off and calm down a bit, and she would - it was just she'd spent the eighteenth and nineteenth completely energized by our talks - she called herself greedy, often-lonely, so part of her reached out to our contact - she'd plenty of people to play with, to watch movies with, to go to dinner, and such - but very few who excited and inspired her as did I, at least there in Boston - all she wanted from me was friendship, so if in any way she was jeopardizing that I was to "please please" tell her.

She mentioned the job began next day - told of coming week (included premiere of a choreography she'd done) - sent hello to Gabrielle, mentioned she'd love to talk with her, too, sometime - as ever, were the words: "Hugs, Mira."

I smiled, shaking my head.



22 January 2001.

In a letter from work, I told Mira how wonderfully misplaced her fears were, how I wanted her closer, not further.

On ICQ, when she got on, as though we'd never stopped. I asked after her knowledge of Horowitz, sent clip - him improvising in Italy. I called, to hear her hearing.

We shared music and affection until she'd to go. We parted in happiness.



23 January 2001.

Gabrielle'd felt it was time they'd contact in their own right, so while I worked she sent me bits of the letter as she composed.

Under title "New Friends," she cheered Mira's arrival and its effect.

There is this tender rosy glow about his energy that is unlike anything I've seen in him before. I think he is truly happy for the first time since I have known him.

Mira's poems made her think of me - she felt kinship with Mira in

their mutual interest in faerie, magick, Goddess - closed with hope they'd talk more soon.

She told me she'd found Mira's poetry amazing, especially in precocity.

Gabrielle: what is inside this person??

Gabrielle: her poems...there's a certain fluid balance to them, a wholeness of perception that is like you.

I answered I felt it too, that Mira seemed drawn to coupling the aspirational with the concrete.



Home, I told Gabrielle how good her letter'd felt. She agreed. As I looked in her eyes I noticed an unusual shine. The usual veil between her and life seemed ripped.

I asked what she was feeling.

"I don't - know! I feel a connection with Mira, too. I don't know if it's through you or it's just her and me, but there's something there."

Veils, it seemed, were falling all over.



When Mira and I met on ICQ, later, it was different.

Perhaps it was the letter, or knowing each other better, or other things too - but we were closer, our colors sharper, deeper - we were laughingly, weightlessly flirty.

I wondered aloud what music to send if she felt - receptive - she pantomimed large smile, declared she couldn't imagine turning down much of anything from me, particularly music.

I said I was working on travel plans.

Mira: -shy- Do you want to come and watch some of my classes while you are here?

Michael: that would be beautiful :)

We spoke of meeting - noticed we kept making date, time earlier - and then to phone, talked for over an hour.

Whether were humorous, soft, or serious, through our times light-spirit happiness threaded itself.



24 January 2001.

Next morning, to my site's guestbook - checked every few days, now. There was a new entry, from a Catherine.

Salutations. I've never told you, but I love the poignancy that saturates your words. -C
Posted: Wednesday, January 24th 2001 - 01:38:53am

I remembered - Citylighter, close acquaintance of Mira's - they'd never met, but talked - lay on phone, at night, describe surroundings in ornate glitter detail, share impressions of the days.



Mira wrote Gabrielle that morning. I'd wanted them to speak independently, so'd asked Gabrielle to save letters and possible chats, but show me none.

To me, Gabrielle praised Mira's forthright, considerate ways - teased her close of "Hugs? if I may?" wasn't so bad, either - but, she said, truly a friendship was developing well.

I looked across this good land, saw nought amiss, inland or at shore. We seemed animated by will to do well by one another - it, and goodness it brought, was palpable.

I came home with a surprise for Mira. When she greeted me, I fired off a date and time, no other words. She gasped.

We were to meet at the airport known as BOS. She was shocked, delighted - just as I'd wanted.

Once our exclaiming'd died down, we continued the never-ending converse.

Mira'd seen my site's photos. I knew nought of her looks, didn't want until we met - just for fun. Now she ribbed me: Gabrielle'd guessed, dead-on - I was forbidden to cheat, for she was liking being mysterious far too much.

If she wished to think herself so, I said, I'd not disabuse - she asked what, then - more transparent, I said - she conceded was true - "Good grll," I said, teasing - she shouted not to "good grll" her, pantomimed indignance.

Mira: I'm not little Jocelyn submissive, silly boy!

Michael: methinks the grll doth protest too much!

She admitted pose was mock. I laughed to myself, that we could be thus.

I excused myself to call Gwen - she'd a question. In college had majored in fluid engineering - loved field, had exceptional ability, but was unconfident - held tangential job: marine insurance underwriting, essentially clerk-level.

She asked what I thought she was capable of.

I told: could rise high doing what she'd passion for. World needed fewer lights under bushels.

She thanked, said it'd stirred for some reason - would let me know more as she felt it out. We said goodnight.

I was hungry - when back on ICQ said was taking Gabrielle out for sushi at "26's" - downhill then off on Clement. It was Mira's sleep-time anyway, so I pantomimed taking her in my arms, wished her goodnight. She asked to ask one quick question.

Mira: -shy- would you be comfortable with us sleeping in the same bed when you come to visit?

Mira: I want to be able to touch you in my sleep...

Michael: yes, i would :)

Michael: au revoir

I logged off hastily, stood, walked to hallway closet. I was agitated.

We'd grown more flirty, tactile, and it felt wonderful - but lovers end more quickly than friends, in uglier ways.

I didn't want this to end - but didn't want to neglect an unprecedented possibility.

So, then, middle path - natural, not reckless, not safe. Stay in touch with connection - find what *it* wants - it'll show where, when, how little, how much.

I put on overcoat, turned - Gabrielle by door, smiling - walked down steps, through gatework to sidewalk.

As I turned left, downhill, wondered what being with Mira in the flesh'd be like.



Gabrielle and I walked back in and split to our offices. I went to desk, brought up Mira's journal - from sense of expectation.

There was new entry: "Peaks and Valleys." I noticed she'd called the page "peaks.html."

She wrote of meeting homeless man, on the trolley - he'd begged for help, pleaded not to be left out in cold all night - couldn't have gotten his wheelchair up her stairs - couldn't help him in any way - it'd made her feel utterly impotent.

Started job - boring but tolerable, offered likeable co-workers, huge book-discount - best class in months that morning - everything'd just flowed, even formerly-troublesome turns - she'd been wonderfully exhausted after, and on way home she'd wished someone waiting with hugs and touches.

But most glorious thing of all, she wrote, was her budding friendship with one - I saw my full name.

We'd been writing about six weeks, and'd just started talking by voice and chat past week. Every moment of contact'd been incredible, vivid, deep. Thoughts, emotions contacted with lightning rapidity, rang out like small silver bells. I'd played piano for her - she'd reclined, absorbed; when my voice'd come, it'd been just as it should.

She'd known exchange like this before, meeting of passions and souls,

but never so deep so fast. No matter what future - if a friendship forever or a "bright, brief, comet-like bit," though she prayed not - she'd be grateful forever for the experience of being able to share like this, completely, to reach this new emotional depth.



I tingled. She knew the purity, and she'd told the world.

All wasn't perfect. Seeing an end - especially at our start - annoyed me. Odd passivity, as if it'd just happen. Picture of our contact was beautiful - and exaggerated.

Yet she'd gotten the feeling, the underlying pulse, so right.

I read again, smiled at flamboyant boldness, imagined more ruckus from the Citylighters.

The dangerous amusement returned.

I began to write in my journal.



25 January 2001.

I finished a little past midnight.

I uploaded it on dedicated 'net line - thought of her reading, morning - worried briefly it was too much - but her entry'd left no doubt she felt it, too.

I read my words again, lingered at end.

I will not turn from her - nor do I think will she, from me. We will see it through, to all the places that it and we lead.

May it be endless!

I wrote, upon a time, "Come soon, dear friend. I loved you before I knew you."

And you did come, that very day.

Now that you have, I love you, Mira, all the more.

Gabrielle was in her office, researching opera history on dial-up. I walked in, showed her Mira's entry, then mine.

Her eyes shone. She hugged me, we kissed and, soon after, pulled one another into bed.



Work's morning had much not Mira - nothing that was. I knew eyes were reading, notes being sent, phones possibly being dialed - but from her, silence.

That afternoon, sudden, on ICQ - something very bad'd happened - could I call? I did, instantly.

Her voice was hoarse - been crying - ballet evaluation earlier that day - gone terribly - her two principal teachers'd been dissatisfied with outward hip rotation - less so with several other areas - without improving, not continue in Intensive - real dancers' training-ground - worst of all, they'd said that in their estimation she'd little to no chance of making it as professional dancer.

I asked her to walk me through - what was hip rotation? why important? did she think them right? why hadn't they notified before now?

I said we'd work on together. I'd research nutritional approaches to increasing flexibility. She'd appeal the decision, work out plan to break through problem areas.

We worked well together - turned directly to facts, action - could feel unhappiness lift from her shoulders - told her she'd win through, and if I could help, it'd be my pleasure.

She rallied in strength and cheer. A few minutes later we bade good-bye.

I reflected, turning to work, that hearing her strength and return to hope was one of the best gifts the world'd ever sent me.



26 January 2001.

The next day, she was upbeat, bright. We talked for an exceptionally long time. Andrea was urging her to be more sexual, unabashedly colorful - we segued into erotic movies - she named *The Pillow Book*, *Sirens*, *Kama Sutra*,

and *Queen Margot* as favorites. I was musing on opulent focus on women, certain sensory innocence to it all, when Mira said perhaps we'd watch *Queen Margot* together in Boston.

My heart began to beat a little faster. My arms tingled. This sudden skirt of the erotic-edge - after nothing, all this time - was delicious.

I asked if her heart ever went faster from all this.

Yes, she said, every day - was curious, anticipatory, nervous about what physical interaction was going to be like. It was all so amorphous, and she wanted to touch me so badly, all the time, an overwhelming urge. When I was there was going to be worse.

I was riveted to her words. She'd never spoken to me like this, never hinted at such things.

Emotional heat rose. I focused away from it, said that as we'd walked to sushi, night before, Gabrielle'd asked how things felt with Mira, and I'd used the very word: "amorphous." Mira said she didn't want to come between Gabrielle and me in any way.

I reassured her, noticing voicemail light on my desk phone was flashing. I dialed in - was Gabrielle in silly sing-song: "I know what Mira loo-oo-ks like, I know what Mira loo-oo-ks like." I hung up, wondering what this was about, smiling at the two of them.

Mira asked if I ever thought where all this was going.

Yes, I said. Not much, not pondering - was seeking natural path, and we'd not even met yet - it had, I said, potential to go staggeringly far, in my opinion, and I believed she felt that possibility too.

She pantomimed a nod.

Michael: if you mean, in part, have i thought of our becoming lovers - in every sense?

Michael: yes, i have

It was a great whirling field of possibility, I said, and I was less wanting to steer it than for us to swim in and find the best path for all - her, me, Gabrielle, the people in Mira's life - open, neither imposing on it nor being passive. It was heightened life, and I used that as guide.

I told her it was her turn now.

She'd asked because she wanted everything on the table. She believed in total honesty, and it was important to know how far I might be willing to take this. She didn't want to control or define it, because by defining things you sometimes limit them.

Mira: And you and I are limitless, Michael.

I pantomimed a smile and nod. My heart began to pound. We, she continued, had a limitless capacity for expansion, and anything less than exploring it to the utmost would be a tragedy.

I said my heart rate'd just spiked further.

She knew me, she said. She knew how she felt when we talked. Her entire life- experience made sense in a new way because of me, and the little taste we'd had so far'd opened her up so entirely, and she wanted more. Even the little things in life had a new shine, and what'd happened at ballet school was easier, and she was stronger, because of contact with me.

I was nearly overcome. All I could say was it was exactly the same for me.

If we did become lovers, she continued, it'd be difficult in ways - not only because of Gabrielle, and because I was so much older, and I'd a life in San Francisco, she one in Boston.

Mira: But I know...I know that you are the kind of man I should like to be with.

For she knew, she said, my passion for life, my artistry, my compassion "the drive to self-knowledge - the sensual nature."

I closed my eyes, breathed in a quiet breath - realized my entire body was lightly shaking.

The sails were filling.

She saw these things and her whole self said yes, it was so very much what she'd been waiting for. It made her want to be bigger, to know more, for she'd found another person, one of the very few, who could see the beauty we're all surrounded by, who worshipped life in all its complexity and who wanted to make what is here better.

So, she said, if the road of love in the more romantic sense was our wish, so be it. She was ready for it, and welcomed it. She wanted me in her life, in whatever capacity we could be together.

I told that my face was burning.

“Why, dearest?” asked Mira.

Because of her, I said. Because of us, what’d come this day. It’d been known, I said, but between lines until now. Yes, she said, it was time for it to be spoken. And so we had.

A little later, Mira exclaimed she’d gotten happy letter from Gabrielle, pantomimed big sigh of relief. “This,” she said, “is going to work...some-how, this is going to work.”

A one-line note I received from Gabrielle only added.

I have a picture of Mira on my desktop at work :)

I wondered what they were up to. There seemed almost-romantic playfulness. They’d each known attraction to women. Was the closeness that’d sprung up between Mira and me going to wrap Gabrielle up, too?

That, surely, would be the best of all possible worlds.



Mira and I’d taken respite from chatting. After several hours she returned, said Roque’d phoned to relay some of his and Jocelyn’s growing concerns.

Jocelyn was, he’d said, flipping out - wanted to protect Mira - Jocelyn’s husband’d been older, and she saw me as flying in as rescuer and caretaker to make Mira into a kept woman - pattern, Jocelyn’d said ominously, with me: saving helpless women in hard situations.

