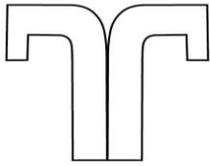


Book Three
Seeking



he door to the Rebbe's office is closed, so I sit dutifully in the waiting room, waiting to be allowed in. I have about ten minutes before our newly scheduled "tai-chi dance" compromise extra meeting. Images of Mery dancing and Johannes cavorting are fresh in my mind and swirl about. These images intermingle with the trauma and confusion caused by my two counselors forcing me to bring up the chaos and pain of my Kansas City visit, and my family interactions.

As I wait, I can hear mumbling, even laughter, as they talk with the client who is keeping me from seeing them. I feel some jealousy at being excluded, like the person on the outside of a joke. I feel anger arising at having to wait, and uncertainty about whether they are really helping me, or can help me. Things are not getting better, they are getting worse.

And today is the day I am going to have to pay them. Jealousy and anger escalate, combine and become rage. Something breaks in me.

Calmly, I reach into my pocket. There are only about ten lirot. I need money for my dinner. I weigh, as if on a balance, food versus them, and the answer is clear. As uninteresting to me as food is, I still believe it will provide me more sustenance than another meeting with them. Good-bye to a failed experiment at therapy. I am definitely worse off for having been forced to rehash and rebring up so many ugly memories.

I do the only logical thing. I write them a note, saying I unfortunately have another commitment and am not going to be able to make this afternoon's session. I mention that I really

don't have much money, so am enclosing what I can. Because of my financial straits, I'm not going to be able to continue in therapy. Out of courtesy, and because I am a gentleman, I thank them for their efforts this past month. I end with shalom. I like that word. It's ambiguous. Hello. Good-bye. Peace. For me, it means good-bye.

They're lucky I'm leaving them anything. I place six lirot in the letter, over half of what I have left. I fold up the sides of the letter, and leave. I'm impressed with my generosity and thoughtfulness.

Outside, the sun is beginning to set. I feel a sense of liberation and freedom, as if I've escaped from thea bondage, into which they had slowly lured me. At first they offered their counseling for free, an entire hour and half session. Then they said I'd have to pay something, and the sessions shrunk to less than an hour. Bait and switch. But I have escaped.

To celebrate my freedom, I take a walk to Independence Park. Within an hour it will be completely dark outside.

I wonder about the darkness within. In them. In me. In my family. In Mery. Is it really good to do too much rooting around in your life? Does that effort fertilize the soil for a possible rebirth, or does it tear up the roots, causing your own death?

What's next in my unfolding day, and life? First I'll get some dinner; then I have the freedom to continue writing about my experiences in Eilat. I think gratefully of Jean-Claude and his wisdom. Much superior to the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. And his advice was free of charge.

Inspired by Jean-Claude's refreshing attitude toward life; his poetry; being in Independence Park and free from the tenta-

cles of the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet, I sit and write a poem, free style. No more efforts to fit into Dr. Lisbet's legalistic, legitimizing limits of haiku's form. I have been called to freedom.

DARKNESS: AN ODE TO INDEPENDENCE

Oblique setting
sun caressing my shoulders,
legs, crossed yoga-style,
sitting on the hard dirt.

Freely rooted?

Crushed and broken
beneath a passing car's weight,
all that remains
are two tire-tracks now molded into
this ground, once wet and malleable.

Exposed, now cut off at earth
a stubbled root
of foliage
that once boldly, naively,
carelessly, groped to break
through the sod, grasping for
the light.

Freely seeking?

All that is left lies
below the ground,
in darkness.

Does the root
under the ground even know
there is sunlight above?
If so, will it dare try again
to grow?

If unknowing, will it
be content to lie
buried in darkness?

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Faces flicker, light and shadow, reflecting the firelight.

A full moon reflects off what Homer might call the "wine dark sea." Saturday night. The branches and logs fueling the fire are like a large intertwined Havdalah candle celebrating

the end of the Shabbat.

I sit outside the campfires with my little chess set, and watch. I can't write, but I think what I will one day write about this experience.

I hear the singing. I see, but don't feel, the warmth of the fires. Even at a distance, I sing along with them. I wish I could play my flute. I try, but with one hand, it's too awkward, and half the notes I'm not able to play.

"The times, they are a' changing."

The song ends.

Empty spaces.

The people around the campfire turn toward each other and joyously celebrate in the afterglow of the music. They hug, talk, caress. I hear only the silence, feel the aloneness, see the distances between me and others, the tenuous melodic connection broken.

I see spaces everywhere, a foggy mist that I can't seem to crawl out of. Except for the brief moments of song.

Outside the circle, by the full light of the moon and the fire, I read this week's Torah passage. Sodom and Gemorrah. Is that what I've been witnessing here the past few days? Women walking and swimming topless; men wearing thong swim suits that make my speedo look like a three piece suit. Or is it just that I want to criticize because I don't feel part of it? Vayera. The Lord appeared. Where? Not here. Why am I staying and wasting my time? I need to keep going forward to Sinai. "Look not behind thee." Even in the book of beginnings--Genesis-- there are end-

ings, and we shouldn't look back at them.

There is too much pain behind. Abraham binding Isaac, the dominant father and timid son. I need to leave behind my father/son relationship.

Hine-ni. I am here. All of me. Present before the Lord.

Those are not words I can honestly say.

Hitpallel. The first mention of prayer in the Bible. I need to start living a more prayerful, God-centered life.

What a beautiful passage: Hakhnasat orhim--extending hospitality to strangers. I read a commentary from Talmud Taanit 20b, Rabbi Hamnuma "Whoever is in need, let him come and join."

I wish those here would heed that message. I am alone and in need.

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"Suzanne takes you down to her place by the River..." I listen to the words waft over me. The song is too piercing, I can't sing along. "And you know that she's half crazy and that's why you want to be there, And she feeds you tea..."

I refuse to start crying again. I pinch my thumb nail into my index finger. The physical pain is almost soothing as it blocks some of my mental anguish. As consolation, or torment, I remind myself that it wasn't always like this. My life used to feel connected. Very rarely would there be a moment of space or emptiness.

Now, after Elizabeth, I see the emptiness everywhere.

"And Jesus...spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower...and when He knew for certain only drowning men could see him...."

Has the emptiness always been present, just not noticed, and is it her absence that revealed it to me? Or has it been created by her leaving a void in me that I now see all around me?

"And you think maybe you'll trust Him

For He's touched your perfect body with His mind."

Maybe both. Once I saw only words. Now I see the spaces within and around them. Is it just where and how I focus?

Trying to understand myself is not that easy, as if I'm trying to look at my eyes directly, without mirrors. I can't see them. I have trouble bringing myself into focus.

Find the basics, like Descartes' Cogito, ergo sum. Can I agree that even if I can't see my own eyes, at least I can see?

No. Even that is an illusion, isn't it? When I blink, I create darkness, but most of the time I don't even realize that I've lost touch with the visual world. I don't see that I don't see. The world still feels there after my sight returns, and often I don't register that I've left it-- I don't notice the brief instance of sightlessness.

"While Suzanne holds the mirror

And you want to travel with her

And you want to travel blind

And you know that you can trust her

For she's touched your perfect body with her mind."

Or what about the blind spot we all have, that none of us notices. We don't know what we don't know. And even when it's pointed out, I still have trouble believing that a blind spot in my eye actually exists.

"Has anyone ever said you think too much?" Jean-Claude asks

me with a twinkle in his eye and an easy smile. He answers his own question by saying "Is the Pope Catholic?" He says nothing, but feel my mood lightening as he continues: "You are a thinker. Thinkers think.

"Use your thinking to turn the world upside down and inside out. If you assume the world is connected, you are sad every time you see emptiness. Every loss of contact, every empty space is shattering. BUT, if you turn things topsy turvy, and assume, like the existentialists, that the world is a lonely place, then when you see spaces, you are not surprised. Lower your expectations. If you assume spaces and emptiness, then contact is amazing, is it not? See how, contrary to expectations and belief, the existentialists are really positive!"

I look up at the moon, which has lost half its reflection. Another week has passed. Another Shabbat come and gone. If it weren't for my occasional contacts with Jean-Claude, my first two weeks in Eilat would have been filled only with those empty spaces.

I suppose I should be grateful that connection and song are still possible. "Patience," he counsels me to counsel myself. "The moon is still half full." Maybe these are new shoots budding with me, and this is a time for resting and healing. It is, as he told me, pointless to compare myself to who I was. I have to acknowledge that this is going to be a slow rebuilding and healing process.

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Over the next several days, I find myself willing to open up and share with Jean-Claude. Eventually I share about Elizabeth. He feels both safe and wise to me, and I ask him if he's ever

been hurt like that, felt the emptiness. He seems to me so fluid, so content with himself, comfortable either with company or without.

"No one goes through life without being wounded. Of course I have been hurt. That's what women do. I'm joking, but pain is part of the journey. We are humans. We hurt each other. Not always on purpose. Have you read Sartre's *No Exit*?" I nod. "Read it in French. *Huis Clos*. *L'enfer, c'est les autres*. Hell is other people.

"See that beautiful blonde Scandinavian model? "

"Yes, why? She's gorgeous."

"Yes, she is the stereotype, but often true. That is why you can't take Sartre too seriously! Heaven is other people, *n'est pas*?"

"Ten years ago, a school teacher from Sweden visited here, looked almost like that one. Tall, lithe. Gorgeous. Yes, I'm superficial at times, too. But God gave us bodies, didn't He? We spent the summer together. I asked her to stay but she couldn't or wouldn't."

"Why didn't you go see her?"

"No money. Plus, I hate the cold. Too much uprooting already in my life. She said she would return on vacations, the following summer. I never saw her again. And after a few weeks, no more letters or cards. Just silence."

He's interrupted as someone comes to rent some snorkeling equipment. They negotiate, exchange a few pleasantries, then he continues.

"Sad? No. *Désolé*. Numb. For several weeks I talked to no one, felt like I could not say anything. Me. Can you believe

it? I even built a rocket ship out of wood and stones." He points to different objects on the beach in a sweeping gesture. "A rocket ship to take me to the moon. Each night I would sit in the rocket ship for hours, looking at the moon, saying nothing, talking to no one. Everything seemed strange, lost, without moorings. Sartre's Roquetin's Nausea. Wait."

He goes back into his little shack, and comes out with a crumpled piece of paper.

Je ne comprends rien...cette vie.
En effet, il n'y a aucune chose
que je comprends. Rien.
C'est seulement...
rien.

I read his poem. I could have written it, it so closely expresses my feelings. I sense that he really does understand what I am saying. Yet he seems as though he's moved beyond this nothingness. Ten years. A long time. But at least there's hope. He hands me another of his poems

Seul?
Qui, je suis seul,..mais,il n'y a
aucun difference entre moi et
les autres

Tout le monde nait seul, meurt seul.
Mais il y a des amis, comme toi.
Tu viens et nous partageons
le pain et le vin
Puis, bien que nous soyons seuls, nous ne
sommes pas
solitaires.

Le renommée, le bien, tout ne vaut rien.
Tout n'est rien; sauf, mon ami,
les amis, le vin, et le pain.
Ca, c'est tout.

"Remember, the spaces can be your friends. They give you time for healing. Use them well. But don't get lost in them."

I point to my hand, and ask him if he can make me a copy of the poems for me.

"Gladly. Only a small copyright fee, artistic fee, and printing fee." I start to say how little money I have, but before I can he slaps his hand on my back, laughing at my downcast face. "Come, tonight, you must join our group around the fire. I see you each night watching us. Enough aloneness. Tonight is a night when there is no visible moon. On such a night you need company."

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In vino veritas.

Wine flows freely, as Jean-Claude passes his silver chalice around to the singing group. It's as if we are in a vineyard of God, Kerem-el. Somehow the supply of wine seems endless, like John's (2:1-10) recounting how Jesus turned water into wine.

There is harmony and camaraderie here. Though there are a few Israelis, most have gathered in Eilat from other countries--Australia, Norway, France, Germany, Italy, Japan-- because of the weather, the free rent on the beach, the hashish, and the Red Sea. Conversations occur mainly in English, but also in many other languages. I'm picking up a few words here and there. I notice if I don't concentrate too hard, but just let the words flow over me, I can understand better the languages I've studied, and even some I've never heard before. I'm learning slowly to trust myself again, not to focus so much on every detail, every word, but try to find the big picture, the tone, the feeling. I'm trying to become more flowing, allowing, free.

We all sing together, creating even more harmony, both in the act of singing, and in the nature of the songs themselves: spiritual, connected, hopeful: Blowing in the Wind; This Land is Your Land; Turn, Turn, Turn, There is a Time for Every Season.

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If it weren't for the moon, I would have no sense of time here. Days came and go, just following nature's rhythms. Each day the sun shifts a bit more when it rises and when it sets. Tonight we see the fullness of the moon returning. What wonderful days and nights the end of November has brought. I feel like I'm putting down roots here. I've bought an inexpensive used tent--from a departing Brazilian couple, which gives me additional shelter, and some much needed privacy for the evenings after the singing stops. I also feel safer having my few material goods stored out of sight.

More wine is passed. More songs. Judy Collins, Pete Seeger, Simon and Garfunkle, Peter, Paul, and Mery, Bob Dylan. It's interesting how many singers/songwriters are Jewish.

As I've gotten to know some of the people, I can say that all of us in Eilat seem dedicated to a better humanity: civil rights, gender equality, nuclear disarmament, peace movements. I have a real feeling of hope, about me, and about the world. The vision is reflected in the songs we song, both their content, and, as importantly, the joining in song of so many diverse cultures, beliefs, individuals... in harmony.

We are like a small United Nations.

There is an easy sensuality here that is allowing me to reawaken my body, which has felt lost to me for these last several months. We are all joined by the song--words, humming, fingers and hands pounding out rhythms, swaying bodies. Connectedness.

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Everything is shared. Not just by Jean-Claude, but anyone you meet, after knowing them only a few moments, invites you into

their tent for shit. There is something *gemutlich* about passing the pipes--not only the effect of the smoking,--but the ritual and camaraderie of sharing that goes along with it.

Hashish isn't the only thing that is shared: bread, wine, anything that someone has instantly becomes communal. Like on the kibbutz, the acquisitiveness of American society is absent. Both are like a big family, but on the kibbutz there were so many rules required in order to belong to the family.

Though I don't drive here, it reminds me of what it was like trying to merge onto a freeway. I was never sure whether the car in back would let me in. If I cut it too close, they would press me, until I picked up speed and could feel I belonged. But I had to go at a certain pace to ensure that belonging. With my own family, it was the same thing. I had to keep driving through life at a certain pace--progressing, rising, becoming a star--to feel loved and accepted. Here, in Eilat, I don't have anything to prove. I don't have to wear contacts, worry about my hair, lift weights, try to be academic. I can just be, and nothing is expected of me by anyone, including me.

What is there to seek any longer? Freedom, belonging, money, safety, security? I have all I need, right here.

It is so refreshing to be in a place where there is no structure, no limitations, no one telling you what to do and when to do it. These people are truly free, not bound by artificial restraints, not even those of clothing.

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More wine. We're just following the instructions of St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy (23). Drink no longer water, but

use a little wine for the stomach's sake.

As I look around me, in the light of the moon, over half full, there is something lovely and pristine about this natural environment. It hasn't yet been desecrated by humans. The initial beauty I found at the kibbutz turned out to have been an illusion upon closer inspection. The fabled, enchanted Sea of Galilee, where Jesus walked on water, was filled with excrement. When I got too close to reality, it didn't match the vision.

Both Sides Now. I let the song drift over me as I continue my reverie while imbibing another glass of wine. I notice I care less about its taste and more about its effect. How pompous Richard's wine obsession-- wanting to sound like a sommelier--a mere waiter in charge of wines; and how silly I seem for being bothered by his pretentiousness.

Progress? Yes, indeed.

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I take a big puff on a pipe passed by the lovely blonde Swedish model Jean-Claude pointed out to me last week. She's here on a photo shoot.

I pass the pipe to an Italian woman, with long dark hair. The model whispers her name in my ear--Carina-- and places her hand on my right thigh, as she sings and sways her hair in the moonlight.

The Italian woman places the pipe in the mouth of a powerful looking Italian man on her left, who is playing a guitar. Carina whispers again in my ear that his name is Thomas, and he is the photographer for the photo shoot. I lean over and ask him if I can learn some tricks of the trade from him, as I fancy myself an amateur photographer, and I've brought Mr. Cannon with me. He

easily agrees.

No competition, just cooperation.

His girlfriend sways her hair over my left thigh, as she continues singing. "Love your brother and sister, Gotta love one another right now."

Carina keeps rubbing my thigh, and smiling at me. Why is she doing that--to me? Although I haven't looked at myself in a mirror in a while, I can't imagine that I am that attractive. I've stopped working out, let my hair grow long, have a scruffy beard, no Brooks Brothers shirts or Countess Mara tie. Why is she making advances? Do I still have it? It? What? I hear Jean-Claude's words, "Don't think so much."

Maybe it's the wine? I take another drink. Maybe, because she is so beautiful, and in such a body-focused profession, she's learning to go beyond the body, and she feels my burgeoning spiritual nature. Maybe she feels my good heart. But how good is it, really? Maybe it's the hashish.

Too many questions. No answers. Maybe I've "touched her perfect body with my mind."

Maybe it's an act of spiritual charity on her part.

If so, this is a spiritual charity that I am going to enjoy receiving. My lingham is adding to the glow of the moon and the campfire. I have a feeling that if I can just stay out of my own way, and stop thinking, later on tonight she will guide me to the light.

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As I look around the campfire, seeing the shining, happy faces reflected in the light, I feel full of pride.

Look at us, singing and swaying as one. We are all living together here, simply and harmoniously. This community is proof that it is possible to see beyond a narrow materialistic and selfish vision of life. There is no greed. No struggle for fame or glory, no Richard-like oneupsmanship. We are showing there can be a better, gentler life here on earth, a value system that treats human life in a sacred way, and an individual communion with something beyond this earthly plane.

Together, we are modeling it can be done by peoples of all nations, creeds, colors, ethnicities, religions. Why can't everyone everywhere be this open and loving, and remove the barriers that alienate people from each another?

I sense a commonality here, irrespective of culture, parents, environment, society. Are these people unique subsets of their cultures, or is there a transcendent core within all humans waiting to be discovered and let out?

Gotta love one another right now.

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Another beautiful sunrise. Early morning. Some fisherman are already up and have set out for the day. My compatriots are sleeping in. For some reason, no matter how late I go to bed, I always awake with the first light.

I like this morning time. It gives me time to think.

Why are things so good here, and what went wrong at the Kibbutz? With my left hand, I make awkward notes of what I have already thought about. The natural beauty here. Freedom and the lack of restrictions. No one telling me what to do.

What else?

An Asian man--Japanese?--he reminds me of my golf buddy

Inamatsu, walks by, carrying a wooden flute. I try out "Ohio." He stops "ohayoh gozaimasu." I point to his flute, cup my left hand to my mouth, and place my cupped right hand about ten inches away, as if holding a flute, and motion for him to sit and join me.

He does, raises his bamboo flute, saying "shionbue", and starts to play. Slow, methodical notes, right hand over four holes, a different fingering than my Yamaha silver flute. My flute seems out of place, less natural, too ostentatious. Look at me, a rich boy from Kansas City. I want to hide my flute. I also become angry with myself at the fear I become aware of. that someone might steal it, or I might lose it. Still a frightened greedy little boy. I want to hide not only my flute, but that part of myself.

As he plays, I continue my reverie and left handed writing.

I feel like I'm trying to learn again how to play the music of my life, to get the sound right, to find the notes of who I am, what range of emotions I have. This is a learning and practicing time, when lots of mistakes are and will be made. As Jean Claude said, "It is all good. When it is good it is good. When you make mistakes, you learn from them and it is good. Failure is what makes success remarkable."

I know these new lessons are going to take time. I think back to my early flute lessons. When first learning a flute piece, I have to overview it, find the key signature, notice the sharps, flats, accidentals. After I play it a few times, I no longer think each note, try to find each finger position. I start to feel the rhythm, Soon, I can just jump in and play, trust, read the music as a flowing sentence rather than as individual letters and words. Maybe

in the quiet of Coral Beach, I am relearning to play some notes, starting to trust more, pick up momentum.

After a while the man offers me his flute to play. It is light weight, and I can easily support it with one hand. I place my left hand over the three holes. I try to play. At first I'm self-conscious and it's breathy. But soon I hit a couple of pure notes. He claps and bows. Then he runs off.

Soon he returns with a second flute-like instrument. "Shakahachi," he says, and plays and holds a single tone, a much deeper sound. He motions for us to play together. Spontaneity and improvisation is not something I am good at, especially without music and without a lot of practice. His gestures tell me to begin. I again play a few notes with my limited mobility. I'm in awe at his ability to harmonize and counterpoint. We sound like a well-rehearsed team, even though it's our first time.

Several people gather around, as we spend most of the morning playing. The notes of my life seem to be returning.

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When he finally leaves, he indicates I can keep the flute. Again, amazing. "Arigato" I reply. Another example of the way everyone here, like Jean-Claude, gives what they have to everyone else. I'm ashamed of my earlier thoughts, hiding my flute.

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It was hard to think last night--the wine, hashish, Carina, the singing. But I know forming in my mind was a vision. In the clear light of day, I want to sort through my thoughts. I'll take some notes--as well as I can with my left hand--and when I can again write I'll fill in the details.

I make a chart, four columns across the page representing four

geographical/cultural areas. Down the side of the page I make four rows: motivation and economic system; economic system and spirituality; views of human beings and violence; and love/freedom.

	MY FAMILY GRANDPA / DAD	AMERICA	ISRAELI KIBBUTZ	EILAT
MOTIVATION/ ECONOMIC	survival, then ego; capitalist competition more is better	same	survival, sharing co-operation more =better	sharing cooperation seek simplicity
ECONOMICS/ SPIRITUALITY	capitalism has no god;	socialism has no god	transcend materialism; seek the spiritual	
VIOLENCE/ NON VIOLENCE	Dad: never back down from a fight	Vietnam	Teach children war games	Non-violence
LOVE, FREEDOM	If are success within limits, Don't stray Too much.	if success high freedom	high belong low freedom	both high!

For my grandfather, his economic motivation was survival, to pull himself out of poverty, fighting and battling to achieve material success. He accomplished that dream. The motivation of survival, as he grew wealthier, became fear of loss, and as with dad, money equated with self-esteem, a way ordering the world and defining success. Their views were merely a reflection of America's capitalistic belief system. More is always better. Survival of the fittest. Be the best. Cooperation is for wimps, and losers get left behind. Capitalism has no spiritual vision.

The socialism of the kibbutz was an improvement in that its members want to make sure everything is fair and equal. They espouse the values of cooperation, and on one in their community is left behind. But they haven't transcended materialism and are still

trapped by it. They still wanted MORE material goods, just like my family. Thoughts about money and possessions are still a major way they structure their time and efforts, and there is no spiritual vision beyond the material.

Here in Eilat we have chosen a different, better way. We share, like on the kibbutz. But we voluntarily choose not to be bound by the material striving evidenced by both my family and the kibbutz. It's as if we see beyond the material toward the emergence of a new spiritual vision. The Times, They are A'-Changing. A new generation, new beginnings, new values. Turn, turn. turn.

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The sun continues to rise, and I look for some shade.

I think of the lovely moon last night, nearly full. What we need is for everyone to become an astronaut on the moon for a moment, looking down at earth. Aren't we all one planet? From that far distance, there are no borders, no boundaries. How can we not respect the sanctity of human life? Once we decide a life is expendable, either on the radical right or the radical left, then no human life any longer has value. As soon as I feel I can judge another human being's life as not worth living, and can make that decision for him by killing him, then I lose part of my humanity. Like Dostoevsky's Ivan, everything is permitted and the last thread tying me to existence is cut.