{ idiot - beth or gabrielle could eat you for a snack }

Roque’s own comments’d been more balanced - be careful - eyes always open - not let self be snared - she was an incredible catch - wasn’t to be anyone’s trophy - she’d answered she wanted me in her life - was willing

to accept possibility she could get hurt.

I turned still. Inside me, voice said, "If anyone's hurt, it won't be she."

Day before, I'd sent Andrea a greeting-note at Mira's behest. Unanswered. Now I asked what Andrea thought of all this. Protective, Mira said - Mira to see all me, not be word-seduced, but in general way happy for us.

We'd had idyllic begin, precious time only ours. Now, in sight of others, negativity accrued, texture thicked. It came of violating the folkways. This was why people kept secrets.

One part of her, she said, kept in mind I could be crazy stalker out to seduce. She trusted, but'd be stupid not to bear in mind.

I said I loved her strength, clean independence, no wish for trophies. She knew that, she said, and was glad for all of that.

Mira: But I am a pretty girl...and I have been at danger of being a trophy before.

"You're understating, then," I said in my mind. "Pretty girls aren't trophies - beautiful ones are. Are you outward-beautiful, too?"

{ *she is* }

I agreed with her taking all precaution - offered home, work data to send to friends, mother. She thanked - had to go into town, had said so some time before - and departed.

I walked into my thoughts, frowning. People were watching. They'd make most of the least. She might be affected, might come to agree. From start I'd felt her clear sight and liked it. Obscure judgments from negative-biased persons made me nervous.

Reich'd said blackmail only works when one's done wrong in own-eyes. He who lives in openness is strong and free.

I returned to the truth, the only thing in this that mattered: Mira wanted me.

I felt nervous, exhilarated, and proud.



There's a phrase in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Oliver is caught in an emotion, and rather than pressing it back or avoidantly getting busy he "waits for the turn."

I'd come home, and vitality'd disappeared. Heaviness'd spread. I didn't know why - irk at Andrea? anger at Jocelyn? couldn't the world leave us be?

I waited, for the turn.

(How often do we not wait. We want to *do* something, make it go, make it go away. So we never learn the fine structure of emotional experiences.)

Gabrielle came home - I told - we decided walk to Royal Ground Coffee - down traffic-busy Geary, past lit sushi places - each to own thoughts, quiet, tentative - entered - crossed plank-floor to broad chairs, dark old-wood table - talked of Zen and halting over-thinking - Buddhist master she'd known'd said to objectify thoughts, observe them from distance, uninvolved - "Big trouble!" I said quickly.

We talked more - I asserted we must enter, deeply as we can, to come out the other side.

We walked into cold-fog night, rambled down past Clement - after about dozen blocks we were before gate - walked upstairs and without word went into bedroom - we lay down and hugged closely.

Street-light came in - Gabrielle's face was dim oval of pale skin and darker ovals of eyes, her lips and chin slants in half-dark - she was more a feeling on my skin, arms and legs entangled, both of us silent.

We lay there.

Time slowed, then began in new direction. Air lightened. Weight went.

Change. Opening between us.

I felt great clarity.

She began to talk, quietly, of how I'd been since Mira'd come. Something great was here, she said, I'd been seeking it, something totally new and different. She sounded prophetic.

We talked of forms it might take, from chastest to most erotic-romantic. She was well with all.

I could feel this wasn't yet complete.

I looked into her eyes.

"Remember - you can have your own relationships too. I want it to be good for you. Physically safe, first, then medically safe, then the best possible for you - sexually, emotionally, whatever else comes of it - how could I not want that for you, if it's something you wanted?"

Deeper stillness. She spoke, in a voice newer yet, quiet. "I could, couldn't I ..."

"Of course."

She smiled, started to grin. And then we were talking about the relationships she, too, could have.

We stayed up very late, limbed close. At some imperceptible point, we went into sleep.



27 January 2001.

It was there when we woke. Simple radiance.

Early that afternoon I told Mira. She was glad, yet seemed brief, neutral. I said I was pretty good at feeling tone-shifts, said it seemed Andrea's warnings'd hit home.

Yes, she said, to an extent. In past romances she'd ignored early signs. Andrea said she judged people by words, not as wholes. Between that and Roque's warnings, she suddenly felt she'd to act grown-up, careful.

It was silly though, she said - really did think it safe and right to simply be with me.

Mira: our relationship has no use for ages, age is just scratching on the surface, it's not important.

Don't act, I said. If she felt adult, be so - a child, the same. Why not?

Her brain, she answered, telling her to be commonsensical, cautious. Sensible caution, I said: eyes open, heed signals, keep critical mind - benevolently - I did it with her, too - real problem was the "had to." That had to go.

Given this, I asked, did she still wish to meet? "Of course," she bel-
lowed - I'd better not *dare* not come. I said that, for record, my visit was
sans obligation: wasn't obliged to like, love, touch. She knew, she said.

Mira: I wouldn't even have suggested you sleeping in my bed if I didn't
think you were a man of honor and of principle.

I asked if Andrea knew about bed. Mira hadn't told, but Andrea knew
her and probably'd figured it. She pantomimed a wink. I laughed.

As always, joy won out.



That night we talked on the phone for five hours - stream of color, play,
fact, and warmth.

It was late when we said goodbye, hugged in words, said we wished them
real. I got into bed with Gabrielle and passed quickly into quiet sleep.



28 January 2001.

A perfect day for Davenport. I'd activated ICQ, to send Mira a note I'd be
back, evening - instant I online she wrote, said for me to check mail.

Her letter, just-sent, was of a half-hour's talk she'd just had with her
mother about us.

Mira'd said she wanted it "not to sputter out but be strong and burn
for a long time" - we'd discussed romance - Gabrielle was in my life - I
was keeping Gabrielle informed of all - my visit was without strings, ob-
ligations - I was sending contact info - her mother'd interrupted to say
heart rate and blood pressure'd just dropped significantly - Mira panto-
mimed a smile - we'd agreed if she felt uncomfortable in any way I'd be
happy to get hotel - her mother'd burst in, "But that won't happen! You
need to share your life with him." - Mira'd told about Beth, my encour-
aging Mira to be herself in all ways, my help through ballet-problems.
Her mother'd responded - glad I was in Mira's life - perhaps a welcome

distraction from troubles with dance - be easier on her if I were ten years younger, for I sounded too perfect, but I wouldn't be same person then, and she knew that - could hardly wait for me to see Mira dance, because that'd help me understand a huge part of her.

Mira's mind was brimming - her mother was somehow at peace, as if Gabrielle's deeper ease'd transferred - talk'd been fantastic, far easier than she'd expected - "pretty much told everything" - loved beyond all else that she could have it with me - and share joy she took in it.

She was off to a long hot shower, then wander to Museum of Fine Arts. She closed, "With an overflowingness of hugs - Mira."

I returned to ICQ, exclaimed happily. We celebrated, called day beautiful already, then parted.

Gabrielle and I stepped into sun, turned, walked uphill to car, then drove to sea in bright light and clean air.

A few days before, I'd told Mira of Myers-Briggs personality types. That evening I'd see a few minutes after my departure she'd revealed she'd just taken the test.

Of sixteen types, she'd come out Champion Idealist.

Just like me.



Returned, on ICQ I told Mira of day - she told of her and friend Don's dinner of steak, rice, sautéed mushrooms, salad - said we'd have great fun cooking in Boston - said she was finally chatting with Gabrielle.

Mira: She feels so warm, Michael!!

At that moment, Gabrielle wrote me from two rooms down the hallway.

Gabrielle: it makes me totally high to interact with her

Gabrielle: there is some connection here...

Gabrielle: my heart is pounding and I'm dizzy, and I'm unexplainably joyful and touched!

I wrote Gabrielle my heart was ready to burst.

Gabrielle: what is this??

An amazing thing, I said. I pantomimed a smile. I told Mira this felt very extraordinarily right. She yelled she knew it, wanted to talk to Gabrielle on phone right away.

I called out to Gabrielle to disconnect the dial-up. Then we were all on the phone, smiling, laughing.

In the hour that followed, among us - compatriots, friends of future, of past - there wasn't a moment of erotic, no trace of flirt - and not a second without joy in each other's being.



29 January 2001.

That morning, letter from Mira - I opened it, noticed my and Gabrielle's addresses. She greeted us both.

She wrote of early light on building-sides - colors of gold and rose - big oak across street - silence in house - cat's purr, refrigerator's hum - honey in morning tea, subtle sweet texture-layer added to deeper flavors of Ceylon - even, she wrote, tedious mundane things'd taken on warm glow of satisfaction and joy.

She'd dreamed of rooks, ravens perched on an oak - giant gust'd risen as if to blow them away, but they'd held on, not even flapped, though tree'd swayed violently. Upon waking, she'd remembered that in Native American traditions, "ravens are the bringers and keepers of magick."

She drew her own conclusions from this. She pantomimed a smile. She'd to go ready herself for the wider world.

But I just wanted to say, before I go, that I know that the glow in my body is not just from the sunlight alone.

Thank you above all measure for the beauty of last night.

She closed "With all my love and many, many hugs - Mira."



That evening, Mira and I talked with ease. We'd reached plateau of easy-breathing closeness.

At one point, she saw us on couch somewhere, or her bed, looking at each other - her taking big sigh, leaning back against me, listening to my heart - she called it lovely picture, said she seemed touch-crazy this day.

We went to phone - words and breaths and emotions deeper yet.
Each day, it happened.



30 January 2001.

The new job was affecting her schedule. We were starting a little later, talking a bit less.

That evening, told I'd talked to Catherine earlier, first time - called her likeable, tender inside, intelligent, spines around heart like prickly-pear.

Our subsequent humorous banter led to scenario in which we wound up lassoed together, pressed tight. Mira delightedly cursed me, said it made her melt.

Pleasure warmed me.

We weren't just kidding now. It was exciting, suggestive, her reaction most of all - but we'd never gone erotic. I didn't see it happening until we met, if then. It felt the intensity-building way.

I pulled back, gently teased her agony, quickly said I'd call.

Mira: right, then.

And so, the phone, playful, sweet in the closing. After Mira and I'd said goodnight, I told Gabrielle about the image. We went to bed, smiling.



31 January 2001.

I woke from dream. I drove to work.

When Mira appeared, I told.

I was standing in a crowd in a modern-elegant meeting room in a lodge-casino surrounded by pine forest. I knew Beth had attended with me, but I didn't see her.

I had moved across the room. I was standing near a wall, looking down at persons there, on couches, sprawled. They had smoked too much marijuana.

I had moved to midway between the couches and the first place. I entered into an intense talk with an upright-standing slave girl. She showed me a leather-and-metal appliance that went over her head. She snapped the last straps into place.

The metal-studded leather bands held in place a short hard-leather tube that passed her lips and went on into her mouth. Anything could be inserted. I thought of the obvious phallic possibilities. I wondered how far she took her slavery-practices. We looked into each other's eyes, standing very close. She was filled with mysterious frozen power - anything but a weakling.

(Mira, suddenly intent, said to tell her more.)

I worried that Beth had wandered off. I worried that something bad had befallen her. I began to search. I went outdoors to peer into rooms through plate-glass windows. I saw the marijuana persons. I thought of the lotus-eaters. I felt irritation at their decadent passivity. I went back indoors, anxious.

I had entered a narrow corridor that led away from the reception room. The atmosphere was thicker. There was less light. There were fewer windows. I knew this was now the casino and I was in Las Vegas. I was completely alone. There was no life anywhere. It was windowless. I walked by a brushed-steel door to a stripper room. I felt I was coming closer to where Beth had been drawn. The air grew heavier with that oppressive porn strip-joint feeling.

(Mira said she was getting anticipatory.)

I was standing before a wall in the corridor. I was looking at a sign made of wood. The sign was mounted high on the wall. The sign bore raised wooden letters in a friendly-rounded '70s font. The letters were thick, crowded, garishly colored. Out of the last letter swelled a wood-

en direction- arrow, heeling round and down, then running straight to the left, to the first letters, plumping as it ran, a swelling underline. I did not know what the letters on the sign spelled. The arrow was painted with thin bands of alternate blue and pink. The arrow pointed to a dark door at the wall. A crude raised carving on the left side of the sign - sign was all one carved piece - showed in garish colors a bold-faced naked woman, reclined, legs spread open wide. Once one paid the fee, she would permit one to touch her vaginal lips. The drawing showed huge waves of water - blue, with little white foams atop - pouring out from around her vagina. An extension to the sign gave the cost to go in: \$90.

I did not go in.

I walked on, suddenly without worry.

(Mira said she was on the edge of her bed.)

I was out of Vegas, out of the lodge. It was the present day, and it looked like California.

I was the driver of a sports car on a highway. There were vegetable fields on each side, cloudless blue sky, sun bright and strong. Ahead, the highway merged from two lanes to one and shot off across the fields, into the distance.

The ignition of my car had been turned off. I'd made a small traffic jam behind.

Yet the other drivers were utterly patient, waiting.

As soon as I awoke, the engine started.

I pushed down on the accelerator, and I moved forward.

The kink in the flow was ended.

The two merged into one.

I drove forward, quickly.



Mira called it incredible - said it made sense - wondered if perhaps meant I was free to move on from taking care of Beth.

She was brimming, near-speechless - I, vibratory and bright in my head - quiet in my lower body but at top strongly energized - she could feel it spilling off, wanted to see me like this in person.

She asked if I felt somehow potentially - explosive - she'd sense of something beneath surface, about to erupt - she should be pacing - I felt energy flow down abruptly into my body - workplace barely contained me - I was flushed and hot, leaning forward, ready to sprint - we went layers deeper every day, she said, and today we'd reached a layer of action - warmth in her belly and upper thighs, feeling of electricity running across fingers - sizzling feelings in my legs, a sense we'd touched a primal level.