Dad's admonitions seem so wrong: "Never back down from a fight." "Never let anyone push you around." And isn't that just a microcosm of our country, and what's going on in Vietnam. It's all about our fears of the stranger--the other-- whom we now call evil communists, the "red devils attempting to take over the

world, one domino at a time. Don't let them push you around. What a horrific, bloody, meaningless result.

I watched as the kibbutzniks taught their children war games, praising them for fighting--whenever they would take the time to play with them, before shunting them back off to their boarding school like day care. Why does our tradition enjoin us to dance and celebrate on Purim, when Jews killed Persians? "How many deaths does it take till we know that too many people have died?"

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I see the beginnings of a loving and peaceful vision, but I also notice a lot of anger. I wonder how much of the harshness toward the kibbutz's style of child rearing is based on unresolved feelings toward the Kansas City family, feelings that were not directly brought into the open until months later, when John is writing this after seeing the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. Also, his anger toward Purim makes sense on one level, but he has yet to learn some of the deeper, mystical understandings of the different holidays.

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What if "they" --Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, Communists, capitalists, Jews, Arabs, --those who consider each other the "enemy," were forced to sing songs around a campfire on the moon. Share wine, maybe even hashish. Would that help them see our pure human essence within, that to kill someone else is to kill part of ourselves, part of our humanity?

Somehow we have to stop these views--material consumption, aggressive competition, fear of the other, violence as a means of

solving problems--from being passed onto the next generation, and the next. This only escalates the cycle. Killing is thought of as a necessity. Each succeeding generation hardens its heart, and becomes more blinded to nonviolent solutions. I know there is a better way.

Someone needs to shout, "What about the light? The good?" Why not be appreciative of the message of the Torah: Leviticus: Love thy neighbor as thyself. Or the message throughout the Torah: Kindness to the stranger for you were strangers in a strange land. What about Jesus' New Testament message of love. Gandhi's and Martin Luther King's non-violent lessons? These need to be our teachers, our curriculum.

The sun has moved again, and the shade with it. I run into the water, splash around, cleanse and cool myself. Healing my mind, healing my body. When I return, I dry off. Carina comes by with a lemonade.

She is topless, wearing only a small bikini bottom. She has a lovely smile, and is a lot more comfortable with her body than Elizabeth was. I ask her if she believes in world peace and one world, and she nods. "Of course."

I ask her if she has heard of De Chardin and the omega point. She says no, and I explain to her what I'd read. Thanks to Mery. I have a fleeting thought, wondering if this entire quest is somehow related to trying to impress Elizabeth. What a strange thought. I dismiss it immediately.

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"The omega point, the teleological goal of our existence, the highest expression of love." Carina giggles and cuddles into

me, spilling a bit of lemonade on my stomach. It's cold, and I'm at first annoyed both by the unexpectedness, and by the interruption of my train of thought.

I quickly recover, however, as I look around me at the beautiful scenery, then at a nearly naked Swedish girl bend who bends over and starts licking the spilled lemonade off my stomach.

"Omega point," I continue, now with a smile. "Not a merging, but a converging of humans. A time when individuals are willing to learn about, tolerate, and seek to understand rather than fear, condemn, even abuse those who are different. We can each be unique individuals, but each working, in his or her own way for the good of all. Collectively, each of us striving toward and helping to create that omega point."

"Perfect," she purrs. I love it. Her purr sounds different than Mery's. Maybe it's the Swedish accent.

"A new larger vision of spirituality: freedom, hope, non-materialism, non-violence. I want to believe all of us-- are good and loving and peaceful at our core."

"Sure thing," she agrees.

"What keeps them from seeing it?" I ask out loud, as much to myself as to her. "Is it just a stage people are in, that they will grow out of? The Israeli survivors of the Holocaust, feeling that memory and terror, hardening themselves for fighting the next perceived enemy."

"Have you been to the Holocaust museum?" I shake my head no. "Beautiful. Terrible. Beautifully sad." She snuggles into me. In the distance someone is starting to sing again. "Bridge Over Troubled Waters...."

The words of Simon and Garfunkle continue to drift over us. Carina says nothing. Her head is on my heart. Jean-Claude walks by, smiles, and gives me a thumbs up.

Once again, I feel myself surrounded by people who believe as I do. People who are groping for answers, but searching in an open hearted, non-violent way, committed to helping humanity.

"The times they are a changing...."

I feel as though I have found what I am seeking...a place of kindred spirits and values.... people that give me freedom and accept me as I am.. I've found a family, a home.

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The sun rises. The sun sets.

There is nothing new under the sun. And that is fine with me. Days come and go, nights come and go, all drifting together.

Another majestic sunrise after another wonderful night of singing, sensuality, and a moon even fuller and more glorious than the previous nights.

Carina's photo shoot ended, and she left a couple days ago. I remembered what Jean-Claude had said about people leaving. I was sorry to see her go, but not that sorry. We said we'd write. I have low expectations. I've learned my lesson.

As I look around, everyone is still asleep, and I'm not exactly sure what to do. I feel like I'm catching up with myself. My hand hurts less. I'm getting plenty of rest. Perhaps even too much. I decide to take my usual morning walk along the beach. The days are quiet, lazy, uneventful. Could I live here forever? Is this where my life ends?

There is something pleasant, but also slightly unsettling in

the thought. Am I feeling at all bored? I notice a bit of restlessness in me. What has happened to my desire to visit and climb Mount Sinai? Is the tranquil life here lulling me into passive complacency? Is my new golden calf unstructured and directionless freedom? Can the Garden of Eden become monotonous?

Maybe these are just idle questions, and what I really need to do is come to peace with a life without striving, to learn to live with a daily, routine ordinariness. My problem may be, paradoxically, that I become agitated when I'm too calm. Why do I always seem to want to seek more, not willing to allow a place or a person to be "home" for me. Is this the wandering Jew within me? Is it just an old Protestant ethic throwback reaction? My grandfather saying "be the best?" Johannes always looking for a new conquest, something exciting, an adventure?

I had the Sinai "aha" experience in Jerusalem with the Rebbe. I've climbed it in my mind. Maybe that's all that is important, and I now need to apply the lesson of love and acceptance wherever I am. And Eilat seems a fine place to be.

I break into a jog, and find myself humming a song from last night "Hey Mr. Tambourine Man...."

I haven't been dreaming much, or at least not remembering my dreams. A snippet of last night's dream comes to mind.

I am in Paris, visiting a music conservatory. There are several beautiful women there with whom I am talking, when an older bearded headmaster comes running out, grabs me roughly by the shoulders and tells me to leave in perfect, Parisian French.

"Ne me touchez pas sans mon permission" I respond angrily, in an awkward, clearly American accent.

The end.

* * *

I pick up the pace a bit, feeling the sun's heat, and some sweat. The exertion feels good. Have things been too easy here? What's going on?

What is the dream's meaning? Is it my unconscious giving me the first sign of trouble in paradise?

On the surface the dream's meaning is obvious. I don't feel authentic; I, the outsider, the American, don't belong. I don't speak the language well; I'm not really that well trained a classical musician; and I'm making Johannes like moves toward the women, for which I'm being reprimanded. Defensively, I try to stand up for myself. But I'm still being ushered out.

I find myself running still faster.

Deeper level? Was I feeling bodily threatened? Is the headmaster Jean-Claude? Is he J.C, Jesus, saying I'm making too many advances toward women, returning to the ways of the flesh? That I need to treat my body (and others') with more respect? Is he a superego, one who speaks better French than I do, and presumably is a better musician?.

Though I said I wasn't going to editorialize, I feel it's helpful here to add the new understanding of dreams that Dr. Lisbet shared with me

If I'm all parts of the dream, I'm both the one who created the perfectly accented French, and the one who is struggling to speak it. Does that mean the goal and the struggle both co-exist within me?

I am both the one entering the music conservatory, and talking to the attractive women, and I'm also the one trying to

prevent myself from doing so.

The women? If they are not external, does this mean I long for, and fear a reconciliation with and development of the feminine in me?

* * *

I wonder if I could live life just trying to understand myself. Comment and re-commenting in waking life on a dream that takes longer than the dream itself.

When I return to our beach, a few people are up and gathering for morning coffee. I feel better having run. The physical helps clear my mind and brings a certain comfort and aliveness to my body. Maybe that's all that is missing here. Some additional physical exercise.

We are all sitting around in a circle, lazily enjoying the sun. There is something so peaceful and idyllic here. I decide to take a picture, to send to my family, and maybe even to Elizabeth and Richard, to show them the beauty in which I am now living.

I go to my tent, and realize that while I was out walking and jogging, someone has broken in and stolen my camera.

I feel violated, punched in the stomach. It's not just the loss of the camera, but a feeling of desecration. I so wanted to believe in the Sinai vision of love and acceptance. To believe that we have created a non-materialistic, spiritual model U.N. here. How can this happen? How can I believe in the purity of and trust in my fellow humans. Maybe it wasn't one of them? But who?

I feel enraged, and think about going from tent to tent, investigating, accusing, probing,

I go to Jean-Claude, the eyes and ears of the group, to see

how best to proceed.

When I tell him about the theft of my camera, he begins laughing. "Lucky man, good for you!"

My anger grows. He continues laughing.

"What are you talking about!" I can feel myself breathing rapidly, working myself into a tantrum. *J'accuse*. But who? Who is the thief?

"Lighter for your journey. Less to worry about. A camera comes between you and life. Life is more immediate without it. You're getting closer and closer to life. You should go celebrate!" His laughter feels taunting, but when I look at him, he looks sincere, and truly appears happy for me.

"Do not do anything now. Go back and sing with the group. Or take a hike. There's a beautiful fjord down the road. I'll ask around regarding your camera. But think about what I am saying."

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I take his advice, and decide to hitchhike from Coral Beach. Same sea, same sand farther on, but I want to get out of there, and find a different perspective. I'm picked up by an Israeli driver who tells me he'll give me a lift to the fjord "Israel's only one."

On the ride, I am sure there is no way to avoid dying, and not in an abstract sense, either. Death feels imminent. He's a reckless driver, tearing along this old dirt road carved into the wilderness. The road has just been built, and is sloppily constructed. The jeep is nearly overturning, and my concerns about the camera quickly seem trivial and are replaced by abject terror.

"Rega, rega echad" I shout. I'm becoming angry, wanting him to slow down.

But he can't hear me. He drives faster and farther into the wilderness. The "road" ends. He continue driving.

I'm fascinated by my other emotions. Yes, some fear, some anger, but these are almost drowned out by an emerging feeling. Excitement, exhilaration. Almost as if I were coming alive, feeling life more fully as I find myself approaching death.

The desert sands are colorful as they whirl by, no longer the starkness of the Negev.

Finally the driver stops the car. There is a huge grin on his dust-covered face.

"What was that about?" I smile back, wagging my finger at him. It's as if a death-defying macho camaraderie has been formed between us.

"My road! I built this!" he exults, punching his chest.

* * *

He explains that we'd just driven over the road that he had helped build. The road is his creation, and he drives it fast because he knows it like the palm of his hand. He's labored with it, suffered with it, and watched it grow. It's his, and I can sense in his pride that its meaning is sufficient to him. It is his base into existence.

And what is mine?

* * *

I walk along the top of the fjord. Alone. I like being on the summit. Heights give me a literal, and symbolic perspective. The fjord's pretty, but not as majestic as the ones I saw with my grandparents when we were in Norway.

Always judging, comparing.

What is my base into existence? I know I don't want to be captured by societal achievement, or by the legal profession, like Johannes.

I want somehow to find a meaning for me that works. I envy the Israeli road builder. He is proud of his contribution; I envy the members of kibbutz, making sustenance grow from the earth. I even envy the happiness of the wanderers drifting in Eilat.

Why do I say drifting? More judgment? A signal to me?

Do I need or want a base? Can the daily routine at the beach be enough?

I think about the feeling in the car. I liked being frightened. Part of me even wanted to drive faster and faster to see how much I could take.

A death wish?

A way to arouse myself from a dulling passivity that I wasn't even aware of?

By hurting myself, I was able to break out of and leave the regimented life of the kibbutz. Looking back, it is clear that I felt I was becoming a stagnating, enslaved, routinized work machine. But at the time, I was not able to get enough distance from myself to be aware of how much pain I was feeling. Have I been seduced by the complacency of the lifestyle at Coral Beach? By living there am I hiding from my lack of meaning, direction, and focus? Is there a part of me that seeks to escape the self-imposed prison of total freedom on the beach?

Do I need to hurt myself again--accidentally--in order to do so?

There must be a better way to make choices.

As I walk along the top of the fjord, looking down at the blue water, I wonder whether the theft of the camera was really a blessing, as Jean-Claude suggested. Could it be a wake-up call to get me to step outside myself and reflect on where I am?

When Moses climbs Sinai, the people at the base make a golden calf. Is my golden calf the insidious golden ropes of a comfortable dulling routine of beach life? Am I being captured by passivity, sloth, complacency?

I remember the exhilaration the summer before my senior year of high school, running sand dunes until I vomited and nearly passed out, lifting weights until my body was ready to burst. I loved the feeling of having a focus and goal, of seeing my body grow stronger and more powerful.

And I loved the feeling of seeing my mind grow. There was a joy in studying so hard that I was certain I was sure I was going to ace the exam. Once in High School I remember studying for a history test, memorizing the names of all the U.S. presidents, their birth and death dates, terms of office. The night before the test, after weeks of study, my brain felt completely filled. Then, just as I was about to go to bed, I reviewed the list once more, and realized I'd left out a whole column of information on each president's major accomplishments, and another column on their wives' names and the number of years married. I wouldn't let myself go to bed until I'd memorized both additional columns.

The next morning when I woke up there was a lump on the back of my head. I was sure it was a place created so that more material could fit into my brain.

What has happened to the part of me that wanted to break through all barriers, to push myself as hard as I could--physically and mentally--in spite of the pain, or maybe because of the pain? Be the best was Grandpa's admonition, but is there a part of me that also believes and wants that, not for him, but for me? What has happened to that willingness to challenge myself, to see what my limits are?

I can feel welling up in me emotions that I may have been repressing in Eilat. I know that once I enjoyed living on the edge, because it kept propelling me onward. I didn't feel anything could fence me in or bind me. I fear I may be becoming too complacent, like a bee that drowns in its own honey.

Where is the part of me that used to feel, if I'm going to drown, I want it to be from falling into the sea, after the wax has melted my wings?

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Dramatic. Poetic.

Yet, is that the real me speaking, or is that a left-over artifact of my family, Stanford, Harvard? Maybe there is a masochistic streak in me, which makes me seek punishment and suffering, to keep pushing myself to the limit. Do I need something to be causing me pain, something to fight against, to feel I'm alive? If I'm comfortable too long, do I almost reflexively start to feel something is wrong? Is that a strength, or a weakness?

I add another row to my chart:

"Melts in your mouth, not in your hand." Then another: "Snap, Crackle, Pop." Then another "You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with...."

Is this the mind that I'm going to use to help me make decisions, and feel in control of my life? A mind that jumps and jangles with words and phrases and emotions of which I have no control of when they arise, or when they leave? How did Johannes ever once feel that his life was in control? Talk about a grand illusion!

* * *

I close my eyes, and remember the experience with the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet in Jerusalem, where he guided me up Sinai.

"Trust....."

"Trust.....you are loved."

Unbidden words arose in that experience that were wise. Do they come from a different source within than advertising jingles?

I drift in and out of sleep. Occasionally my eyes partially open and I look down at the water, or up at the clouds drifting by. I remember the game Mery and I played on the way to Carmel, creating names and stories from different cloud shapes. A simpler, gentler time.

More sleep. No dreams. I awake with an unbidden Latin phrase *In omni re nascitur res quae ipsam rem exterminat*. If I'm not being born, I'm dying.

Applied to my current situation, does that mean anything? Wisdom or nonsense?

The very question melts in my mouth.

* * *

When I return from the fjord, Jean-Claude comes up to greet me with a big hug and a smile. "Bad news, I'm afraid." I say nothing.

"Thomas, the photographer borrowed your camera for a new photo-shoot. Before she left, Carina had told her he could use it any time. He'll be back in a couple hours, and you can talk to him then. Sorry. I still think you might be better off without it.

I feel ashamed. Of course I had told her he could borrow it. Probably trying to impress her with my open handed non attachment to Possessions, and willingness to share. I'm so appreciative Jean-Claude stopped me from thrashing from tent to tent. Clearly there's more I need to learn here about trust and mellow-ness. And myself. I'm not finding myself here. Not the self I want to find.

J'accuse.

I can see that the problem is not Eilat, or the people here. It's me. I can't run away from myself, and I'm finding the very aspects of me I was trying to leave behind. Again. I'm like my father the policeman and my grandfather the lawyer all in one. And enraged. I am judge, jury, trial lawyer, and executioner intertwined. Somehow "they" have followed me all the way to the south of Israel. I don't see to be able to outrun the parts of myself I'd like to leave behind, and am still in bondage.

* * *

The next few days are uneventful. We sing. Drink. Smoke. I think. Make some notes with my left hand. Play the flute. In the evenings, the moon grows larger--we are once again nearing a full moon. I notice I'm having some trouble resettling myself into the

routine here. Like a low grade fever. Or the moon's restless stirrings of the tides. Nothing dramatic, but noticeable.

Friday afternoon, erev Shabbat, little groups of us are alternately swimming, singing, chatting. While drifting in and out of conversation, I hear a panicked shout. I leap up, but because of my ear, can't tell where the sound is coming from. One of the smokers casually opens his eyes, and points toward the water.

A small child's arms are thrashing. He cries again.

I rush toward the water, leap in, and begin swimming toward him. I'd forgotten about my hand, and there is a sharp pain as the saltwater cuts into it. I ignore the pain, and swim, keeping in sight the spot where he last was. He's now disappeared beneath the water.

I dive under, touch the boy, pull him up by the arms, and begin the side stroke rescue crawl back to the shore. I feel him squirming, trying to get away, but he is small enough that I can easily manage to contain him. He's coughing and retching.

When we reach the shore, I apply CPR and mouth to mouth resuscitation until he starts breathing smoothly again. He's fine. I give him a reassuring hug. He's still shaking and scared from what happened.

I feel a great pride in myself. In a crisis, I acted without overly thinking, almost instinctually. I didn't care if I looked foolish, or made a mistake. I wasn't self-conscious. I didn't do it for glory, status, sex, or reward. I was only motivated by the desire to help someone in trouble. There's hope for me, yet.

I look up, and see his mother ambling over in a slow jog. She's actually quite attractive, and I like the way her full breasts sway and jiggle nakedly as she runs. She's someone I've been thinking I'd like to meet, especially now that Carina has left. Hmm, maybe there is some reward in this after all.

She seems slightly confused, even a bit annoyed, though in a hazy sort of way.

"What are you doing with my son?" she demands.

Immediately my mood shifts from potential lust to anger.

"What are you doing letting him swim alone?"

"He's a good swimmer, and it's none of your business."

"He almost drowned!"

"Says who?" She grabs her child and drags him away, admonishing him with her index finger, returning to the guitar playing group where she was smoking.

* * *

Something snaps. A branch. Me.

The leaf falls.

Do I really want to become a hashish smoking zombie like this woman hazily coming to find her child who nearly drowned? Do I really want my life to be sitting around singing at night and drifting through days?

Maybe there is a time for judgment. And action.

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I return to my tent, and notice a slight limp, and when I look at my foot, see that part of a sea urchin is embedded. The adrenalin must have kept me from noticing. Great, no good deed goes unpunished. I take my tweezers and pull it out, and pack my few remaining belongings. I see the Torah, which I haven't read since the first

Sabbath night here, when I sat outside the fire, watching the Sodom and Gemorrah-like proceedings. It's pre-erev Shabbat, why not?

I sit down and look at the Haftarah portion for the first week I arrived, which I never read. Second Kings. Last days of David and the destruction of the Temple. Elisha brings back to life the son of the woman, raising him from the dead. "He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes and his hands on its hands...." And the woman fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground. Not exactly the reaction I received for saving a drowning boy.

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I skip several dozen pages to this week's portion, Vayetz. "And he left." Who left, to where? I thumb through and see that it is Jacob leaving for Haran. Haran, which in Hebrew means crossroads. Jacob leaves for the crossroads of his life.

No matter where I open it, there always seems to be something symbolical and relevant in the Torah portion that speaks directly to me.

I read on. Jacob has a dream of a ladder rising to heaven, with angels going up and down. God promises to protect Jacob wherever he goes. Jacob names the site of the dream Beth-El, the house of God. He then changes his own name to Israel, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." (28.16).

** * **

I pack up the Torah, and the rest of my possessions, and go to J.C.'s Junk to tell him good-bye.

"I am not surprised. I was wondering when you were going to realize it is time to move on. For me, it's home. For others, like you, a way station." He points to his heart, then to mine. "You have healed many parts of yourself."

I'm afraid to let myself feel, that if I do, too many emotions--tenderness, sadness, fear-- would come forth, and I may not leave.

"I'll let you find a buyer for my tent, and tell Thomas to keep the camera."

"Good choice. Here are the poems you asked for. I recopied them for you."

I look down at the poems, and his curvy, ornate writing.

"Thank you. Maybe one day I'll write a poem about my time here."

"How will you describe it?"

"I can't tell. I know I've seen a vision here of what might be possible. But then I wonder whether this is just a great vacation spot to create a pot-smoking mirage, a hashish induced euphoria, in a beautiful setting."

"Like you, I once asked the big questions. What is the contribution these people--and me-- are actually making? Are we striving for meaning, purpose, brother and sisterhood, or just a way to pass the time? Big questions for the Garden of Eden. Too big for me. Let me know when you find out, so I'll know who I really am."

He gives me a hug, and starts laughing. I start to laugh with him. I laugh at the coral reefs, the hashish, the desert sun, the real and yet imperfect model U.N. I've found in the desert. I laugh at laughter and lightness.

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Is it the external events--the non-theft of the camera, the drowning boy and his mother's indifference --that are causing me to move on. I don't think so. Rather it feels they reflect some internal clock that says it's time. Would Dr. Lisbet call it Jungian synchronicity?

"There's always a place for you here. We need a thinker. A resident philosopher. You could set up shop, next to me. I'll sell the physical at 'J.C.'s Junk.' You could sell the mental at 'J Jr's Junk.' What a team, eh?" He spreads his hands out, as if surveying his kingdom.

I stick his poems in my pocket. I'm aware of trusting that it's time to leave, time for change.

Openings, healings, sprouting some roots.

Closings, internalizing those roots, but not establishing them in space, in geography. In time? I hope so.

I no longer feel rooted here. How do I know? I just know.

"Do not forget us. You may need an oasis to return to."

I pat my heart and give him another hug. "Don't worry. I will never forget you."

Even when there is a new rope to swing to, partings are becoming harder and harder for me.

But amidst the sadness, I also feel a rekindling of energy and determination. My Shabbat candles for the night.

Time to continue the wandering in the desert.

I re-remember why I came down here.

Onward to Sinai.

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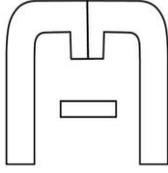
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gain? And again?!?!"

The words are Inamatsu's when I called this Sunday morning, before church, to tell him that I was going to have to once more miss our Sunday golf game. Have to? That's not taking responsibility. Want to, choose to would be better. At least it looks like I have learned something from Dr. Lisbet.

"Same girl? Church? Better watch out. Getting hooked, and I bet your golf game is going to hell, too."

He has no idea what I am going to actually do instead of play golf this afternoon--feed the poor, again.

"Sumimasen, my friend. Tell Richard I'll be there for Tuesday's tennis game, I promise. And..." I think to myself that "again and again" could well apply to the frequency of Mery and my entwinements over the weekend. She even asked if we could stay an extra night at the Fairmont. Talk about the poor little girl getting used to an extravagant lifestyle. "And play well today. Sayonara."