We spoke at length about the palpable energy. Our words were charged, direct, almost cutting. No play, no silly. We leaned toward each other, intently focused.

She could dance this, she said - could touch me and show it - but couldn't do it in words. I told her she didn't have to.

She had to leave, and dance. We parted, farewells suddenly like those past, but different.



We met that night, bantered happy-casual.

The morning's emotions, she said, hadn't come out in dancing - too roiled. Some parts of technique'd worked better than ever, while others hadn't at all. The net result hadn't been art.

Several days earlier, she'd said she dreaded my leaving Boston - invited on second visit, mentioned mock-offhand her formal choreography'd be in April's second week and wouldn't that be lovely?

This night I teased about good airfares for round then - she chided me for encouraging her greed - told her I wanted her entirely greedy, not just for our relationship but for all of life.

Her chance to denounce my wicked ways was interrupted by her phone - Catherine, then, directly after, Roque.

Then it was our time.



After we'd said goodnight and she'd gone to bed, I checked her journal. A new entry.

I'd told incredible dream - it'd new-moved her, brought feral force, desire to run naked along cold windy beach with rain pounding her breasts. Now she wasn't in head - flowed into body, filled it utterly. She knew deep viscosity, knew "this numinous moment, this heightened awareness."

When Gabrielle'd finished reading, she looked up, said if Mira and I became erotic lovers she could only approve - this was to be fulfilled.

Mira'd titled it "Something's Coming."



1 February 2001.

A work-day, with easy things beside - sent dream to Gwen, showed Mira's entry - this writer, Gwen said, had energy to keep up with me - chatted again with Catherine - she lived in South Bay, not even hour away.

That evening, Mira and I talked long. What happened after good-night, I'd tell next morn.



2 February 2001.

I'd closed my door, I said, mainly to exclude dandery cats. Gabrielle'd suffered in silence in her office, worried I'd meant to exclude, something secret going on.

Mira interrupted. Should we stop talking? She didn't want that, was crying at thought of it, but didn't want to hurt me or Gabrielle.

{ *oh, sweet soul* }

She felt an intruder, wrong to take any of me away - I said, sharp, this assumed intrusion, not welcome - subtraction, not addition. She knew - heard in her head, too: "But this is so wonderful! How could it hurt anybody?"

I told of pressing work. She'd be home for about two hours. I promised return. Smiling, she promised wait. I told her to breathe deeply. She pantomimed doing just so.

I stepped back into role of mortgage banker handling sudden interest-rate change. I worked quickly.



Returned, I asked state of her breathing. Strange, she said: she'd just received a letter from Matt.

He missed her, he wrote.

Their year together'd been perfect. He knew now he'd been scared, depressed, jealous, had held too tight, pushed sex.

(All of which, she said cleanly, was true.)

He wanted to be her lover again.

{ no }

My heart shot into my throat.

She'd answered it couldn't be.

I eased.

I brought my fingers to the keyboard, told her we'd things to talk about.

Mira: yes.

I began to tell she'd brought only good to me-and- Gabrielle. She interrupted to ask if she was blowing this all out of proportion.

I'd have asked her to explain.

I didn't have time.

In that moment came the words, in her own italics - the words, in truth, I'd never dreamed I'd see.

Mira: I just....*I love you, Michael.*

And my sails blew full.



5. Sailing

2 February 2001.

It entered me without shock.

There'd been light from the first.

And this, this was what had been wrapped in the core. This was what'd been coming.

We loved each other.

I felt simple gladness, clean at the roots. We'd been so clear, so good, walked with care and awareness, and this was our reward.

We couldn't stop to savor - much to talk of - but once we'd finished we could walk in it together, and be glad.

The romance angle, she said, wasn't all-important just then. Most of all didn't want to do anything to hurt me. Worry not, I said, about Gabrielle - told of her denunciations of exclusivity, how we'd known something might come.

Mira said she'd never been "polyamorist" - I smiled at sweet awkwardness - was all so new, wasn't sure how it was done. She asked me to go on.

Each time a boundary'd been crossed, I said, Gabrielle'd been initiator, gently eager about pushing the envelope. It'd emphatically not been passive woman versus active-persuasive man.

Mira: Somehow I didn't think it had been. :)

She cheered. She felt better.

This, I said, felt like flowers all over.

She'd to get to class. We parted, promising to talk that night or, at worst, next day.

We said goodbye in happiness.

Whatever was to come, we'd have had this.

I went forth into the consummate day.



When I told Gabrielle, afternoon, she asked if we'd meant in-love or just soul-love.

Some of both, I said - how much of each, not yet known. I reassured her it wouldn't break or diminish us in any way.

She said she'd need much talk and reassuring. I said we'd have it: night to ourselves - downtown for dinner and a movie, then back home to bed and to touch.

And we did.



3 February 2001.

We woke early - were taking a night at Tahoe - last extended time before Boston - told Mira, few days before, now wanted to send good-bye note.

A brief note was waiting.

In pas de deux class, night before, they'd worked on a contemporary piece improvised by the teacher, set to Chopin by the pianist. It was a love story, told in tiniest movements, of affection budding between two young lovers.

Dancing it'd made her feel clean and whole inside.

*This morning I wake up and I wonder if yesterday was a dream.
But I still love you in the morning. More than I did yesterday.*

*With all my heart,
Mira*

I read it again. Tears touched my cheeks.

I dialed, to thank, but roommate gruffly stated she was out. I left a message, then - not trusting - brief note.

Gabrielle and I ran downstairs, with duffels, and jumped into the car.



4 February 2001.

On impulse'd gone far north into redwoods - hotel with indoor pool - small-town dinner - back, swum and hot-tubbed - close, peaceful - then to bed.

Upon return, amid small parade of ICQ notes sent earlier that day - first serious, then teasing she missed me - the present Mira shrieked, pantomimed pounce, exclaimed I'd mail from night before.

Titled "Evening Song" - told of spending much Saturday with Cybil - I recognized - Citylighter, Jocelyn-friend - mid-twenties 'net-telephony genius - talked with her back in '99.

They'd lunched - dealt with a flat tire adventure - shopped through Harvard Square - gone to movie - purchased good things at Tealuxe.

She confessed second Mira-neurosis - come home worrying I'd be like Taylor - mad she'd not told me she'd be unavailable.

Roommate's message'd made it worse - but my note was soft, loving as ever - she speculated at length, almost incredulous, that perhaps I was a little miffed - yet it seemed I wasn't. And for that she was grateful: she knew fully, now, that I really wasn't Taylor.

Her friend Jeremiah was coming for brunch next morning, sleep was calling seductively - she hoped Tahoe'd been glorious, beautiful, and - though she didn't know her plans - that we'd talk the next day.

She ended in perfect simplicity -

5 days, Michael.

- signed "Love, Mira."

On ICQ, I said Gabrielle was freeing phone line. Mira expressed many thanks.

In our voices we repeated "five days," stressing vowels here, shaping rhythms there - and, amazed we could, that we loved each other.



5 February 2001.

Catherine told of gossip thickening.

Jocelyn, Roque, Taylor were broadcasting that Mira was in a dubious relationship, was in danger. Catherine brushed it aside, asked directly for my history and philosophy of romance. After, I wrote to Gabrielle:

*i spoke directly at length to her questions, and she professed herself satisfied.
interesting from an evolutionary point of view: the woman - especially a younger one -
is always the one presumed in danger!*

As I drove home, I thought of Matt. He'd grown harsh after her refusal, particularly after hearing of me - said I only wanted sex. That, and Taylor, and all I'd heard from Gabrielle, Mira, Beth - grew into an anger at the gender of which I was said to be part.

At home I rapidly wrote an entry denouncing the desire to control. I ended -

*We must paraphrase in living terms the wise Congressman who told the United States government how to end the war in Vietnam: "declare victory - and withdraw."
We must declare victory in the living world - by no longer withdrawing.*



That night, I told Mira of my talk with Catherine.

Mira said she'd been contacted by Jocelyn and Roque - separately, but in united front: she was too young - I was too old; she was credulous - I was manipulative; she'd stars in her eyes - I'd use her for sex.

She laughed - hadn't told I knew not what she looked like - hadn't wanted to share even that of us.

She defied, she said, anyone who dared question us - even her mother, who'd grown leery, particularly of the non-exclusivity. They'd just have to learn it was real and true.

We spoke of how it'd grown from start, found own-nature, own-momentum.

Our voices went lower, quieter.

There was little stand-back left.

Our breaths went deeper.

We felt desire, and admitted it.
It went no further - but it went deep.



I walked into Gabrielle's office.
She looked up from computer, said "Look at this."
She'd written a personal ad.
It expressed the best in her.
I worried she'd fall for someone else and leave me.
I was thrilled at the risks we were taking.
I was proud of her going to new places.
I looked at my years' beautiful companion over life's waters.
"I like it," I said. "Send it."
She pressed the button.



6 February 2001.

She'd awakened, Mira letter-said, then just lain abed thinking of our talk.
So much, she said, had been within it - now we began to understand
what'd lain underneath all along.
The form in the rock was beginning to come alive, to sing louder through
the small layers that remained as yet unchiseled away.
It was morning, she ended, and her heart was singing.
So, after long rest, was mine.



When an AIM window appeared, I knew she'd arrived home.

Mira: -creeps up behind you and slips her arms about your waist-

She asked how my day was - the third day, I asked, before we *met*? She
laughed, said she was without words for last night - I'd given big gift -

unsure how to express how much it meant - I said she had - her voice, her breath, her letter of morning.

She asked how was Gabrielle - a springy gazelle, I said - we'd been madly busy, talked briefly - she'd responses from guys I called "really cool" - Mira was thrilled - was she going to meet any? what had the ad said? - she almost shouted in curiosity.

Was taking it slow, I said - about fifteen so far - some seemed good, a few oddballs and stiffbacks - even if only few wonderful friendships came, it'd be great - Mira hoped she found someone beautiful, exclaimed at adventure - I said we were all going into a glimmering place - she agreed.

She gave a hug "just because" - I said I wanted to be with her, then and there, was tired of waiting - wondered if our missing'd be worse after meeting - likely worse, she said, citing past experience with long distance.

Suddenly nervous, I recalled distance'd helped doom Taylor-and-her - thought suddenly how Gabrielle was always up for sudden moves and new places - daring idea came - told Mira she should know - if we chose to continue romantically and found things fraying due to distance, I wasn't going to passively sit by and observe it happen.

She pantomimed sharp-eyed look - demanded to know what I meant - I said I'd decrease my distance from her, called her silly for not getting it - she pantomimed a sigh - I wasn't supposed to make her melt so - I made it sound so easy - I didn't worry about easy or hard, I said, didn't do insoluble tragedies.

She was quiet - I said if it was going too far, she need only to say so - no, she said, that wasn't it - speechless, overwhelmed - always'd assumed for us to be closer she'd have to move - hadn't expected this depth - not just from me, but ever to find in her life - was blown away, aching with astonishment, wondering what she'd done to deserve it.

She'd met, I said, the only requirement - she'd been herself. By conventional lights, I said, there'd to be snarl-ups, reservations, withholdings - but we weren't usual. She prayed to all divinity to please let us have a long time - she wanted that, more than anything else. I said I did, too - mutual greed in best sense.

Mira: You and I are pretty damn greedy, you know that?

With that, she'd to go - dinner to start, and the making of bread for us to eat when I was there.

As she left, I reflected. In Boston we might feast on the earthly loaf, but this day we'd tasted higher source, yet.



7 February 2001.

Mira and I'd decided: less talking - more tension.

That evening, I told I was - packing.

She pantomimed dance of glee.

I said that, after dinner with Gabrielle, a long call between them seemed in the cards.

Yes, please, she said - that'd be wonderful.



We walked downhill - right turn, Clement - new place - Blue Point - oysters, clams, delectable sauces.

When home, a note to both - her brain and body'd overloaded - exhaustion - hoped to recover from a cold - was off to bed - apologized to Gabrielle, literally falling over - probably not talk to me tomorrow, but oh, the day after ...

She hoped the meal'd been beautiful - promised to talk soon to "the beautiful Gabrielle-girl" - closed, "Hugs, Mira"

We went to bed, soon after. It was the last time we'd sleep together before I left.



8 February 2001.

This day I sent Mira a single note.

Bare facts of my flight.

I heard nothing.

The highest tension.



Work'd been a blur. At times I'd felt calm, present - others, almost out-of-body.

Late afternoon. Sun-yellows fading, darker oranges rising as it moved toward horizon.

Neatened desk, altered voicemail, got up.

Desks and chairs - darkened screens, silent phones.

I'd worked here for nine years.

I thought of Boston, turned, stepped into falling dusk.



Gabrielle and I walked to "26's" - sat - looked into each other's eyes - held hands - ate lightly - confidently smiled - nerves struck - hid not - assured.

Walking - lingered - not-quite-fog - stopped, looked north - street lamps sent light-cones up into watery air - knew, further north, air went out over water.

Turned, went up hill - our gate - lit-up corridor - lifted duffels - down steps - crossed city - bridge to Oakland - working-late traffic.

Airport signs - departs - spot by curb - out of car - arms thrown, fierce, around each other - told me to have incredible time - urged her to remember I loved, we'd not end.

I walked with my duffels straight to the gate.



Forty minutes in - hop flight to Las Vegas - reading Kendrick's memoirs - riding lull, quiet, happy - slight pressure in my arms, stomach - course correction - more force - deep banking - pushed toward window - wasn't right.

Shut book, put on floor - lean it on wall - look around - no look-ups, no chatter - rack brain - perhaps spiral for elevation - but we're on horizon-level.

Voice on speaker - Captain - "... returning to Oakland immediately ... cleared for an expedited landing ... left engine indicator light ... oil pressure ... we've shut down the engine ... we can fly on only one ... we'll have you folks back to Oakland in no time ..."

Sickly flower of terror blossoms in me - this is two-engine'd jet - stomach hollow - heart begins to pound - images of crashing, body crushed -

{ *you haven't even met her* }

- cabin quiet - no cries, no screams - humidity of fear-of- violent death goes through.

Force decreases - we're level - flying straight, onward in night, toward our beginning.

I look left - neighbor - forties - business-casual - turns to me - I reach across space, touch shoulder - I, gently, "How are you doing?" - looks at me, smiles - "I'm alright" - moment he says, it's true - fear gone - long as we two keep contact, we're well.

Tells of his daughter - "She's - only two years old." - his eyes widen - "I want to see her graduate college." - I tell him he'll see her forty - to distract, offer, I tell of Gabrielle-and-Mira - he listens - I touch his shoulder, time to time - world brightens.

Attendants - listen - crash position - Oakland near - he crosses himself - plane flies on - descent - trees moving against lights - he begins to pray.

They order us in position - I obey, folding myself - feel breath in me - moving, own accord - take deep breath - may be end.

My old desire stirs - *see* my death - experience even that - I disobey - unclasp, unfold - raise head.

Line of vehicles - waiting - red lights - Mira, Gabrielle - silently tell I love them - street lights gone - house lights go.

Only reds - whites - rushing darkness.

Feeling rises - we'll live to see dawn.



We touch down - aft, fore - one of gentlest - engine blows into reverse
- we're slowing - one'd not know amiss - we applaud - he avoids eyes -
silently wish him, daughter all good.

Taxi in - cabin-lights - walk off - empty fluorescent-lit terminal -
some to payphones to be picked up - most line up for rebook - tele-
vision crew arrives, sets up tripods.



9 February 2001.

Two hours in line - during rebook, impulse - two day extend - agent
does, jolly mood - tickets in hand, call Mira - tell - safe - flying out in
few hours - mid-afternoon she'll be at class - can't miss - I say we should
meet there - she agrees - calls serendipitous if scary - gives address, loca-
tion of studio, strikingly precise mass-transit directions - we say good-
night - voices quiet, immersed.

I wake Gabrielle - speeds to Oakland - drives home, across bridge,
through quiet city - straight to bed - drift through almost-sleep in each
other's arms - two-and-a-half hours - alarm goes off - time to leave -
again through city - across great bridge - airport up ahead.



Northern Arizona ground - 31,000 feet - reflect-morning-light - walls,
ceiling - snacks served, lights dimmed - body feels sour, confined - con-
sciousness stuck in-present - slightly constricted - wonder if shock -
want to be supple - shift around - rest, if not sleep - close eyes - be-
gin to drift.

I do not sleep, but my body is peaceful.

All is silent for me except air-rushing, outside.

Unmeasured time later, the ringing of a bell.

The Captain's voice.

We're beginning our descent.



IV. BOSTON

9-14 Feb. 2001

Paderewski's playing ... possesses that subtle quality expressed in some measure by the German word Sehnsucht, and in English as "intensity of aspiration." This quality Chopin had, and Liszt frequently spoke of it.

- William Mason (1892)

9 February 2001.

We reached the sunlit cloudtops - cruised down into clear channel between cloud-columns - they towered as we fell - slender grey lines ahead - passed inside light-grey cloud - minutes later, partings - whites and greys flew past - suddenly all gone - snowy Boston under us.

We shuddered, slowing - side-winds rocked us - we sought final approach - straightened, then dropped - a gold grass-swath - cell-line of hurricane fence - red lights atop striped poles - brief snow - asphalt, closer - two impacts - thrust-reverse - attendant welcomed us - plane halted - we stood - walked off.

Taxi and bus stands - frigid air - cab slushed forth - gave address - he called fare - things passed in grey - city hovered oddly above and below freezing - various-thick clouds passed differing lights to earth - no blue, no sun, some patches of almost-white.

We reached downtown - bright colors of umbrellas, lit shop windows - we turned and turned - thought of London cabbies - pulled up to construction barriers - sign hung at center -

ROAD CLOSED

- "Can get you to the front door," he said, "but have to detour." - "No, thanks, here's fine." - paid - into whistling wind - pulled duffels, shut door - looked all around, to take in.

In four-way intersection - buildings going to sky - no people, no motion, almost no sound - turned to barriers - heard cab's wheels spin, then catch - it turned a corner, was gone.

I walked through barrier-gap, then up on sidewalk - steam whipped from manhole cover - walked steadily - mist wetted face and hair - heels crunched snow - numbers went down.

A wide-fronted building.

I knew it was the one.

I walked through the front doors into an atrium.

Warm air - soft light - unimpeded space rising up - pastels and light earths - faint piano-sound from above.

I turned right, walked to Security-desk.

A warm-faced older man looked up. "Ed?" I said. (She'd told of him, called him sweet soul.)

"Why yes. How may I help you?" "I'm here to meet Mira Graham in Studio Four. May I leave my bags here while I go up?" "Certainly, but you'll have to sign in first."

I wrote on clipboard, brought bags to side-door.

Ed put them in the back.

He smiled. "Go on up, Mr Brown."

I turned. A broad staircase was before me.

I walked to it, wiped off my face, and took the first step.



As I rose slowly, I felt the whole span of my life.

I looked ahead.

Sunlight slanted in from a bank of windows at right. I reached a small landing, turned right - up the last few steps.

I was at the top. Open double-doors to left.

Sound of feet striking floor. A woman spoke sharply, inside.

Mira's directions stopped here.

I walked quietly to doorway - stopped, leaned at jamb to left - so I'd be seen, but didn't bulk center.

I looked inside.

Perhaps twenty dancers doing repetitive leaps. Each'd shoot up, arm stretched high, then land, arm continuing down, smoothly.

A short older woman - dark grey skirts, almost-black shirt, grey hair tied back - walked about abruptly.

She cried something like "balloon!"

They began leaping higher.

I saw myself in mirror-wall at rear - still, tall, self-contained in long brown overcoat.

I looked at the columns of dancers. Each girl - there was one boy - was slender. Most had bun'd hair, most were blondes.

I couldn't make out their faces in motion, but similar impress to each - clear, oval-shaped, focused.

She called something in French. They stopped leaping.

They stood in place and began raising arms, slowly - my eyes shot to girl in second row, mid-distance.

I knew nothing of this art - found of all perhaps most alien - but her movements, as arms rose and came down - hands and wrists in fluttered spirals, elbows suddenly vanished in smooth-curved arms - spoke to me, clearly as a quiet melody of Chopin's.

In that moment ballet first spoke to me its wordless language of the stylized body.

I looked away - the feeling stopped. I looked at others - didn't feel. I looked back - it returned.

I looked at her closely.

She seemed tallest of the class - her face most elongated - skin paler, more clear - seemed to put more into her dancing - stretch higher, special grace of fluency in hands and arms.

A word came - it was "aspiration."

Silently I asked, "Is it you?"

She was the most classically ballerina-like - features of greatest purity, form of highest refinement. I amused myself - she'd reacted no more than anyone. I'd just selected the most-admirable one.

I began to wonder - this was the right studio - had she not come in? - ought I look elsewhere?

I was losing the present, when the instructor spoke again.

They broke out of their lines, spread in individual free exercises. I saw the most-beautiful one begin to pirouette.

I turned slightly, to face her.

She danced away from the rest, spun down the floor, toward the studio window-bank.

She stopped in line with doorway, facing mirror-wall.

My reflection was gone. I could only see her.

She raised herself en pointe - leaped up, spinning - came down, landed turning round and round. She finished in deep bow, hands folded like petals - perfectly still.

Then she shot up - turned to me - launched herself in sprint - streak of gold hair and strong limbs.

She crashed into my chest.
Our arms crushed round each other.
She and I embraced.



After a moment, thought: "Am I hugging her too hard?"

She hugged tighter. I tightened my arms.

We stood outside time - loosed arms, leaned back - still embraced -
looked at each other.

She'd a pale forehead that seemed windswept sky - huge, strange blue-
silver eyes looking into mine - smile of unconquerable joy.

The words rose to my lips.

"Hello, love!"

She took in breath, said, "Hello, dearest!"

She stood just below my nose; her hair was bun'd back in ballet-way
- little darker than pale-gold - her head small - flowed down round her
eyes spread wide across her face to a small chin.

Her eyes searched my face back and forth. Her smile widened, she bent
knees, leaned away, back arched, body pressed to me, eyes almost clos-
ing, smile waxing huge.

She straightened. Smile vanished. She looked, gravely, eyes full on me
- she lowered her chin, eyes fixed, seeming to probe, darker - raised hand,
laid it on my cheek. I laid mine on hers.

Time, again, was not. I stood in a timeless clearing - had emerged from
a wood, and here was the new woman to greet me in the new day.

We pulled each other close, softly.

There was nothing more to the world than this newborn body, life ris-
ing in curve of intertwined touch from our calves all the way to the hair
pressed to my cheek.

We'd reached the timeless center. We were free.



From Studio Four came a hand-clap and cry. She glanced over-shoulder,

then back, smiling.

"I must go, darling. Will you stay and watch the class?"

"Of course!"

She ran in. I stepped to right of doorway, leaned against wall, watched as she danced. Her face was intent; she didn't look at me. I watched her moving in the mirror-filled room, watched her body - she whose mind I'd felt across a continent - moving in service of expression. My mind worked to grasp this art's voice.

As she moved, I looked at every inch of her and wondered if we'd make love.

Break declared. They came in pink and grey tights to use bathroom by stair-top, drink from wall-fountain across from me. She exited with arch look, as if not seeing me - then, almost past, smiled and winked.

I was watching a young dancer - about sixteen - pour pills from a bottle into her palm. The arch-looker swished past, whipped head toward me, bugged eyes, stuck out tongue, and was gone, into the studio.

I slapped my thigh through the coat, shook my head, and laughed.



Class was done. We hugged, walked to stair-top. She'd change to street clothes then come back.

As I watched her fly through lobby, round corner to bottom floor, I remembered "quick" had originally meant "alive."

I wandered back to Four - stepped through last dancers leaving - stopped in doorway - empty studio - scratched hardwood floor - mirrors reflecting floor, walls, each other.

I was going into daze. I looked at studio, buildings outside. What was there was simply what was there. It was as if all concept and history were being destroyed.

I wondered if a piano on this floor. Turned left, crossed footway over lobby, slowly, almost ginger. Looked in Studio Three - unoccupied - in right corner, piano.

I walked, sat, began to improvise - wanted to not be where she expected.

I wanted her to hear distant music, and come.

Daze began to go. Tension was replacing it. Soon we'd be alone.
My heart began to pound.
I hardly knew what my fingers did.
Out of corner of eye, I saw her in doorway.
I didn't look away from the piano.
I improvised on.
She came in, turned right, walked slowly, head lowered, along outer
wall. Her footsteps, through music.
She reached wall-corner, turned, began toward piano.
My hands were shaking. Didn't know how long I could continue.
She passed behind me. Steps stopped.
She was standing behind me.
I heard a faint sound - rustle or a scrape. I turned head partway.
She was letting herself slide limply down the wall.
I turned back.
As if from miles away, I watched my hands.
The lights went burning white.
Moment of highest tension.
I lifted my hands from the keys.
I turned around, looked down. She was sitting on floor, knees up, hands
loose in her lap. Her eyes were huge, silver-blue.
She was looking at me, unsmiling, lips parted and trembling.
Our eyes locked.
We reached out at the same moment, touched each other's cheeks.
"Hello," I said.
Her eyes grew wet. So did mine.
She whispered, "Hi."
I touched across her cheek, then forehead, down to shoulder. I lowered
palm to her calf, pressed. I reached up, closed it on her knee through jeans,
rubbed with my fingers, felt the solidity.
This was her body. She touched my cheek, cross my face and fore-
head, through hair.
It was then I knew, in my body, that she, and it, and we - were real.



She leaned aside, tucked calves under, sat up, straight from the knee.

I slid to bench's edge. Eye contact never broke.

She leaned, I leaned down to her, we slipped arms round, pulled each other in. We pressed hands to each's back.

She laid her head on my shoulder. I closed my eyes, inhaled. She smelled clean, warm, herself.

We felt the other's breathing, the body-warmth - shifted, got closer. We moved hands on each other's backs - up and down, then shoulders.

Stilled, held tighter - stayed still, for a long time.

I didn't want to move.

We pulled back, same moment - laughed, pulled all way, found ourselves eye to eye, unsmiling, shocked into present.

I was shaking my head in wonder.

We hugged, then rose. I offered my arm. She took it and we strolled silently to the doorway, her hip brushing my thigh.

As we crossed footway, I looked at front doors. We rounded past Four, walked downstairs, arm-in- arm.

I put my head in at Ed's side-door. He brought duffels forward, quiz-zical. I wondered if he wondered.

I lifted them, walked with her to door. We passed outside, to streets of a cold and clear Boston evening.



We walked fast over cobblestones, casting little smiling looks at each other - almost same rapid gait, same pleasure in click of shoe on cobbles, in swinging along next to the other.

Few blocks in, she looked at duffel, said, "That looks heavy," reached out.

I knew it was time.

I gripped it away, said, lofty, "Certainly not, Mira. After all, you're the *weaker sex* and must be protected."

She bared teeth, said "Ooohh!" and grabbed. I yanked back, said, "Oh no you don't!"

She got her hand on strap, pulled - I tugged - "I told you - you'd not

be winning - any easy victories" - she threw her whole body - I twisted trunk, grip near failing - "around here, missy!"

I dropped other bag - began to jerk, double-hand - she barnacle-held, so I began to whirl - "Turn loose," I said, voice rising, "or you're gonna go flying!"