"Ciao and Fore."

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"Lox and bagels, cream cheese, grape and strawberry jam; tea for me; tea and lemon for the lady; and three, three minute soft boiled eggs."

"What do I look like, a kitchen timer?" the waitress glares.

"Three three minute soft boiled eggs," she mutters as she walks

away.

"I love their attitude..." I smile at Mery, so motherly comforting." We are at Solomon's once again. Mery felt upset at the idea of going to David's, and being served by people with whom she worked.

"Oh, why three minutes, Mr. Precision."

"I'm glad you asked, Miss Dreamer. You see, when soft boiled eggs are cooked three minutes, the yoke isn't squiggly, squishy, squirmy, but rather bursting with bountiful bliss in bubbly bites."

She winces, but I can tell she's appreciative of my wit, and my profound poetic rhetoric. Must be my creative writing class.

"Did you ever hunt eggs on Easter? My family did. I loved boiling the eggs and decorating them."

"No, my father said that was a criminal desecration of the meaning of Easter, the sacred symbol of Jesus's rebirth."

"Ouch. Why do you think hiding eggs became a custom?"

"I don't know, I guess the symbolism of eggs as a sign of potential life and birth, little chicks." She ponders, "A hidden God?" Then with a whimsical girlish "Have you ever seen a baby chick? They're sooo cute." Before I could answer she asks "How did you like the church service this morning?"

"Let me ask you a question" I intentionally avoid her query.

"Since this is the week of Passover for us Jews, and since Friday night is the Last Supper for you Christians, shouldn't today be Easter Sunday, not weeks ago? Why do the dates shift?"

She looks puzzled. "I have no idea"

"And does that mean that our last supper was the fruit and fondue and wine?"

"Now, now, naughty boy. No mocking allowed. I certainly hope that wasn't our last supper." She looks down shyly. "Though we certainly drank enough wine."

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The waitress comes with our tea, and I hold my glass up in a toast "To the ecumenical couple," I hear myself saying joyfully. Then, as the words sink in, I feel shock at what I've just said. What is this "couple" talk? Generally this is the point in a relationship when I begin looking for the exit stage left. As Inamatsu said, "Careful. Fore."

Never would I go to church AFTER being successful with a girl, only as a strategy before to move the game forward.

Is this a type of relational rebirth for me? Is there something special and unique going on between us?

"Yes, ecumenical, the Christian girl with a minister father; the Jewish fellow with a great-grandfather rabbi, going to a Christian service, and now eating lox and bagels in a Jewish deli."

She smiles. "How does your family feel about this? she points to the two of us.

Since I'm not speaking with my family, and since none of them liked her--or the image of her--and since she knows none of this, I reply as if she's talking about our ecumenicism. "My Uncle married a Catholic woman. My mom went to Catholic school. Although for some of my friends, dating a Jewish girl was important, it was never ever mentioned in my family to my knowledge. The message I always received was just so she loves you and you love her..." and then I smile, and from my grandfather, "Don't

get her pregnant."

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Mery takes some water from her cup and flicks it at me.

"You were very responsible these last two days, and I appreciate that." Rather than looking at me as she says this, she looks down. It seems she is about to say something else, then she hesitates. I notice the space between her brows furrow. What is she thinking? Is she having second thoughts? Is she going to ask about the pictures? I've told her I develop them myself, and they're just for me. Should I reassure her? Maybe I should just keep it light. As I'm thinking of something witty to say, she continues.

"These last two nights turned out differently than I thought they were..."

Oh no. Great. Finally someone I'm beginning to have feelings for, and she's going to start pulling back.

"...going to be. It was so special, so wonderful, almost as if we were touched by grace." I don't know what got into me. I'm normally not like that. I feel trust with you." This is not what I expected. While I try to think of something to say back—reassurance? platitudinous distance?--, she is now looking directly at me, and continues.

"I've learned through counseling that that kind of happiness is hard for me to receive. I usually try to sabotage it, saying I'm not deserving. So, in church this morning, and even last night, while I was up watching you sleep..." She keeps talking but I become preoccupied with what she has just said. Watching me sleep. That feels a bit vulnerable. And what is this coun-

seling? I again wonder if I'm being attracted to someone like mom. Warning bells begin going off. First I'm afraid she's going to pull back. Now, I worry she's getting too close too fast. Is she really the right person? And all this occurs within the space of less than a minute. Whoa, Nellie, slow down.

"I'm sorry, something the minister said this morning popped into my mind. I got distracted. You were saying you were watching me sleep..."

"Yes, you looked so peaceful and content. It was just lovely. And I didn't want to start feeling bad like I sometimes do. So, I remembered what my counselor advised me: 'When you receive joy, you can feel guilty about it; you can push it away and feel unworthy; or you can use the energy and happiness from the joy to put good energy back into the world.'"

"Makes sense to me." Yet even as I say this, I notice some worry that she's been in counseling. Is she as troubled as mom?

"So, I have an idea and I'd like your support if you're willing."

"Shoot."

She looks puzzled. "You don't want to hear it?"

I smile. 'No I don't mean 'shoot' as in darn it, I mean 'shoot' as in fire away. I'm listening."

"Sorry, I can be pretty sensitive about sharing this openly. Anyway, I was wondering if you'd be willing to go to the mission again to serve food this afternoon. Sort of our way of giving back and saying thanks to God for bringing us into each other's lives."

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I sit stunned.

I replay her words: "go to the mission again." My reflex

reaction is ugh? "saying thanks to God." More ugh. This is the point where I am supposed to get up hurriedly and get out the door. Those reflex reactions don't stun me.

"For bringing us into each other's lives." There is no ugh.

What stuns me is the depth of warm feelings that well up in me toward this woman. This is really a kind, saintly, wise person. She's not afraid to be vulnerable. She's so giving and pure. Ok, proceed with caution, but let's open up just a bit more.

"You know, you are the third person in my life who 's suggested I give back more. The first two I ignored. Maybe this time is the charm. Of course I'll go."

She looks relieved and happy..

Our eggs come. I am relieved, too, for I didn't really want to comment on God bringing us together.

I look at the yokes. They are a little overcooked. I'd guess three and a half minutes. I look at the waitress. She knows. Yet she stares at me defiantly with an "I dare you to say anything" attitude. "Come on, Tiger, let's go another round. You won't win." I feel my competitive juices start to resurface as we stare at each other.

I also feel I don't want to ruin the mood with Mery by looking too aggressive, or acting too mean. I remember the discomfort at the swimming pool.

I look directly at the waitress with a snarl. "You underestimate your talents." She looks annoyed, puzzled, unsure how to respond. I've caught her off guard. Perfect. I then break into my most charming smile. "You are not only a magnificent kitchen

timer, but efficient to boot. These are perfect. Thanks!" Then
I wink at her.

She still seems puzzled, but softens. "Get you any more hot
water, kids?"

"No, we're fine, thanks for asking."

Ah, kill 'em with kindness. Point for me.

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I butter my bagel, then put cream cheese on it.

Mery is motionless. I look up. Though she is silent, her lips are
moving, eyes closed. I notice the curved arch of her eyebrows
sheltering the soft upward curling of her lashes. When the
lashes raise, her brown eyes reappear.

"A prayer of thankfulness before the meal," she explains a
little self-consciously. "Dad used to make us pray before every
meal, and punished us if we forgot. Once I was out of his sight,
in college, I stopped. But my counselor said to choose my rebel-
lions wisely. In this case, she said, remembering to be apprecia-
tive and not take for granted the gifts I receive might be a good
lesson to reinstitute, even if dad didn't teach it very well."

"Lovely." I take her hand. "Next time, let's do it togeth-
er. My dad used to say, 'Good food, good meat, good god let's
eat.' That's when mom made him."

She smiles and begins poking around in her egg. "If it's
not too personal, you said this was your third time being asked
to be more giving. What were the other two?"

When I said I felt like opening up a bit more to her, I
thought it was enough to let her know that there had been two
previous times. I'm not sure how comfortable I feel sharing the
actual events. I hesitate. She seems to sense this and says, "If

you don't want to, that's fine. I'm sorry if I'm being too intrusive. It's just that I want to get to know you better."

"Be careful what you ask for!" I smile, but it feels like an awkward smile. "Ok, this is a bit embarrassing. I'll tell you what, I'll share, but you have to promise me not to hold it against me, not to bring it up in the future, to dismiss it with prejudice, and to practice some of the Christian forgiveness and non-judgmentalness the minister talked about in the sermon this morning."

"Ah, you were listening. Now you're the good boy. Of course I will. Now, shoot away..." she teases.

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I need to decide where to begin, what to say, and how to say it, so I take a long pause, ostensibly trying to decide whether to put strawberry or grape jam on my bagel.

After about thirty seconds, Mery asks, "Why did you get two types of jam? Are you trying to make life harder for yourself?"

"Now that is a question I can easily answer. I like strawberry jam better on bagels. But eating grapes yesterday, and since we've just come from services this morning, I thought grape would be more symbolical, you know grapes, wine, Jesus's blood. All tied together."

Her smile is gone. "Are you making fun of my religion?"

Geez, I was just trying to be playful. Maybe not the best word choices, but good grief, how defensive. I choose my next words and tone carefully.

"Fine. What I thought was just a playful exchange is going to turn into a referendum on faith. Let's change the subject back to something easier --my being told to give more to others.

See," I smile at her, "I'll do anything to get out of a jam."

And I hold up the strawberry container.

She flicks more water at me.

Phew. She seems to be playfully moving on, absolving me of my "sin" of religious mocking—and sexual innuendo. Is the water a sign of baptism to purify me? I know enough not to ask.

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"Ok, both times were freshman year. Time one. First, let me say, with some bragging, my parents are both very attractive. My dad is handsome, my mom is considered beautiful, has done some modeling for charitable causes, and the story goes that her mom, my Nana, was a beauty pageant winner in Texas."

"So, you're saying that's why you're so cute. I can see this is a very vulnerable story for you." Actually, as she opens up, Mery is a much better sarcastic teaser than I had expected. I like it.

"Thanks, Miss Compassion. I now really feel safe to continue!" She takes my hand and squeezes it three times. We go through the ritual, reciprocated this time, while looking into each other's eyes. There is something so vulnerable, open, hopeful and optimistic in this moment that I wish I could somehow capture it. I know, unfortunately, that in this case Mr. Cannon wouldn't be sufficient.

"In my family, looks are extremely important. Not only does mom use makeup, but I've actually walked in and seen my father powdering his face. And sometimes he would say to mom, 'You're frowning, stop that. It will create wrinkles on your forehead.' Or 'Don't smile so much, so fully, you're creating wrinkles around your mouth.'"

"So, you're saying you forgot your powder last night. Or that's why you never laugh."

"Quiet girl. I'm getting to the punch line. So, I went to the student health center, and the doctor says, asked 'What brings you here?' I told him that I had a concern and I needed his help.

"Go on," he said.

"I'm wondering," I asked pointedly as I stroked the flesh under my jaw, "am I getting a double chin?"

Mery starts giggling. "No, you really didn't."

"Hey, this is not easy. No judgment."

"But you've got a great jaw line, a great chin."

"Better, and thanks, but I'm not fishing for compliments."

"So what did he say?"

"He looked at me directly and said 'Son, I'm astonished. No one in all my years here has ever come for medical services asking that question. You need to look around you at the poverty in the land, the suffering around the globe, and find some more worthwhile topic to worry about than the flesh under your chin, which, by the way, is fine.' And with that he turned and walked out the door."

Silence.

"Silence is judgmental, too."

"Thank you for sharing that story. You're right. It makes you look pathetic." She holds up her hand as I start to protest.

"That's not judgmental, that's just true! But it shows a real openness that you could entrust me with that story." I feel her feet reach under the table, up my leg, and give me a little caress.

at its beauty and majesty. I was fascinated that I didn't see it when I came up and got off the elevator earlier this morning. It's amazing what a change of perspective can do. On the merry-go-round, I had an enormous panorama of the Bay and the city. I guess it goes to show that no matter how large your view, it can still be larger. There always is something missing, just out of sight, even if it's right there before your eyes.