She held on, valiant, but I reversed hard, unpredicted - threw in unexpected arm-relax followed by jerk-in - she lost grip, spun away over cobbles.

I scrunched my lips toward nose, shook head back and forth, mocking. She laughed, screamed "Damn you!"

I picked up bags, resumed walking, faster. She ran, caught up. I looked over.

"Here." I shoved the duffel at her. "Carry this, woman." She bared her teeth, then laughed as she grabbed.

We walked past gold-lit mullioned-window shops, as if weightless. We smiled, and talked not.



Through small square - still cobbled - cross diagonal, catching breaths, tree-trunks about, black leaf-canopy over dim sky - I looked at her.

She wasn't tall, but slenderness and decisive motion made her seem. She wore long black cape to below knees - long pour of hair, unbunnet now, fell in ringlets and waves in light-beams from beyond square, over her shoulders - cape held by great silver claw-clasps in front - she moved with confidence and snap under it.

I saw why men fantasized her an imprisoned object.

We reached transit-station, purchased handful each of bronze tokens. Before long, trolley. Its doors opened - walked inside, took facing seats - doors shut - car accelerated, lights dimming slightly.

We took hands. Eyes locked again. Silently, we leaned forward and brought our foreheads to touch. Tingling spread across my head, down my neck.

"I feel your thoughts," I said quietly. "As I feel yours," she whispered back.

We laid heads on each other's shoulders and hugged tight. As we went through curves, crossed dips, I closed my eyes. The other-world sense returned.

She'd come in a cascade of words that'd been more than words. Now, pure touch.



We rounded past a few closed stores, into residential blocks.

It was cold, clearer than downtown, sky darker above snowed trees. We crunched glinting carpet unbroken along sidewalks, over curbs, across streets. No car passed, no person afoot. We went in crackling-dry air through silent neighborhoods.

I saw ahead, walking toward, amid buildings, a dark-coated person, shoulders gathered together, hands plunged.

Mira called out "Hi." He nodded peremptorily, turning aside in passing. I looked at her.

"Who's that?"

"My roommate. He works for Cybil."

"He didn't seem especially happy."

"He - disapproves."

"Of us?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"He doesn't like a lot of the people I bring over. Also - our ages."

A heat of anger rose to my cheeks. What'd they know of this? The care we'd taken?

I shook my head. "I wish they'd get off that."

Her mittened hand took mine. "I know, darling. They don't understand. They will."

The heat eased. I squeezed her fingers.

We walked, hand-joined.



Into courtyard of her building - three stories, two wings - old-fashioned - perhaps '30s - she unlocked little post-box door - slipped envelopes into cloak - we stepped inside warmed lobby, through fire-door to building-back, up two flights of stairs.

Out at top, a right turn - down hallway - she stopped at last door on the left.

She smiled. "This is it."

Unlocked, went in - shut it behind me - pointed to door ajar, been covered by its swing - roommate's, she said - couldn't close, I saw, from tangle of cable snaking in - he was up all hours, she said - sounded disapproving - perhaps messy dark rooms - perhaps nights in service of computer networks.

She pointed - bathroom, right-angle to roommate's - walked down hallway - small kitchen, '40s-seeming - a closed door - "My room," smiling - at other side, inbuilt wall-nook, old-style glass-and-wood doors - living room.

Small dining-table - on it, two candles by window to courtyard - television aside doorway - couch opposite, window behind - easy chair to right, angled to face couch - closet door behind chair - art prints on walls - unframed, tacked - Pre-Raphaelites.

Room's light was Christmas-bulbs - tiny, clear, bright-white - strung along top-molding, run all round several times - glow bounced from whitewash walls, hardwood floors - suffused all with softened, slightly dim gold-white.

Dropped duffel behind easy chair, took off coat - she unclasped cloak, opened closet - rich color-sea of her coats and shirt-tops and scarves - luxurious - thought of trophy-hunters - door shut-click.

We walked to room-center - no coats - embraced slowly, sliding - felt our male and female forms - looked into each other's eyes, smiling, still.

After time, I looked at couch, said, "Sit with me." She first - I at other end, quarter-turned and dropped back, my head in her lap.

I looked up.

She was above me, smiling down, lights behind her.

She touched her cool fingers to my brow.

Another time had come.

I reached up, took her hand in mine, laid our joined hands on my chest, and spoke.

"I felt you from the first words. It's grown, ever since, but you can't tell just from words." My eyes grow wet. "I came from a long way away to see, and - Mira - it's still here. We're real."

She nodded, tearing. "I feel it too, love. More, even, than I expected."

We looked into each other.

I lifted my hand from hers and laid it on the side of her cheek.

I wanted to tell her - us to kiss. But intuition that'd guided from beginning, bade me wait.

We began to smile.

It turned into sound.

"Yes, Michael," she said, golden with light - touching me as we laughed - over my neck, cheeks, forehead, in my hair - "Yes, Michael. Yes. Yes. And yes and yes and yes and yes."



We stayed for a long time, talking, touching softly.

She said, quickly, "Let me show you my room."

We jumped up - through hallway - she opened door, switched on light, walked ahead.

I stepped into the center of her personal life.

She swept hand toward open laptop, room-center, papers round it - clothes thrown, pens and paper, surprising-few books, most in small bookcase to my left - caught sight of two paperbacks - *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, close by, *Atlas Shrugged*.

The wall I faced was chaotic foam - slogans, quotes, drawings, post-cards, stamper-art, photos of people, art prints, magazine-clippings - no common theme, certainly no theory-base - yet had own unity.

She closed door - more paper, up and down doorframe - one, stamped with hearts, thorns surrounding them, read "Thorny Heart Productions" - I asked - "Oh, that's when my mother and I do stamp-art together" - above, photo of striking-faced girl - Mira gave name - friend.

I turned left.

Abutting art-wall - head of small topsheetless bed - there it was - place I was thought contriving to occupy at all costs.

She smiled, moved hands apart and up, said, "So, what do you think?" I felt largeness of being with her. All thoughts of webs - and spiders - blew off.

"I like this room," I said. We walked into each other's arms. "I like the person who lives here, too." She leaned into me. I felt her, from thighs to forehead, pressed. All was still.

I pulled back, looked in her eyes from very close, closer than friends get. They widened. Her chin dropped slightly.

My fingertips brushed her cheek, down her neck, across her wide shoulders.

I thought of Gabrielle, across darkening-continent, said it was time I called. Mira smiled, said Gabrielle'd be happy to hear how well it was all going.



It was near midnight - round two hours later.

I'd dialed the toll-free line I kept in apartment - each talked to Gabrielle - been more fluent than when I was at home. For a while they'd talked so closely I wondered if they'd grown lost in their connection and forgotten about me.

After, we'd gotten snack - I'd been physically bounding, without food-need since arrival - looked around apartment - she'd given background of her room's art - we'd sat on couch and talked - easy as breathing.

In past minutes, Mira's eyes'd grown heavy - yawns - she'd vowed we'd stay up until 5am the first night - said I'd say goodnight to Gabrielle, then time for sleep.

She hello'd, rushed - readying to go out - been talking with ad-answerer - San Francisco - Darin - web-designer, worked with theatre troupe in evenings - they'd decided to meet, spur of moment - coffee - I told Mira in pause - her eyes were wide.

I and Gabrielle exclaimed - sudden adventure we'd been working for - edgy, good - I asked where might go - she'd no idea - doubted they'd

have sex that night - told her do whatever felt right so long as stayed safe - thanked me for leaving in her hands.

Soon, time to go - long byes, scattered kisses - we loved each other - wished her good adventuring - we hung.

Outside was snow and cold and dark. Inside, a room suddenly more intimate, warm and lit and silent but for sounds of radiators and pipes.

I sat by her. We didn't speak. The room's objects looked sharper in contour. The quietness seemed to have its own tension. Sense of connection as I looked into the eyes across from me, that didn't waver or hide, was richer.

The night was ours.



We talked of little things for a time, then she yawned.

I told her she should get some sleep. She agreed, said she'd class the next day.

We walked hand in hand to her room. She shut door, moved toward the bed. I stood back a little - didn't want, by posture or position, to presume we'd sleep together.

She went to the dresser, held out folded sheets - some raucous colors, one blue-and-white. "I've tie-dye," she said, "and I have blue sky. Which would you like?"

From her eyes, I knew there'd be no air mattress.

"Let's sleep on the clouds," said I.



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She put the others back in the dresser, then, against art-wall spread out ours.

I pulled bed away from wall - we put sheet on mattress, tucked in, then top sheet - worked quietly, few words or glances. Soon covers were smoothed atop, pillows arranged, bed pushed flush.

Nothing left to do.

I walked round the foot, stood by her.

"So how do you want to do this?" she said, voice little harder, face serious. "We can wear sweatpants or - if you're comfortable - underwear and t-shirts. I usually sleep in underwear." "Underwear and t-shirts works for me." She smiled, said she'd be right back, scooped up shirt and walked out, turning right.

I walked to easy chair - pulled t-shirt - shucked off day-shirt, tossed behind chair - put on new - returned to room, stood by pillows. Everything drained away. Body without tension, mind without thoughts.

She came in in shirt - pants on, like me. She walked to me and stopped. We stood for moment, gently awkward. Smiles came as we avoided eyes.

She reached for her pants-button as I reached for mine. She pulled jeans over hips as I tugged on my zipper. I stole look as her hip reached light, then light fell down her leg as she bent to take pants down.

She folded, laid them on floor, got under covers, and lay flat. I kicked feet free, watched pants land by hers. I lifted covers and slid in - trace of warmth on sheet.

We slid together, legs and hips touching, her skin smooth and warm and taut.

We turned, faced one another.

I lifted my right leg over her thigh and pressed down, she moved her left between my two, I laid my right hand on the up-curve of her hip.

We snuggled down, heads close. "Feels good, uh?" I said.

She sighed. "Very good." Her hands met at my back, held me closer. Smell of her skin and hair came.

"Very good," I said. "And very right."

She lifted her head, looked in my eyes, serious. "It felt right - from the beginning."

“Yes, it did. And I knew that you knew that I knew -” I lifted hand, made corkscrew with index finger.

She smiled, made silly face - bugged eyes slightly, bit lower lip. “It was kinda obvious,” she said.

“Did you know?”

“I - hoped. When you told me about Ingrid, I was afraid it was going to be her, not me.”

“It was always you - from the first words.”

Her eyes shone. I put my hand in her hair, moved in long, soft strokes. She mirrored on my back. I brought finger to her ear, traced edge. “You have nice ears,” I said.

She cupped my ear gently. “So are yours. Kinda small.” I remembered Nietzsche - he’d said his were small to hear things unheard.

“Ours are rather alike, Miss Mira.”

She returned hand to my back, put up eyebrows in exaggerated innocence. “Us, alike? We’ve no similarities whatsoever.”

I nodded soberly. “None at all.”

I leaned forward, kissed curved top of her ear, back-falling hair, her forehead. She closed eyes, breathed deeper. Her fingertips dug gently into my back.

In a dark pool of water at far end of my body, many miles away, a tiny heating began.

I touched her forehead, cheek with soft kisses. She raised a hand to my hair, began running fingers through. My breath deepened.

We tightened arms.

Waves began in the water.

They rolled forward, through the dark, advancing, advancing.

I touched my lips to her cheek again.

I was pulling back, but she opened her eyes. She looked at me, an inch apart.

I stopped. She turned her face up, toward mine.

I felt her breath on my lips.

We stayed there, frozen.

The waves beat on, closer.

We moved faces nearer.

(the warmth of her face)
We moved slower still.
(breaths together)
Time stopped.
Our lips touched.
They parted, slid deeper along.
The waves rose.
We relaxed them, then kissed in again, deeper.
Moistness of her mouth came in over my lips.
We slid our mouths along, in short kisses.
Mouths we opened. Our tongues touched very softly, kisses deepened,
nearest waves began to break, around me, on top, inside, flowing, long
waxes and wanes.
Waxes came stronger, and I pulled away. I looked across at her - so
other, so familiar.
"Mira," I said.
Her breath was very quiet and very sure. "Yes."
I stopped for a moment. I felt all of it, our road from the beginning.
Words were coming, flying ahead of the waves. I didn't say them in a mo-
ment's heat. I paused for a moment, to feel it out, one last time.
And though waves were coming to crest, though almost gone out of
myself - I was well with it.
I looked across at her, and finished it.
"I love you."
The waves carried her to me fully, me to her, arms very tight, her lips
at my ear, whispering intensely, "Oh god, Michael, I love you too," our
bodies pressed against each other from, our calves to heads, lips meet-
ing again and opening, daring the waves higher yet, warming sea cresting,
continuing to rise and heat.
Our hands traveled over each other's fearless bodies.
I felt her tongue enter my mouth, taste inside hungrily. I tasted into
hers, deeper yet. One of her arms moved, then her hand on my chest, her
pulling her head back. She shook her head. I looked, perplexed.
"Not - like that, okay?" she said.
"What do you mean?"

"Don't kiss me like that. Don't plunge your tongue in so far."

I felt moment's annoy at her abruptness.

Then I relaxed - just awkward. "Regret it felt bad," I said.

"It's okay. Just getting to know one another, you know."

"So, how do you like to be kissed?"

"A little less forcefully. More playing at the lips."

I felt humor returning. "Hmm, something like -"

I kissed as she'd said. It felt sweet, if withheld in passion. When we pulled back, she clapped hands against my chest, said "That's it." I winked, said, "Well, practice is said to make perfect."

We hugged, began to kiss. It was different - softer, not as heated - deeper though, more penetrant. The waves moved, hands tightened, caressing, lips played more hungrily at edges, tongues moving with them in complexer, closer rhythm.

We grew frenzied, and as I felt the passion in her I'd hoped, I pulled her to me in strength, ran hands from her thighs to her face. I gloried in her touching me as boldly as I touched her.

I felt wild energies let loose.

I whipped my head to her, voice quiet but almost guttural in intensity. "Mira, I'm in love with you!"

She met me, unshrinking, eyes dark. "I'm in love with you, Michael, *and I have been!*"

Fury rose in me. I clasped her, violent.

She dug her hands into me.

Our mouths raked one another, making and tasting every sensation we could.

The waves blazed in the sun. We were magnificently akin.

No weaker, no stronger.

We'd known, without words of it, we'd not make love this night. And so, in perfect rhythm, after timeless time of passion, ardor eased, without disappoint. I existed again, found myself atop her, limbs twined, each of us gasping. She got out, "Well, there's no doubt - that we're chemically compatible!"

Soon her face was relaxing - showed quiet joy as we talked and laughed on way to sleep.

As we talked, I wandered fingers through her shirt, over muscled curves of her stomach - found little piercing-ring at navel. I brushed over it, we looked in one another's eyes, said nothing. "Another facet," I thought, happily.

We kissed sweetly few more times, almost as if passion'd never been. She turned over, we spooned close, and in few minutes she was asleep.

Little sleep-spasms came and went. I looked at covers - quick twitches - one place, another - impulses flying down body. They grew stronger. Moving so she didn't wake, I backed to mattress-edge, turned, lay flat, looked at blue-white light on ceiling, from windows.

My mind didn't want to sleep. I never told her, but I stayed awake for hours that night

Sometimes I'd look at her, sometimes at ceiling, sometimes at room-things in faint light.

I thought of her, of our beautiful two months, of the flight to Vegas, of Gabrielle, of the man she was meeting - of the passion that'd bolted up in this room.

Early morning was coming when I turned quiet.

As night left, so too did I.

We, at last, slept.



*noise - morning light, movement ... then i know who and where ... she climbs over me
- sbuts alarm*

I came awake - she, few inches above, looked into my eyes, smiling - snuggled down, kissed warmly - she rolled off, stood up, stretched, bending backward flexibly.

Early class - we showered one after other, dressed, got out - white winter day, quick walk to trolley - stood on snowless open platform in gusts, holding hands. She looked down tracks, I looked at her pure-form face and gold hair against deep blue sky.

Trolley came - sat with other Saturday travelers - picked up speed, slowed for station, sped again - swayed before tunnel-portal - our stop

- at stand just before stairs I bought orange juice - Mira got breakfast - looked like low-fat muffin - walked upstairs, then windy streets.

She went downstairs to change - I signed, went up to Four.

I sat on bench under-window, watched them arrive in leotards and tights - most seemed younger than Mira - gym bags and backpacks - water bottles in hand - faces determined - a few glanced at me, passing - I watched gathered muscularity of their legs - so different to arms' long slenderness - wondered at link between ballet and Mira's consciousness - what'd been her path here?

She passed talking with peer - exchanged quick smiles - felt warm, secret - wondered what people'd think of our night.

The task-mistress was already stalking the boards. I sat back to watch what she'd make of her class.



At break they came to drink and refill bottles - stood, mostly small-group'd, with hand holding bottle, other on-hip - reached into bags or packs, took out plastic bottles - Advil, Tylenol - small handfuls with water - most bottles bulk-buy.

Mira came out, filled bottle, reached in bag, swallowed large handful - thought of her email signature - Tori Amos quote - "Give me pain - Give me myself again."

I went to her, quietly said I'd call Gabrielle, tell of night, see how her'd gone - she pressed my hand, asked me to say hello.

I walked to lowest floor - phone just outside girls' changing-rooms - no answer - after 1pm there - Gabrielle was in rehearsal for Fauré *Requiem* - no idea if she'd left yet - imagined them kissing, bodies pressing as my and Mira's had - didn't worry - thought-image itself slightly erotic - but not knowing made tension.

I called, left mail - all well, we'd not made love but'd crossed barriers - missed her, couldn't wait to talk, nervous and excited about Darin - loved her.

I went back up - for hours, watched Mira go through classes - would not know until later that Gabrielle'd sent a note that morning.

Good morning! I am off to all-day rehearsal and then voice lesson - I hope you had a wonderful night - I did with Darin! I will tell you all about it tonight. I love you very much - have a beautiful day!

*Love,
Gabrielle*



Mira and I walked in deeper twilight - after day at School, we'd gone to Cambridge on trolley - meet Jeremiah for coffee.

Passed news vend-machine - bold-lettered progressive tabloid warned women of being objectified in media - "I've been asked to model," she said evenly - I looked, listening - she'd turned down - didn't want that world - I nodded, thinking of the Academy.

Fluorescent-lit ATM alcove - sign on stone building-side: "Wainwright Bank - Banking on Values" - as New England, I thought, as the streets round us - Brattle Square, Sparks Street, Holyoke Place - under-breaths of old-England.

I looked at her - upright carriage, clarity of expression - suited this place - right she lived here - remembered feel of her letters - she moved through snow like that: over a clear foundation, an easy swing.

We arrived - broad open space back from street, tables and chairs, entrances to shops - one wall, bookstore window-display.

I bought coffee, sat telling Mira of visits to MIT in Randian days - she listened quietly, eyes straight on mine - man on bicycle rounded in - "There he is" - he dismounted, coasted up on pedal.

I sat straighter.

He kickstanded, sat at my side - looked at Mira, shook my hand with briefest eye-contact, pulled away - small and compact, quick gestures, pointed beard - reminded of Pan.

He laid fanny pack on table, excused - bathroom - Mira and I smiled, touched fingertips - pulled apart before return with glass of tea - sipped as we began to talk - worked for electric motor company - his-and-my conversation drifted there.

We were speaking of physics - he took sudden issue with something

I'd said. He began to summarize quantization of energy - took out pen, drew diagram on a piece of paper. He tapped the paper now and then with the pen to emphasize a point. He was looking in my eyes now, speaking with greater force.

As Mira sat quietly watching, I began to tense. He was talking at peculiar length, overly fine detail, as though a button had been pushed to begin a taped physics lecture. He didn't ask if we understood, invited no interaction - no analogy or metaphor, no history, no context. It was as if the ideas'd rise up and connect themselves.

He stopped summarizing, began to cover point by point, eyes shiny, looking at me almost fixed, hardly blinking.

{ *so, jeremiah - you want her for yourself* }

I felt my stomach harden against him. I kept replies brief, affirming, hoping he'd notice audience wasn't with him.

When he was done I felt drained - mentally flat, jittery in body. I suggested we walk somewhere. Mira said she'd been wanting to go to chocolate cafe with me, so we left. Good to be in open air, walking, Jeremiah more regular, if quiet, walking with bike helmet at back of head.

We entered chocolate place - well-peopled, warm, dark-wooded, lit up golden inside - Boston-motif, it seemed - bought things - I teased Burdick's no match for California's Scharffen Berger - she sniffed, said humorous-arch she'd have to judge for herself. I thought of showing her my state, her meeting Gabrielle, Darin.

We left, rambled through streets - Jeremiah wheeled bicycle quietly - I wondered his thoughts. Mira and I by tacit agreement hadn't touched in his sight - I missed it.

We entered arcade-building - small shops scattered - comic store - suddenly gone happier - Jeremiah in a row, Mira elsewhere - I walked silently - there she was, looking quickly along titles - snuck up behind, touched palms to her back - she arched against, drew breath. I walked on. Neither of us'd said a word.

Further in - jewelry store - Mira led, looked through cases - asked to see piercing-gem - held up - blood-red - said, "Maybe this one. Ack,

wish I could afford it.” - as salesperson replaced, I thought of sneaking back, buying for her.

We went out in hallways - soon ended, so back to street - walked at random - frigid air - into coffee-place to warm - then, blocks later, exotic-food store - we fanned out - rows for India, Thailand, Korea, others - I was looking at wickery rice-bags with stamped howdah elephants - Mira walked up - we looked at boxes of curries for a bit - Jeremiah appeared suddenly.

“I’m going to leave now,” he said, quickly - tone natural enough but void of context.

I extended my hand, said, “Good meeting you.” He shook - brief, firm - said “farewell” - few words goodbye to Mira - turned, walked out. We watched door swing shut.

“What,” I said, “was that?”

“I - don’t know. That wasn’t like him.”

“Did I bug him?”

“I have no idea. You were fine. I’ll have to ask him.”

“Kind of weird at the beginning. Intellectual chest-pounding.”

“Well, I don’t know higher mathematics. Mainly it was interesting watching you two interact.”

“Not much during the lecture,” I grumbled. Mira laughed, poked with a finger, told me not to worry. “I’m not. It’s just a bit unsettling. Is he attracted to you?”

“No, he knows we can only be friends.”

“Ahh, youth. You think that stops feelings?”

“Who you calling youth?”

“You. Youth.”

She poked again, harder, and we laughed and walked off into cold air.

It’d become deep night, but Mira and I were never far from a glowing - not in the shops of Cambridge, but between the two of us.



The air was icy, almost windless as we walked back to the trolley-station.

A gust came, pushed at us, but no snow rose from ground or snow-bound cars, no flakes flew about street lights. No cars moved in street - no passers-by.

Silent world to ourselves - crossed esplanades of snow, passed walls of buildings, shop-windows dark, doors - above, apartments lit through shades. There was no time but within us, for we were all that moved.

I was glad Jeremiah'd gone - no brightness.

We walked until the "T." I could barely feel the token, but we ran - before long, came - gliding oblong, light streaming from windows, flowing along platform toward us.

We sat - car hummed forward - put my arm round her, leaned heads together, felt fingers slowly run over nape of my neck. We sat silent, in touch, car clicked over rails, passengers swayed, my hands came alive in grid-warmed air.

Our stop - walked into cold darkness - headed to video store - we'd resolved to watch each other's cardinal movies - in, under bright fluorescents - she to comedy, I foreign - met, under minute, at register - Mira produced member-card - I tossed few bills - clerk handed plastic bag - walked out - her choice, Kevin Smith's *Chasing Amy* - mine, Ken Russell's *Women in Love*.

She slipped arm in mine, pressed me - I swung bag to and fro with free hand. Slightest edge of nerves - part Jeremiah, part Darin.

Still air - tried to breathe deeper. We said little. We thought our thoughts, walked through snow, smiled.

Now we could be silent, walk under trees under black sky.

I breathed easier. I felt back with the good things. My unsettledness floated away toward the stars.



We walked round her building-corner, mail, then in, upstairs, down hall, apartment - dry steam-heat air - few steps - Christmas-lights.

Coats off - snuggle on couch - chests pressed through shirts, heads close, hands intertwining - hearts faster.

I looked, restless, round, at light on wood floor. A want stirred. I told

Mira she'd to see something. She smiled, eyebrows rising.

I reached behind chair, pulled out videotape - returned to couch, she laid head on my shoulder - titles rolled - *Horowitz Plays Rachmaninoff* - video I'd found - *Piano Concerto No. 3*, from 1978 - saw her eyes widen, her face turn toward me. She kissed my lips gently.

As the piece went its strange places, I felt electricity. I felt communion with thrust-of-life of composer, performer, piece, human impulse to art. We rose on a golden spike of energy.

When done, we embraced, stayed for a long time. "Something else for you to see," I said, into her hair, "if you're up for it."

"Oh?" she said. "What's that?"

I put in another, screen crackled with video-lines, then smoothed, then odd sudden opening on detail-crowded 1920 English living room, mother of house fussing at something, father hammering at little woodwork-art. "Ms Graham," I said, gestured toward screen, "meet Mr Lawrence. It's *Women in Love*, darling."

As it began, she seemed highly concentrated, head erect, unmoving. I couldn't feel her.

In one scene, protagonist and his love quarrel in a wood. They insult one another, hector, snap. Ursula runs off, seeming forever. In a minute, she returns. She lays a flower in his hand, he kisses her forehead, unutterably tender. She looks up, love shining, says, "Did I abuse you?" "Wait," says he, in touch with his depths. "I shall have my own back." They go off to his little cottage, go inside and speak of never growing apart: for the way was cleared.

I sat beside her, tears running down my face.

The pure idyll doesn't last - trouble comes, but hope behind it, in creative tension between them. I looked over as credits rolled. "What did you think?"

She cocked her head, then shook it. "I'll have to think about this one," she said. "Cryptic actions of unknowable people."

She said nothing more.

I felt a bit flat.

Then, reminded myself - I hadn't liked it at all, first view.

Still, she hung back. I felt she'd judged it less than sterling, almost as

if she'd judged me, directly, inhuman.

I thought of the Citylighters.

After a moment I upbraided myself.

Was creative difference, and tension of it, not how Ursula and Birkin'd
grown, and found their way?



11 February 2001.

Three hours'd passed - we'd spoken of art, culture, our lives, how they all twined together - it'd been intimate as being alone, expanded to an inspiring, unfailing other. By 2am, we'd reached easy quiet.

I stood up, stretched, looked at her. "Time," I said, "to call Gabrielle and see how it went with Darin."

Stomach flutter, I dialed. I'd returned to couch when she answered. After I'd told of Mira-and-me for few minutes, she told of night before.

She'd run down Geary, met Darin at Royal Ground. He was non-exclusive too, mid-thirties, married, wife living on East Coast just then. It'd gotten late, they'd walked to "26's", ate sushi maki and sashimi, drank beers, talked until closing. He'd asked if he could come home with her, they'd walked to our apartment, then inside, lain in bed, kissed for a while, then gone to sleep holding each other.