I must say, even for me, that's profound.

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When I enter the room, there is no view out the window, because the blinds have been pulled shut. Mery must have closed them to keep the sun out. She is still the sleeping beauty. I think of just snapping open the shades, but decide, as Prince Charming, the only appropriate way to awaken her is with little kisses. On her eyes, her cheeks, her mouth.

She moans and begins to stir, then rolls over on her side, and pulls the covers around her.

"It's too early. Can't I sleep a little more? Five more minutes."

I give her a few more kisses. She's partially responsive, and I ask "Are you saying that Prince Charming's kisses are not powerful enough to wake the beauty?"

"They're most excellent, kind sir, but please, just five more minutes."

I give her another kiss, tussle her hair, and get off the bed and look around the room. There are still vast portions of food we haven't eaten, particularly the desert platter. Strawberries embedded in creamy yellow custard, lush pie shaped wedges of New York cheesecake. I worry how well they've kept overnight.

I turn to the chocolate fondue, which has hardened, and reignite the paraffin under it. I pick up the icebucket and go into the hall to gather some ice to rechill the Moet and Chandon.

In the hall, I realize I have a few minutes, and decide to go down to the garage to Mr. Red to retrieve Mr. Cannon. Why not? There might be some good pictures this morning. I start humming two of my favorite songs, "Come on baby light my fire" and of course "Great balls of fire." How far I've come from Davy Crockett.

And how far you are, mentally and spiritually from "This Land is Your Land" and "Blowing in the Wind." I wonder if it's always necessary to go through the Doors of "Strange days have found us"; and Eleanor Rigby's "all the lonely people" to have a chance to come out the other side, being more caring and sensitive to others. Necessary, but not sufficient? We'll see.

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"A perfect bite for m'lady." Upon my return, I once again give her a few kisses on her still closed eyes, but this time I take some of the melted chocolate fondue that I've dipped my finger into, and rub it around her lips, sticking part of it into her mouth. She starts to flinch, but then relaxes and says

"Yumm. Breakfast in bed."

"Your expression looks so cute, I need to save it for posterity." I take Mr. Cannon from around my neck, focus and snap.

"Hey," she says, pulling the covers up around her neck.

"Awake now, princess?" I say it as a question, but isn't it really an imperative statement? Inflections are intriguing. I pull the shades and the sun filters into the room, bathing our last night's festivities in its warm light.

"No pictures. Not of me in bed first thing in the morning."

"Does that mean later is ok?"

"No promises."

"You look beautiful. Chocolate lipstick. A real fashion statement. Come on, strike a pose." I come over, lean her head toward her left shoulder, "Now, look up at me out of the corner of your eyes." Snap. "Perfect." Snap. "Now take your index finger and point it at me, like I'm a bad boy." She smiles and does it, her playful expression belying the finger's admonition. Snap.

The bad boy finger works every time. I'm not exactly sure why. Maybe because it seems to take their "no" seriously, recognizing that what we're doing is a little naughty, but at the same time making it humorous, playful, and not so threatening. It's an ideal time to tell her the story's origins.

"When I was a little boy of about five, I was happily eating some french fries with my fingers, dipping them into ketchup. I spilled a couple of the ketchup-laden fries on the floor just before mom walked by. Some of the excess ketchup had splatted in drops on the floor, and at first she gasped fearfully, perhaps thinking it was blood and I'd cut my finger. Who knows, maybe she even thought the fries were finger stubs.

When she looked more closely, she realized the coated limbs on the floor were merely my having an accident, or being careless. Fear became anger and she admonished me, 'Junior, dumb bunny, bad boy.' Isn't it interesting how often when a terrifying situation passes, how quickly we turn, not to relief, but to anger?"

At that point in telling the story, I make a little pout, sticking

out my lower lip, as if I'm sad and hurt and fragile little boy.

Generally, whenever I do this--which is pretty often with cute girls--
whomever I'm with will try to comfort me. Mery is no exception "Oh,
you poor little baby. Five years old."

I graciously receive the comfort, "Well, I'm a little bit of a
bad boy," and I hold up my thumb and index finger, about a half-
inch apart. "But mainly I'm a good boy" and I uncurl my fingers
and hold my open hands two feet apart, to make the contrast.

"So, mainly a good boy, right?"

I nod, giving her a caress.

"And just a little bit of a bad boy?"

Another nod, another caress.

"I bet you're only a bad boy at good times, right?"

I smile. "You're so understanding."

I pull out Mr. Cannon and take another picture.

"Hey, enough with the pictures, already."

I turn my head to the side, duck my chin, and look out of
the corner of my eyes, pointing at her with my index finger

"Now, Junior, don't be a bad boy."

She laughs. "That's a beautiful laugh," I say. The covers
fall a bit, revealing the top of her breasts. I focus Me. Cannon. Snap.
She doesn't pull them back up. Snap.

"Just a little bit bad boy" I whisper, barely audible.

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Her stomach starts to rumble, and we both laugh.

"Hungry?" I ask.

"Starving."

I get off the bed, and place a piece of bread into the

chocolate.

The covers now reveal about two thirds of her breasts. There is not much cleavage as their weight pulls them across her ribs. I hold the bread above her face, and a large coagulated clump of the excess chocolate gathers at the bottom. It holds itself suspended for a moment, hanging, like a fall leaf just before it lets go. Then, kerplunk, it lands, some hitting her mouth, some running down her chin, and then like a dark river onto her chest.

"You bad boy, you."

"Nothing I can't fix." I scoop a glob from her chin and place it on my finger which I place in her mouth. She begins to suck the chocolate off my finger, concaving her cheeks, and giving a little moan.

I bend over and start licking the chocolate off her chin, neck, and lower to the tops of her breasts. Once most of the chocolate is off her chest, I turn my attention to her nipples, like lush raspberries, and start to playfully nibble on them, "Yummm..."

"Hey, no fair, you're eating me, and I'm the one that's hungry. I want more chocolate."

"Yes, Princess. The sleeping beauty is definitely awake." I get up and take a couple more pictures. She starts to cover up, but instead just resignedly--and shyly--smiles.

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When I return with the bread-soaked chocolate fondue, I stand on the bed and hold it above her head. She sits up to receive it.

"You look like such a cute baby seal. Are you well-trained?"

Are you ready to show your master some tricks? Tongue out now."

"Arf arf."

"Very good." The covers are now completely off. Her neck is strained upward. As I lower the warm chocolate bread toward her mouth with one hand, I grasp Mr. Cannon in the other. Snap. I allow some chocolate to drip into her mouth.

"Excellent, good seal, now let your arms dangle like little flippers by your side. Great, now, palms up and push your elbows toward each other." When she does this, her breasts swell to enormous proportions, forming a long, deep cleavage. Snap.

"Good girl" I let the chocolate drip into her mouth, along with some bread. She tears at, bites into and sucks the warm chocolate bread. I focus, watch, and shoot a few more pictures.

Yummm.

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When Mery finishes swallowing the feast, she jumps from the bed. Snap. And runs over to the fondue. Snap. I love the way her breasts bounce and sway, as if they have a life of their own. Snap. I assume she wants to eat some more. Hungry girl.

"Now, bad boy, you are the baby seal. Time for you to beg." She smiles playfully as she sits back on the bed. "Put your head in my lap." I don't like her telling me what to do, but decide it may be worth it to play along. I comply. "Eyes closed....Now, open your mouth for a treat." I fear she's going to stuff the chocolate and bread into my mouth, and I worry about choking. Also, I don't like being fed. No one can regulate as well as I do the amount of calories and get the proper proportion of bread and chocolate I like. I wait. Nothing happens. I start to open my eyes, but she has put her hands over them.

The next thing I feel is her placing her breasts on both sides of my face, then swaying, placing one, then the other in my mouth.

Ah, no calories. A perfect bite.

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"Mmmmm, yummm, but where's my chocolate?" I mumble through her swaying mammaries. I wonder if I could die by being smothered by her breasts. Maybe that's the way to go out...

"Fine, jerk, you got it," she giggles. "Keep your eyes closed." I wait, eyes closed, mouth open, for the chocolate.

Instead, I feel this warm sensation over my chest and belly. I open my eyes, look down, and see that she is drawing on my stomach, finger painting with chocolate fondue.

"Oh my goodness, now you're the naughty little girl." With that I roll over on her and reach under her armpits and start tickling her. She's good, and counters with the sides of my stomach. I turn around and go after her feet. I love seeing her breasts jiggle as she tries to get away, laughing. We begin a playful wrestling, and more tickles ensue, as our bodies press together and the chocolate rubs between us.

Definitely a delicious breakfast in bed.

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The sun disappears behind clouds as late morning wears into afternoon. The front office calls to tell us we are past the check out time.

"Oh, can't we stay one more night," she pleads.

Who am I to resist?

"Again?" She asks. It's not a question.

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She tells me to pull the blinds down, as dusk begins to settle.

I do, and light a few candles. "It's definitely time for the Moet and Chandon." I open the bottle, shake it, and let it spray over both of us. A champagne bath was in order. We both drink from the bottle as it pours over us. She jumps up on the bed, and begins a slow undulating dance to the candlelight. Snap. I love the sensuality of her body swaying, as if she is in a trance. Snap. Her eyes are closed as she continues to dance and to a music that I can't hear. Nonetheless I remain an appreciative audience, once again at her feet, looking up at her. Snap.

Is she dancing of her own free will? It's almost as, like her breasts tossing and bobbing with a life of their own, Mery is a wave being danced by some far off musical moon, not completely under her own control.

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And again.

After, she asks, "Why don't you like to swim in the ocean?"

I have no idea why she would ask that question at this particular moment. It sounds a bit like an interrogation. I start to respond with a cross-examination of my own--probing why now, is she still upset about going to the swimming pool-- then decide I'm too tired for a legal skirmish, and the mood seems pleasant. I respond with playful sarcasm. "I'm sure it has something to do with some deep memory from my childhood,"

"Really?"

"No, kidding. Well, maybe yes. Growing up in Kansas City, the ocean was always the dream, the goal, the infinite. The Beach

Boys. Surfer dudes."

"You wanted to be a surfer boy?" she smiles, and drinks Moet. Then, in a serious tone, "That's not an explanation. That would be a reason you'd like the ocean." More probing. Oh well, let's flow with the current.

"You'd think, wouldn't you? But it became totally the opposite." I stroke an imaginary goatee pensively, as I remember Grandpa Julius would do. "I wonder if you come to fear what you are attracted to?"

Sometimes, Johannes, like the ocean, you are deeper than you even know. The ocean,--where you are vulnerable, can become lost, swallowed up lose your "self" and disappear in the great unknown.

And I wonder, John, do we sometimes become attracted to that which we fear?

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She is silent. I continue. "Actually, on our family vacations to California, my parents were always very protective of us when we went in the ocean. We were warned of rip tides. Surfing wasn't allowed. We were told that ocean waves were dangerous. They conveyed a sense that we'd better be very careful around the ocean."

"The waves can be rough, especially during a full moon."

Is she empathizing, or making fun of me?

"Dad did teach us how to deal with big waves. First, try to avoid them! But he also taught us how to dive under the wave. Such a strange concept. The deeper you go, the less turbulence. Unless you go too deep."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, in college, sophomore year, I had a girlfriend

who..."

"You mean there was someone before me. Why, white knight, are you becoming tarnished right before my eyes?"

"Oh maiden, if only I'd known you were on the horizon, I'm sure I would have saved myself for you....Can you absolve me of my sins...."

"Maybe, if you continue to be good." She strokes my lingham a few times. This is innocent maid Mery?

"Anyway, to continue, I was trying to impress this California girl--babe-- and I went running into the ocean. I see a wave coming, and, as I was taught, I dive under it. Unfortunately, the wave was not that high, and the bottom of the ocean was not that deep, so all I do is SPLAT into the sand, and the water foamed all round me. Totally embarrassing."

"Serves you right, you bad boy." And she continues to stroke me.

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And again.

I hold her hands tightly over her head, as I now know that she likes. She seems to enjoy feeling totally subservient, surrendering, giving herself. Overall, I don't mind this. But there were a couple of times today when she wanted me to do more than I felt comfortable. She seems to really like to feel a strong, almost piercing pain as part of her pleasure. For some reason--my father's anger?--I like to think of myself as a gentle (though perhaps calculating, even conniving) seducer. I don't ever use force or physical strength to bed a woman.

What she's asking violates an image of myself and is not comfortable to me. Further, as I start to push harder into her hands, it

makes me feel angrily aroused, and I don't like that. I don't want to hurt her, or anyone, physically, even if she says it's not really pain, but pleasure. It's not sexual to me. It crosses a boundary, and I'm not sure how to address this with her, so she doesn't feel embarrassed by what she's asking for.

These are not questions I'd thought of asking Dad about when I was sixteen and we had our little man-to-man talk. And I certainly can't ask him now. Whom do you ask? How do you know what's right and natural? Johannes, that's again deep, almost philosophical. I face different content, but am asking the same root question. And I'm just as unsure who to ask, or who I can really trust.

As I'm thinking this, Mery pushes the boundary again, asking, shyly, teasingly, if I think it would be fun to use my necktie to bind her arms to the bed post. I feel like I'm playing a flute song for which there is no music, and I'm trying desperately to improvise. I try to be jovial. "You must be kidding, wrinkle my Countess Mara tie?" But she persists in her request, gently, but determinedly. Finally, I say to her,

"Rest your head on my shoulder, and I'm going to tell you a true story. I actually read it in my journal when I was home this past vacation. Let me impress with you with what my family called my 'photographic memory':

Jan 1, 5th grade, When we woke up it was New Year's day. We got up. We got dressed, that is me and my brother, Joseph. We ate, we went outside. Some friends came over and played traffic cop. One of the friends was the cop. I got cot. My brother got cot too. We had lunch. Then are friends came back over. My broter was the cop. We tied him up and let him go... the second time we let him stay there. We were told not to tie people up.

I write out for her how I spelled caught "cot". I thought she would

find that adorable. "So, you see, Mery, it's part of my Kansas City
upbringing. We were told not to tie people up." I smile somewhat
sheepishly.

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There is not much in my life that I can control, but one thing is when I pick up and put down Johannes' journal. I'm glad I re-picked it up for I see hope in his entry in his reluctance to physically bind Mery, and his concern about hurting her physically. His overall behavior is atrocious, and he's a calculating cad--ignorant, crude, primitive in many ways. But there does seem at least a small redemptive side. He doesn't consciously want to hurt anyone, certainly not physically, but not even emotionally. At best, he's just naïve and ignorant and unaware. And he is honest with each person he meets about his unwillingness to commit long-term.

And at worst? I'm glad, John, you can have some softening toward Johannes. But careful of too many blinders in you, too. He's not that naïve. Rather, I'd say conscious, calculating, and willful. And couple that with uncaring denial, not wanting to be sensitive to whatever collateral damage he may inflict on relationships that he so cavalierly enters into and leaves on his whim. He wants all the control and to have his own way, to get whatever he desires. That is always his primary focus.

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"I thought you said your brother's name was Aaron."

She's not addressing the point I was trying to make, and seems
annoyed with me. I decide to ignore her tone and answer her question.

"That was the name I gave him in the play I read to you. You know,
da da da dum, Dagnet, names have been changed to protect the

innocent." She doesn't seem amused by my cleverness, but I continue, "My motto is 'Veritas gignit persequimur ficta': 'chasing fiction creates truth.'" She looks confused and even more annoyed with me.

As we empty our third (or fourth) glass of champagne, she makes a little self-conscious pout. I'm concerned how the evening is going to proceed. Will she be angry at me for not acceding to her "tie up" request? Generally I've felt like I'm much more experienced sexually than she is; but now I'm also having feelings that perhaps I am a backward Kansas City hick who is not able to play in her league. Confusing. Mery seems to be sulking. I'm not sure what to say.

I set my glass down and leave to go the bathroom.

When I return, her glass is empty, and her mood seems to have changed again. She is standing on the bed, and begins a full, free form movement "Want to take some more pictures?" she asks, playfully. Ah, this is more like it. She bends over, squeezes her breasts together, and looks right into the camera, with a sultry, almost too provocative expression, tongue rolling on her lips. Snap. Snap. Snap.

I vaguely wonder what happened to change her mood so quickly. but am delighted.

Mr. Lingham snaps to attention again.

"One thing I was allowed to do was 'tickle" as I reached under her armpits, the sides of her stomach, her feet as she fell to the bed. I loved seeing her breasts jiggle as she tries to get away, giggling. We began a playful wrestling, and I heard her stomach grumble.

"Hungry," I ask.

"Starving!" She wiggles free, hops off the bed, and sashays over to the fruit plate, where she picks up some grapes, then climbs

back onto the bed to continue her dance. While still gyrating, she plucks off a grape and starts licking the round wine colored fruit. Snap. The pink, slightly coarse tip of her tongue moves in ever-increasing concentric circles around the grape's circumference. The skin of the grape shimmers with the fresh coat of saliva, and is slowly partially sucked into her mouth, as she hollows her cheeks...Snap. Her teeth gradually sink through the purple skin. There is something erotic and ferocious in the bite...Snap...as she pierces the gelatinous center, randomly spurting juices. I imagine some juices landing in her mouth, coating her tongue. The excess drips down her chin.

Eat, drink, being merry.

She bites into another grape, and another, and the juices continue to flow from the punctured grapes. Some are shooting forth volcano-like from her mouth, cascading across her chin, slithering down her chest, meandering over her stomach and then gliding even lower, curling into, entwining, and melding with the now fluidly moving thrusts of her pelvis. Snap.

I put the camera on the tray table with the fruits and desserts, placing a plate under it so it's focused on her writhing figure, and set the automatic timer on continuous.

I leap onto the bed, and begin dancing with her, as she plucks another grape, and grinds it into her body, crushing and rolling and squishing. As I dance, I lean over and begin slurping all the sweetness from her body. Snap. I am now licking and sucking grapes off her breasts. Snap. Stomach. Snap. And as I proceed still lower, I hear both her piercing moan and snap. Snap. Snap.

Eat. Drink. Be Merry, Mery.

Thank you, Mr. Cannon. Where would I be without you?

Pictures to be reviewed again and again and again. The sweet
sucking of multiple flowing juices.....Immortalized.

A perfect bite

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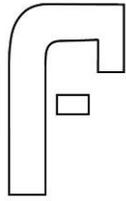
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or those of you who were here last week, or who have received notes," the Rebbe looks directly at me, "you know that the Israelites went forth from Egypt, and crossed the Red Sea. Then what happened?"

Several hands go up. He calls on a studious looking man, who has raised his hand higher than the others. His obvious need for approval is annoying. "It's the Sabbath of the Song. Miriam leads them in singing and dancing. As you said, Rebbe, song is important as a way to celebrate progress on our evolving journey, but God enjoins us not to rejoice at other's pain and suffering. As the Talmud Megilla 10b says, God doesn't want the angels to sing at the drowning of the Egyptians. So, it's not about singing per se, it's about when and why you sing--the intention." What a suck butt.

The Rebbe beams at him. "Excellent, Mr. Jason. First rate."

I haven't been to the sessions in a while, so Mr. Jason must be new. That sounds so formal. I wonder what his first name is. But already I have an intense dislike of him.

"The Israelites no longer have Pharaoh as a master, but they still have a slave/victim mentality. They grumble about their fate, they complain to Moses that at least in Egypt they were fed. In the wilderness they are given food, but told not to be greedy, to take only what they need. But they are still fearful, and trying to hoard--to no avail." Again, the Rebbe looks at me.

I want to meet his eyes directly, but am not able. Is he upset about the note I left him? The amount of money? What does

he want from me? I, who am barely getting by on \$200 a month, poverty level in America. I have \$7 a day to live on, 35 lirot a day. Their minimum was 10 lirot a session. Four sessions. Forty lirot. Did they expect me to go a day without eating and shelter? Do they want me to sell some stocks? If I did, then I'd have even less monthly income. That's not greed, or hoarding, that's reality. I have to protect myself. No one else seems willing or able to do that. I thought I handled the situation well last Wednesday afternoon.

Is he upset at my not returning to therapy because of the amount of money he will lose? In addition, he requests a "donation" of two lirot for the Parashah sessions. Is that even kosher?—exchanging, even asking for money on Shabbat? And Dr. Lisbet is going to charge for her "Tai Chi" class. They're constantly asking for money. Shouldn't God's teachings be free? Who is greedy here? Talk about casting the first stone, Rebbe.

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"Sinai is a mystery, offering revelation and law. Whereas the Book of Genesis--the first act of God's creation-- is a denial of the randomness and chaos and a movement toward physical universe, Exodus and Sinai are God's second act of creation, and a movement toward spiritual order."

I put away my journal notebook, pull out my parashah notebook, and begin to take notes on what the Rebbe is saying. **Even though you are angry at him --because of his presumed anger at you-- you are at least smart enough to recognize that there may be wisdom in what he's saying.**

"Why, then, is this chapter called Yitro? Jethro in

English. By the way, note that there is no J in Hebrew." I look over at Jason. Yason? I smile to myself because Mr. Suck Butt doesn't seem to know the answer. At least he hasn't raised his hand. No one raises their hand.

I make a note in my journal: "There is no J in Hebrew."

"It's because Moses learns an important lesson from Jethro--how to share responsibility. Jethro says to Moses (18.22), You will surely wear yourself out, for the task is too heavy for you. You cannot do it alone....let them share the burden with you."

I look up from my notes, and the Rebbe is again looking at me.

* * *

The dry white midday heat of the desert sunshine hides nothing. Shadows disappear. The Sinai desert, one of the most barren places on earth, a giant peninsula wedged between Africa and Asia. There is a melancholy beauty, a stark loveliness and loneliness about it.

The heat reminds me of when I was sent into the desert as a child, with my grandparents, to help cure my sickness.

God sent the Israelites into the wilderness to "learn what is in your hearts."

Maybe this is where I've been pointed all along, and just didn't know it. I can feel the anticipation and excitement of a goal. And not just any goal. The highest goal. Climbing Sinai, seeking to find what's in my heart.

* * *

I am camped with a group of fellow travelers, and we are all staying in tents near the 1700 year old St Catherine's monastery,

at the southern tip of the Sinai desert, hundreds of miles from civilization. It's freezing outside. We will awaken in a few hours to begin the climb, intending to arrive at sunrise. Rather than go to sleep in our individual tents, we huddle together outside, around a fire, for warmth, listening to the insistent drumming of Arab music, swaying, smiling, drinking tea.

There is a completely different feeling around this fire than in Eilat. There is no cavorting. No wine. Not really even much talking. We all stare directly at the fire, each seemingly lost in thought, as if preparing for whatever we might encounter in the morning.

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I remember from the Rebbe's talk "Sinai Workshop" in Jerusalem six months ago. That seems so distant. Yet now here I am. He spoke of engaging in a period of preparation necessary before the actual climb. Like when the Israelite people sought to purify themselves at the base of the mountain for receiving God's word. One of the purifications the Rebbe mentioned was sexual abstinence. Stay pure. "Do not go near a woman.. Exodus 19:15) I believe that may be a good thing for me, to help me totally remove Johannes from me. I can see, after the Sodom and Gemorrah of Eilat, how easy it is for me to return to that lifestyle if the opportunity presents. I think of the large pendulous bags of fat of the hashish smoking woman coming down to see her nearly drowned son. How could I ever have believed breasts were a mystery that promised nurturance? I'm seeking something far deeper and more nurturing here.

What else do I need to focus on to purify and prepare myself? Later at Sinai, the Israelites, had to face their attach-

ment to and worship of the golden calf. As a symbol of money. That calf is not a problem for me. I have moved beyond the materialism of my family and country. Money and wealth are no longer important to me. I think of my camera back in Eilat. Though I do wonder why they are charging so much to guide us up a sacred mountain. Shouldn't the ascent up God's mountain be free? Did Moses charge to lead the Israelites in the wilderness?