Some moments, my stomach'd tightened. I feared she'd leave me. I could see the places they'd gone - imagined their looking into each other's eyes, holding hands, lips touching. That brought no fear. But the other-world of feelings, internality of their attraction, was more real to me - and in that I'd no part. It made me freeze.

I told myself to breathe, to remember Gabrielle's ease about Mira. This was same, I told self: threatless. I enjoined myself to bring shoulders down, breathe through tightness. I listened to her - tension broke up.

When she was done, I told my fears. She laughed, spoke urgently of our love, said it was an addition, not loss - just as Mira'd been.

I told her in detail what'd happened since we'd last talked. After a while, Mira pried handset, declared she was taking good care of me and I was doing okay taking care of her. She ignored my tickles, asked more about Darin.

After few minutes, Mira said she was very tired, they said goodnight - loving tone surprised me - Gabrielle and I said we loved each other, promised talk next day, goodnight'd.

I hung up, grinned, buoyant. I sing-songed "Gabrielle's got a boy-y, Gabrielle's got a boy-y." Mira sang back, "So have I-i, so have I-i." We wagged our heads like ninnies.

I intoned, "C'mere, you," beckoning. Mira leaped, saying "Willingly!"

I spaced a few kisses across her forehead and other nice places.

"You know," I said, between, "- if Jocelyn - could see us now - she'd die ..."

"Yes!" she said. "The evil Michael, exploiting the poor Mira." She shook her finger an inch from my nose. "Bad Michael. Very bad." I stretched out, pulled her partway on top of me. "Yes," I said. "Such horrible exploitation." Her nose was buried near my ear. I took "Mmmph" to mean assent.

I yawned. We pulled back our heads, said "Bed" in unison - got up, walked to her room.

I loved our being carried there on humor.

We were dropping clothes to floor - I said, "So, boys are trouble, are they?"

"Yes, you most emphatically are."

"And what did we ever do to you, hmm?"

We stopped, looked at each other.

"That hardly bears repeating, sir."

"Well, substantiate your case. A familiar phrase. Anything to do with a warm body who shared this comfy bed?"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

"Continue."

Her face changed. There was conflict. "Well ... look, it was Harris."

It took a moment to register. Her friend - the warm body. I'd thought them separate people.

"Okay."

"We did have sex. It was - not good."

"The sex?"

"Yeah, we weren't compatible."

"I'm sorry. What happened?"

"Well, he's an Objectivist, pretty much. And there's just a connection problem with those men. I swore, after Taylor, never again. I should've stuck to it."

"You'd good sex with Taylor, though."

"Yeah, Taylor and I fit somehow. Maybe despite."

"Why do all these Rand-men fall in love with you?"

She turned still, looking at a room-corner. I felt suddenly she was seeing a vast inner landscape. "Because I can do everything they can, and can do more."

I saw it - well-lit, trimmed circle of Rand-rationality - dark woods surrounding, wider and further-back than clearing - fugitive images, her owls and rooks flying, creatures springing, all rustling in darkness - her, free to pass through all sectors.

I heard, as if in my ear, Goethe's words about creativity: "It is the daemonic something which reason and intelligence cannot account for. The daemonic manifests itself as absolutely positive energy. It likes to attach itself to outstanding personalities."

I felt she was one of them. I wondered if I could keep up. It felt a challenge worth answering. I was eager to meet it.

I looked at her, let myself know it fully: she was beautiful. "Come to bed with me, fae girl," I said, "and hold me tight."

We took off pants, I removed shirt while she kept hers - climbed into bed, Mira clicked off light, and we lay there, a warm breathing bundle of happiness.

"You don't mind," I said suddenly, "I'm not an Objecto-boy? I could get stiff and talk respectfully about the stock-market. If that'd help."

In the darkness she couldn't see my smile. "You, my dear dork," she said, "are no Objecto-boy. You are a man."

"An old one."

"Shut up and kiss me, old-timer."

Springtime flowered again.

We lay, stroking fingertips on each other's sides, when Mira abruptly sat up and twisted at her trunk. I heard rustling.

She threw something - fell to floor. Her shoulder brushed mine as she turned - over my arm warmth of her bare breast, impossible tingle of her nipple - my arms round her, under my hands and forearms skin of her back, shoulder resting on mine, hands at my back.

"Better," she sighed.

"I could not agree more."

We rested in silence, held each other close, snuggled close; after few minutes kisses were broken by yawns. We turned to mold together.

In time, she drifted off, body unconscious-dancing, and I kept the watch.

I thought less than night before. I lay there, flew through the landscape of our history, alit in favorite places.

When the odyssey reached its end and beginning in the moment of touch, it was nearly morning, and I slept.



I swam up toward light as if from a pond-bottom. The way was cloudy, but I stroked fluid with my hands and kicked away from dark below. I broke surface, face down in the pillow, reached for Mira. She wasn't there. I opened my eyes.

She'd already pulled on pants and shirt.

"Good morning, love," I said. "Good morning," she said, not meeting my eyes.

I sat up in bed, wrapped forearms around knees, and we talked. She'd woken up overwhelmed by our intimacy. Part of her wanted to run; she declared she wouldn't. She felt caution-impulses; she'd fight them. Was this not about expansion?

I felt as when she'd gotten her ballet evaluation. I rose, hugged, put on shirt saying since no class today we should leave town, get some free air. She mused over interesting places to go by public transit. I pshaw'd, said we'd rent a car, do it in style.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked.

"Anywhere. Let's just go!"

"Alright! You go shower - I'll email Andrea her update."

Gabrielle and Mira greeted on ICQ - Gabrielle'd done *I Ching* reading on us three, called it amazing - sent Mira text and accompanying picture, bade us look.

Mira: Yes, of course!! I will look as soon as I finish this email.

Gabrielle felt fluxy about future - weather'd been stormy and rainy since I'd left - Darin was coming over that evening and she felt an odd-

ness about him - she wasn't able to be completely excited, as if he held back from her, wouldn't reveal all he could. When she'd touched his body, it'd felt abandoned somehow.

Gabrielle: It didn't have the abundant life flowing through it like Michael has

Mira pantomimed a "hmmm" and hug, suggested perhaps they simply needed some time.

Gabrielle: Well, we'll see what happens ... How are you doing? I know Michael is in ecstatic worlds being with you ... is it the same for you? :)

Yes, said Mira, mostly. She spoke of overwhelm, of desiring to run (Gabrielle interjected, smiling, that she knew that feeling), though she didn't think it'd happen.

I walked in toweling hair - Mira was up from computer - "I'm going to shower now," she said. "Talk to the Gabrielle-girl! Oh!" - she opened a window, pointed - "Look what she came up with on *I Ching* for the three of us!"

She flounced out - I looked at a drawing before me.

Beneath a blue sky were two women in flowing almost-classical dress, close together atop a grassy promontory overlooking the sea. A pure stream flowed through grasses before them, reflecting sky. A deer and raccoon sipped from it, and a squirrel ate from one girl's hand; the other girl petted one of two fawns nestled close to her. Far beyond, in background, snow-capped peaks of stony mountain range going off to sea. The first girl was laying on her stomach; the second girl was crouched.

Gabrielle's question: "What is next for Michael, Mira, and me?" The answer praised the innocence of natural harmlessness, openness, purity of intention.

Those who possess a pure heart are best guided by their instincts and intuition. Thinking too much severs the link with the heart. Be wary of courses of action that require too much cleverness.

The most specific advice, it continued, was contained in changing line four:

Remember that if something truly belongs to or with you, it cannot be taken from you. Let go of it and it will naturally return to you. Similarly, as long as you are true to yourself, and listen to your intuition, you can make no mistakes. The Future hexagram that this reading changes into is called 'Increase.'

We greeted - she felt up and down, she said, out of contact with her center - I told of Mira's wrestlings - I felt simple, at peace - couldn't wait to hold her - her self was clearer to me - all this could be another step to demolishing every block in our way. She said I was making her cry. After time, she spoke of her inability to be fully excited about Darin. We talked a few minutes more about him.

Gabrielle: I just never want you and me to grow less intense ...

And Mira's 'net connection dropped. In San Francisco, Gabrielle typed words I wouldn't read until months later.

Gabrielle: I won't take that as a sign ;) Hahaha!

In Boston I laughed, finished toweling off, then dressed.



Minutes later, Mira and I were standing by dining-table, Yellow Pages open in window-light - candles - tall, thin, wicks almost uncharred - sent shadows across page - we'd found car rental place, taxi company to get there.

"So where," she said, "exactly are we off to?"

I looked at window by couch - sky of snow-day light.

"North," I said. "Further up. What would you think of spending the night on the road?"

"I like it. Yes!"

“We may find a bed-and-breakfast,” I said.

She smiled. “Sounds wonderful. I’ll pack a few things.” She walked off. I shook away thoughts of making love.

I picked up my poetry book from beside bed, clothes-change from duffels - we were ready.



The cab pulled into parking lot - saw little strip mall was abandoned. Confused, stopped a little, we talked of the oddness.

We got out, he opened trunk, set bags on ground with expression that could’ve been annoyance, drove away.

We walked, aimless, before empty storefronts. She peered in window; I hung back, looked up at oblongs where store-signs’d been.

After few minutes, we blew away the vagues: she spotted phone down-street, I stood guard at bags while she nipped over.

She returned few minutes later with corrected address, and she’d called cab back.



Wind brushed us as we went to look.

The Jeep wagon stood at lot-corner, facing frontage road. Silver chassis, four-door, ski rack, high off ground with snow-grip tires. Sleek, tough.

“Sold,” I said.

We went back in, signed papers, and for \$75 daily it was ours.



I turned key, engine blew live, radio screamed. We jumped - our fingers collided by the volume knob.

I drove off fast. We bounced onto street and laughed, in few minutes reached highway. We sped on with a low underthrum toward horizon under grey skies, along cut-slopes through hills with white wings of snow on either side.

We flashed along, by trees - one stand leafless, bare branches swept against clouds - then copseful of pines - needlely, solid, rich-green.

Our hands found one another across divider and clasped.

I looked at her legs.

They were folded at angles atop the leather. Taut-jeaned, they spoke to me. My eyes traced slenderness by her ankles, up her calves, up the compact swell in power of her thighs, muscular and lean, up to her hips, most-womanly of all her body. Further than this her dark jacket fell and I could see no more.

I was drawn to her legs. It was desire - but my body remained at rest; energy in my eyes.

I put hand on her left thigh. Warmth went into my palm, my mind. I felt wholer with her. She put her hand on top of mine and pressed my fingers down.

A few minutes later, I knew a moment had come. I pulled soiled cassette from in my coat, put it in-deck.

Tape noise cleared to man's voice in an echoing hall. Applause, then silence, then my first time playing for an audience - concert in the Academy gymnasium.

Her eyes widened. She sank back in seat, looked out window, listened to Beethoven. She glanced at me admiringly several times.

She clapped with audience of almost eighteen years before. All quieted for my transcription of a Bach organ toccata. As octaves came in at end, a woman in the audience'd gasped. I'd felt a rush. Years later, I felt its reflection.

Mira applauded as I put in pocket. She asked when I'd started, called it remarkable. I told of my grandfather's self-taught playing. She said it was all amazing, looked out window again.

We drove on, past plowed snow-piles, thick bands of trees above them, and - every so often - pine-stands pointing up, dark and different against the sky.

"Where are we going?" said Mira. Her voice sounded as natural as air. Suddenly we were outside time again. I looked west, sun behind clouds, then I looked east.

"To the sea," I said. "We're going to walk by the sea."



The white hills grew as we drove on. Long forest-fronts thinned slightly, occasional rock outcrops near highway paler, smoother. The horizon widened as land between the hills flattened - I imagined rain and sea mixing in eastward grasslands, flowing in over road during storms.

A large sign came up, then passed behind - New Hampshire.

Western clouds were parting. Beams of gold fell through cloud-gaps, to unseen places of earth, beyond the trees or road-curving horizon.

We got off on a smaller road. We passed through quiet New England towns - signs said "Hampton Falls" and "Elmwood Corners." The beams gained faintest orange, falling in front of us as clouds cleared.

Now forest passed on either side, tall and solemn - then gone, and the road, still flat, ran atop earth levee across marsh - tidal flats of tall grasses, rich clayish soil, to right creek winding through, reflecting greyed yellow-white of clouds - row of houses on the creek's other side, beams fell on marsh and houses alike - to south, a wide sky-prospect above, dark as if light'd slipped off the house-tops and fallen away into space.

Immensity touched timelessness. We'd followed no map or person's word. We'd wished the sea, and now we ran along with sunbeams to east, to the unknown shore.

We rode over marsh toward its end - a clean line of houses in light - our shadow ahead of us on the road, foretaste of evening - horizon flattening - colors going pale - this, I thought, is the last town before the sea.

Earth rose up, road ran flush ahead - we passed out into block after block of houses and hotels - endless hotels strung through a deserted-seeming town - lit in near-sunset - parked cars few - doors and windows boarded for season.

The road - one-way in town - had buildings close-by, short-curbed - so it seemed to extend the foundations - level channel between two long walls - sole openings were side-street flashes.

I gradually slowed to town speed - snow and road dirt rose in air, wind-whipped - yellowing light reflected from walls, down dimly around corners.

Then ahead, an ending - a crossing-road - above it some sort of railing

- then sky above, dark with hanging cloud-front.

We pulled into parking space. I keyed off, was readying to get out when she said, "Could we stay a moment?" We half-turned to one another, joined hands.

She pulled a cassette from her jacket - pressed "play" - we sat, silent - her thumb pressed the bridge between my thumb and index finger - Nigel Kennedy began motoric version of Hendrix's "Little Wing" - this was, she said, for choreography debut.

We turned, looked past railing - watched sand blow in small whirls, fly apart seconds later - music edged through strange tonalities, timbres - violin sawed to violent climax - seconds after, flock of gulls blew up - swirled in ball over beach, shot left, toward curving rocky point at beach-end to north - music ended.

She packed cassette away. We opened doors, and the first inch brought frigid knives. I got down and grit went in my eye as I shut door. Mira staggered on snow-hillock. Wind whistled among western buildings. I keyed doors locked and we looked forward.

There, in sinking sunlight, was a tall granite statue. It was a woman, facing away from us. We began to walk in wind. To left, nothing but sky over railings - to right, two slim flagpoles, empty. She rose into air on a square concrete platform.

A stone crescent curved in front, columns of names carved. We stepped onto sidewalk, drew close. Mira ran gloved finger over some letters. I wondered how they'd come to be written here.

We raised our eyes, looked out with her.

Under the sky, at the end of sand, was the sea, the dark sea at last. It was breaking slowly, sluggish. Beyond the breakers, roiled water out to the horizon.

We walked right, stepped on platform through rail-gap, stood before her side.

Her pedestal was four telescoping stone rings - above topmost, hewn, a rocky promontory. She was atop it, her right knee raised, heel arched - only toe-tips touched rock. Ready to rise up.

She leaned forward slightly. Her garb was simple cloth wrap, middle up to shoulders then down arms - further veiling across shoulders and

bust - long flowing skirt - something in hand, other side of lap - couldn't quite see, for snow.

Mira walked to face her, and looked up. I looked down, to the base. Lowest ring - incised trough cut into it - layer of soil, blown near-free of snow, cracked and parched, as dry in winter as it'd've been in desert - stubs of flower-bushes shook in wind - in summer, a planter.

There were capitals cut into second-highest ring - I walked round, read - "Breathe soft, ye winds" - a pair of stars - "Ye waves in silence rest" - final star-pair.

Mira was still facing her. I walked, stood beside, looked up.

The wind hit my face. The woman's head - lifted lightly in air. Un-moving attention, faintest hope behind features. Her left foot on rock, thigh straight toward horizon - ready to walk.

Carved waves like bunched acanthi lapped at promontory. She leaned, as if listening with body - waited, in pure awareness, for what might or might not come.

She was holding a laurel garland, full-circle.

Small capitals, second-lowest ring. I brushed wind-pressed snow away with my shoe's toe.

NEW HAMPSHIRE MARINE MEMORIAL

Below was cut name of she who'd designed it, and date of its dedication.

Mira read. We looked up again. "She's waiting -" I said. "- for them," said Mira.

There was no tragedy in the woman's face. There was acceptance.

I looked at the wreath. It rested, a bit heavy, on her left knee, almost slipping into waves. Still, she held on, a little weary. She hadn't cast it upon the waters.

All wasn't ended.

We walked round again, took in every detail in failing light, then went out onto sand, toward the sea.

Sand blew from drifts, hissed on our clothes. I realized I couldn't feel

my ears or nose. Mira picked her way along. She looked, grinned, beams catching cheeks, hairs blown free, glints in her eye.

She yelled, "I love you!" I yelled it back. We stumbled awkwardly to one another, hugged fierce, walking down, wind shoving us forward, firm hand to our backs.

The waves came in, narrowly foaming but pressed down, kept low - beyond them, unbreaking sea-waves, heaving but depressed too, almost void of whitecap.

Between us and the breakers was something I'd never seen: the sea, frozen. The very lip of sea, where it thinned, sand-emerge from brine, was ice. Not ice of snow - none near - or snow-melt - no channels from up-hill drifts - but sea itself, frozen in bitter cold.

We drew close, in wonder. We crossed onto the ice, walked forth, crackling lightly, looking down into still water. Sand particles seemed magnified, and little floods came from waves - then reversed, dripping back into sea.

We looked at each other, lips parted. Then we advanced, crunching down now, shattering. Saw plant life in water below. How could green plant be there? But it was - alive somehow, or preserved.

"This place," I said, "must be incredible in summer." She shook her head. I knew she meant nothing but wonder and yes.

We cracked across, splits radiating. The wind went down. We could hear breakers, then it rose and drowned them out. We looked at each other, jerked heads toward the road.

We turned uphill.

Wind was pain at my front - grit-cloud blew - in both eyes - slowed pace, turned head until tears washed - blew off - wondered if they'd reach sea.

I turned forward, raised head.

Sun'd fallen closer to the horizon. Wind roared as if vomited, howling, straight from its heart. Mira stood straight, unbowed, directly between me and its disk.

It lined her in flared orange-red. It was a moment I'd waited for. I just hadn't known it.

I stopped walking without realizing it.

She took step after step, firmly - stumbled now and then, never fell,
never let herself slow.

Silently, I spoke.

*You do not know this - I don't have words for it, not this - but I am with you, and will
be with you - if I died now, if I dropped to earth and your face was the last I saw, I've
known this - this was enough - I'll be true to you, for all my life - I'll walk into the
light with you, beautiful being ...*

I walked again, caught up with her.

We crossed to statue, tacking against the wind.

She met us, who'd looked out for nearly half a century.

In passing I looked at her face, hair swept back in braided bun.

I realized in small shock.

She and Mira looked akin.

They could have been sisters.

We ran to Jeep, got in hurriedly, slammed doors - I keyed engine,
gunned it, hands at vents, good pain.

Mira looked in the statue's direction.

"That," she said, "was incredible."

"How did we find all this?" I said.

We turned to each other. She looked at me - no play at all - her eyes
wide, chin a touch lowered again - her face deeply serious. I loved this in
her most of all.

Our eyes locked.

Suddenly there was nothing at all. Nothing. Time ended.

She spoke, each word falling into a new world.

"I felt you, dearest."

We both looked into each other, sudden strangers - seized each other -
lips met - warm moistness, life against cold, against time we'd spent
apart - tasted tongues, lips sang, touched fingertips to each other's faces -
felt still-cold patches, burning warmth - could not tell which of us
was cold or hot or where.

It was a seal upon this place, all we'd experienced.

I looked in her eyes, wondered if she'd ever know all I felt - hoped she

would, all at once - and never, so she'd know the inexhaustible.

We kissed softly, parted, leaning back. We were breathing quickly.

We sat for a time.

I looked toward the point where gulls'd flown.

"I think we should go further up," I said.

Mira nodded.

"North," she said.

I set us in reverse, pulled out.

We stopped at corner, looked right.

The woman looked out to sea for the lost souls.

We turned, and drove on.



Past a landward row of hotels and shops - on other side, dark sea - finally, came the houses of men. They had widow's walks looking over the road. I saw, flanking the widow's walks, dormer windows - lit lamps behind curtains.

The road swerved in - passed sea-hiding mount with houses clustered up it - ran by waves again for a time. The next point, northeast, hovered across beach.

Road hugged point's sea-side - banked curve - beach dropped away, Jeep leaned - I braked - large estates passed above - broad houses, back from road, gabled - open to ice-fields that'd been green lawns - spring, would again.

We rose - curve, at point's tip - flipped on running lights - swept north up-road - freshwater ponds, roads, houses - some new, few positively modernist.

In falling light trees were going near-black - at turn, down through some, blue-white crest-tips on long wave-lines coming to shore.

In time, a wide curve - no lights, bridge over dark water - time for another direction - no restaurant or bed-and-breakfast near - turned round at bridge's far side, drove back as we'd come, south 'til lights again, wide drag to right - sign read "Cable Road."

We turned right - fading yellow-and-teal smears at horizon - rode

about exploring back roads for a while, horizon-light only compass. We swung through houses and forests, all dark - came upon a broad asphalt - turned left - more woods, provision-stop at convenience store, turns, then on highway again.

We merged - river of yellow-white lights in opposite - when we reached speed, rippling becalmed lake of red lights in ours. Motor roared up - Mira turned on radio, found pop-music. We listened, the boys sang their depressed sincerity clear and true, and miles passed swiftly.

On a random offshoot, continued - about ten minutes, town lights, rising in sky - I took exit. As we passed below lit-up arch with town-name I laughed.

I reached back, put duffel in her lap, told her to pull out book - she opened - *Collected Poems* - Robert Coffin - told her I'd planned to read to her in bed - no idea we'd be in town, but it'd been his - he'd lived there.

Mira threw hands up, laughed, said it was all clearly meant to be.

Shops scattered about a neighborhood - looked promising. I pulled off and parked.

Out into still air, we sidewalk'd downhill, hands in coats, looking for food and bed.

Before long, savory smells from warm-dark lit inside of restaurant. Menu posted under glass showed steaks and fish and ales.

We walked in.



We followed her - past diners - wooden tables, candles in little jars - dance floor - behind, empty band stage - chest-level divider - table toward rear - she hoped we enjoyed.

Stage-light colors over Mira's face - I was held by the beauty - wondered when they played. Would she dance? Would I do well? Soon, basket of bread and butter, bowls of steaming soup, salad on plates, courses of meat and fish.

We talked of happy small things. I looked around. We were explorers. People'd no idea who we were, what we'd done. Delicate colors moved in her hair. I felt pride - this hour, this day, bringing food to her.

Sweet dessert came, with hot coffee. We ate, drank, held hands, smiled. When it came I signed the credit-slip. We got coats from the two empty chairs, walked past podium, said goodnight to greeter.



It was colder and we walked fast. Stars twinkled in dark folds of space. I was tired, horizons faintly contracted. Crest I'd ridden was troughing. My reserves were low. I thought of finding warm place to rest. Perhaps we'd find our sensual way further yet.

We got in Jeep. I looked at her. "Where next, do you intuit?" She looked out, then half-turned back, face troubled. "I think I'd like to go home. I want to sleep in my own bed tonight." Her voice softer than usual.

"How come?"

"It's dark out, and cold, and I'm worried we won't find a good place to stay."

We talked a bit. She touted her nice mattress, vowed to rub my back. I yielded, slightly puzzled, said I'd not come between girl and her bed. I pulled out to right, accelerated down one-way.

Mira put hand to mouth, looked at me from corners of eyes. "You've had no problem keeping me from sleep the past two nights."

"Hey! We had things to do."

"My love, that is always true of us."

She was smiling behind hand. Tiredness no more. I pulled onto secondary road south, and we play-fought like kittens.

About forty-five minutes in, she yawned. She leaned in, cozied to my arm, face in delicate panel-light, tranquil. I pressed knee to steering wheel, left hand slowly turned down radio.

I sat up straight, girl breathing long breaths on my arm, and thought. Minutes later, sign, in darkness - the road we'd taken, to sea.

A few minutes later, in Massachusetts.



The moon glowed behind her building. Few lights on as we crunched with

stars overhead to door.

We swayed up stairs - duffels behind chair - to her room - lay down atop blanket - legs and arms cinched - my hand went to small of her back, fingers between muscles - we smiled, lips met - stretched together, laughed at timing, looked silently into one another.

She reached out fingers slowly, as if across great space, rested tips on my cheek. "You," she said, "mean so much to me."

"I've only had days like these with you," I said. "Like all problems are solved."

Her pupils expanded. She nodded, shadow across her face from my own. "Here," she said. "Lay on my other side so I can get your back." I tightened arms, rolled us both over. I released, flipped over, faced wall. "Shirt, please," she said. I got it off, lay down, slight shiver of less than fully clothed.

She pressed fingers, palms, in, touch like our first words: direct, probing, finding - body-feelings rose, moved through - her hands followed, accurate.

I turned my head back. "You feel the energy, don't you?" Steady answer: "I've done energy-work before." My back loosened. Little pains of emotion rose and dissipated. Time faded.

She softened and yawned. I turned over, kissed her nose, thanked. She welcomed, then - sleepy - wished me sweet dreams. Her hand took mine, squeezed, almost immediately first stages of sleep. Small tremors arced. I turned, looked out at floor, cold-moon-lit.

I breathed deeply, feeling solitude.

I didn't know how long I'd be awake, but this was enough.

My mind drifted across day, exhaustion pulling down.

A day, I thought, to remember - life is short, and -

Suddenly I stiffened in horror.

My muscles froze.

Breath stopped.

Frozen awareness had taken me.

One day I'll be dead.

I lay beside her, locked in absolute, silent terror.



12 February 2001.

Everything would go.

The day we'd had - every before, every after - sight, skin, touch, love
- challenge, defeat, triumph - what had been, what would be - even loss,
lost - gone - never to feel again.

Heart hammered - I looked at room - moonlight on floor, all as it'd
been - yet horror - "The moon won't help me," I thought, dislocated -
she slept, peaceful by me - mustn't wake - I stayed silent.

Thought of spring - air, sun, rain showers, things growing - touched
her wrist - life in her, so much like mine - tried, all my might, to feel it
- reminded myself I wasn't dying, not yet - still had time - each helped,
but been thrown too far - couldn't get back - could only accept ugliness
of present - wait for the turn - know that it'd pass.

I lay, impaled, for hours - thought of my life, all I'd done and failed to
do - thought of the things that'd simply come, and what hadn't come -
things that couldn't be compelled - thought of those with whom there'd
been love - traced patterns of what'd worked, what hadn't - thought of
Gabrielle - what'd her day been? - had she seen Darin?

There were little stars out window - moon rays on floor-spots - saw
no motion, even with fixed looking - could only see small alignments,
look away, then later, by markers, know change.

I held mind focused - didn't evade - faced it - as hours passed ter-
ror left in little streams - as if cracking - slowly melting - dripping back
into sea.

It was gone.

I was suspended in neutral, halfway back.

Dawn was rising.

The feeling of unfeeling ended in a few hours of restless sleep.



I awoke. Mira was beside me, stretching up.

I felt better - she smiled, ruffled my hair.

We rolled from bed, readied - my horizon was here-and-now - show-
ered - clean clothes - yesterday's behind easy chair - hoped she didn't