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The golden calf as a symbol of worldly power? That too I have moved beyond. As a symbol of human law. No, I seek God's law.

Food, wine, drugs? Yes, I need to purify myself by what I put in my body. I make a vow here. No more drugs. And the silliness and pettiness of my wine consumption. No more careless wine. Food? I need to purify there, too. I admit I'm attached to the pleasure food provides, always trying to make each bite perfect. I will reduce my eating to absolute necessity. Only as sustenance, no longer as enjoyment.

This afternoon, in a brief tour of the monastery, we saw what is purported to be the Burning Bush, where Moses heard the Word of God while tending the sheep of his father in law Jethro.

"Deliver the people from bondage in Egypt."

Food, wine, sex. Those are my bondages from which I seek deliverance.

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I watch the fire and sip my tea, feeling the warmth of both. I feel a pressure on my right thigh, and subtly turn. There is a German woman sitting to my right. Her right hand is in her boyfriend's and she is looking at him with affection. I feel her

left thigh pushing into my right leg. Is this accidental--we're in close quarters and she is just trying to get closer to the fire? Or is it purposeful-- is she seeking the warmth of additional bodily contact? I'm curious, and push back a bit. Nothing overt. I keep my head facing forward, and take another sip of tea.

There is something erotic in this touching/non touching ambiguity.

I take my thumb, through my glove, and pinch it into my index finger in anger. What am I doing? I can see that the mere presence of a woman may be too strong for me to overcome my bad habits. Maybe the Orthodox have it right. Keep us separate. Keep a big fence around temptation.

I'm not willing to get up and go back to my tent, losing the warmth of the fire. But I do remove the pressure I was exerting with my thigh. Does she even notice? Was this all a game in my imagination?

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I know I was right to leave Eilat. Though I haven't really talked with them, I can tell that the people here at Sinai, from several different countries, are all seekers. Just by being here, they show they are not content to sit complacently, like those on Coral Beach by the Red Sea, and be lulled by life's hypnotic rhythms.

I remember clearly the Rebbe's question, in Jerusalem, "At the deepest level, what are you seeking at Sinai, what do you want from God at the meeting at the top of Mt. Sinai?"

What is it I'm seeking? Life direction, purpose, meaning,

love? The message I heard in the Rebbe's imaginal journey up Sinai in Jerusalem was "Trust...you are loved." Yes, I'm seeking to trust more, to feel loved. On and from a higher, spiritual plain. But I'm also asking what is my meaning. From the place of trust and being loved, what is it I am supposed to do? Where am I to be guided and led in this life? What is the road I am supposed to build?

* * *

Finally, with head nodding in exhaustion, I return alone to my tent to sleep, awaiting the call to awake in the early morning darkness, ready to set out and find the answer. As I'm about to fall asleep, I wonder if the experience of climbing Sinai in my imagination in Jerusalem will be better than the actual climb here.

Is that my doubting mind? Isn't doubt the opposite of trust? Trust still seems to be an issue.

* * *

I sleep fitfully. It's freezing, and my two layers of long pants and socks don't seem to help much. My dreams are also fragmented. I'm waking every half hour to forty five minutes.

* * *

The airplane starts to quiver and shake. The lights go out, and I'm trying to write. But it's nearly impossible to make legible letters, both because it's completely dark, and from the undulations of the plane. What am I trying to write about? Pain, loneliness. I find something humorous in the fact that I'm writing in darkness about the darkness of life.

I look outside and can see nothing. Total blackness. I feel the plane losing altitude. Vertigo. My stomach dropping like on

the precipitous downhill of a roller coaster with no brakes.

As my eyes begin to grow accustomed to the dark, I look around. I can make out vague outlines of featureless people. Unmoving heads. They seem calm. One person is focusing on the air vents, trying to get a better air flow. I almost start laughing. I guess we try to control what we can, completely denying the chaos happening around us. I hear one person say "Don't worry, the pilot is in complete control." At first I'm reassured. I'm not alone. We're in this together.

But I do wonder where the pilot is, and why doesn't he say something.

The plane continues to roll from side to side, losing more altitude. I have this panicky feeling that I know we're going to crash, and no one else is aware of this fact. I want to yell at the strangers, "Where's the pilot? We're going to die. How can you all be so calm, like sheep, looking straight ahead, heedless of our fate?"

We're going to crash and they're sitting here being led to the slaughter. We're plunging headlong into a void. Look at you fools, putting your faith in the pilot, and he's not even communicating with us.

I return to my writing, even though it is difficult with the plane's motion. I wonder why am I even bothering to try to write?

For me alone?

Would it help to share this with anyone?

Then I realize, if a collision and death is unavoidable, why alarm the others around me, and wake them from their obliviousness. That would only raise fear in them, and there's nothing I,

or any of us, can do to change the situation.

Will someone find this writing after the plane hits the ground and all the passengers in it die? If so, is there a hopeful message in reading about one person's struggle, in the face of the inevitable?

John, do you also find it at all humorously ironic that you're having a dream about waking others up while you're asleep?

After another minute, I put my pen down and duck my head preparing for the end. Where is my father to protect me? Where can I turn for help?

Then I hear some lively music, and the sound of tapping, then pounding feet. The other passengers seem to be stomping as if in a jig-like dance to the music.

At last, there is an announcement: It's a woman's voice: "We are making a movie of dancing feet. Let yourself loose. We are only focusing on your feet. This is a dance contest, for our movie. For Christ's sake, forget about any feelings of self-consciousness and let your feet really fly, dazzle, be ecstatic and playfully joyous."

The "Do Not Smoke" lights come on, flashing, blinking, oscillating, creating a strobe-like effect. In the alternating light and darkness, all I can see are my feet and those of the passengers, like in a slow motion black and white homemade movie, as they perform an exuberant display of gliding, bopping, jumping.

After several minutes, the voice over the loudspeaker comes on again. "The plane is going to be landing shortly. Your dream is over. You may now wake up.

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I look at my watch. An hour and a half has passed. Still

dark. The dream has a too simplistic ending, but I like it. Awake, I still feel some joy of the dance in me. But I am exhausted, and have no desire to think about or interpret the dream. The reality of the imminent climb is going to be hard enough to face. All I want is sleep.

John, maybe there is a lesson in this dream from Reb Jonathan's and Dr. Lisbet's class, when they discussed Castenada's Don Juan books about "death as an advisor." Rather than just grimly hanging on, perhaps you, we, all of us, need to try to take time to appreciate and be grateful for the positive blessings of the gift of each day that is given to us.

* * *

We're awakened and it's still dark and freezing. I know I had others dreams, but can't remember them. It feels like an inauspicious start. I don't feel settled. The only image that keeps popping up is a skull. A hollow-eyed cranium staring at me.

* * *

I am groggy, disconnected, incoherent as we get ready and start our climb. There is a full moon which provides our main source of light, and I just keep my eyes on the feet of the person in front of me.

We're off.

* * *

"Camel, mister?"

The ascent up Sinai is supposed to take several hours, and Arab bedouins offer camels for lease to help carry you. I'm shocked and insulted to be asked after only a few minutes. I wave

them away disdainfully.

* * *

To learn what's in my heart.

Disdain does not seem something that I want to realize, it's certainly not what I'm seeking.

* * *

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend." The Rebbe looks at us, one by one, as he cites the words from the week's Torah portion. "The words seem obvious on one level. It is Moses receiving God's word at Sinai. But, from a mystical perspective, and as a teaching lesson, what else might it mean? Anyone have any ideas?" I start to raise my hand, but am not really sure, and don't want to make a mistake, especially given the Rebbe's looks at me.

"Could it be that the part of us made in God's image is supposed to speak to the Moses part in all of us in a friendly, compassionate way?"

Oh no, not Mr. Yason Jason Suck Butt again. That's what I was going to say, more or less. Damn. I need to trust myself more. He beat me to it again. I look at him--and myself-- with disdain.

* * *

My pack is heavy. I'm glad I left my camera back in Eilat. Why didn't I leave my flute, too? I have the Japanese fellow's light bamboo flute. Why do I need to be carrying a silver flute that I'm not even able to play because of my hand? Greed? My "silver" calf? For some reason, it wasn't that hard to leave the camera, but I don't yet want to part with the flute. Will I time to let go naturally come, or do I need to develop more discipline

to let go of possessions?

I am at the end of a long line of people making their way quietly, single file, up the mountain. I walk methodically, watching the feet of the person in front of me as I try to focus my thoughts. It's hard to believe I am at the start of my climb of Mount Sinai. When I look up, past the people, I can barely see a small path, with many twists and turns.

How did I get here?

Balaam's ass. Maybe Elizabeth Mery was like Balaam's ass. The day I met her, I had just been admitted to Harvard Law School and clearly saw my road ahead. She blocked me from going in the direction I wanted --first, law school; then marriage and commitment to her. Balaam's ass blocked his way. But of course the ass saw the Angel of Death waiting on that path, so he was actually protecting his master.

Sometimes when we're thwarted, it's for our own good, but we don't know it. The jackass. A sign of wisdom? A means of carrying us to where we really want to go? Or preventing us from going where we shouldn't?

And the mule you're now being offered, John? A test of your willingness to show fortitude and self-determination? Or a sign of your inability to accept help from others because you feel it's a sign of weakness?

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How amazing the twists and turns life takes. Abram had to go forth from the house of his father to a place he did not know. I had to leave my family. I fell into Mery's arms. She opened me to a level of joy and suffering that I'd never experienced before.

Initially the suffering had to do with what I saw in the outside world--those homeless, hopeless, alcoholic men on Sixth Street. But the suffering became internal so that what I saw was the emptiness, and meaninglessness of what I was doing with my own life.

When she disappeared with the joy, I was left with only the suffering.

What a journey since then....leaving my country for the promised land of Israel, Kibbutz Haon on the Sea of Galilee, where I saw even more clearly the limits of my materialistic country's values. Leaving behind the world of law school and its teaching of a confining, imperfect, secular human law.

I'm right where I should be. Behind me are family, relationship, human law, society. Before me is the quest for God.

That's all that is left.

I image myself as a lone man in the wilderness, like Moses, like Jesus, seeking the divine presence. The final rung in the ladder of the journey. Climbing Sinai, seeking God's law, seeking God.

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"Camel, mister?"

Some of the older people have given in and are now riding the camels offered by the Arab Bedouins climbing with us.

Over an hour has passed. It's still dark. I'm tired, hungry, thirsty, and have fallen farther back from the rest of the group. There are now nearly fifty yards between me and an older woman who is the next straggler, but still keeping a better pace than I am. Twenty-seven hundred meters. I've never been very good at heights. Over a few thousand feet, I get a dizzying mountain

sickness.

I look at the camel with more affection. One hump, a light yellowish brown color. I wonder why they have camels here, rather than donkeys. Maybe because with a donkey, you'd say there's a jackass on a jackass? Cute. Maybe because the camel's hump is symbolic of the mountain? Clever. My mind is still working.

In my hazy vision, I superimpose a donkey within the camel, seeing one change to the other, and back, as the donkey slowly develops a hump, then the camel loses its hump. My mind is starting to play tricks with me.

The camel's Bedouin master is smiling at me. At first the smile seems friendly, but then I sense a mocking tinge. Lazy, unfit American.

I remind myself that even as I'm looking down at the ground in front of me, my goal is the heights above. The Rebbe said that the ascent of a mountain is the perfect image for faith. Sometimes the ascent is demanding, as I certainly feel, and maybe everyone in the group is experiencing.

"In the midst of labor, that is when we are purified."

Yes, I'm now the last one in the group. "Mister, want a camel?" I hear again. I stubbornly shake my head no.

Effort, purification. Effort=success.

I dismiss him, once again.

* * *

Another hour of climbing. Steeper, more arduous. More echoes of "Mister, camel?" as I've now fallen far enough behind the group that I can barely see the person in front of me. I feel as though I've now been singled out as the weak one of the

pack. Like buzzards and hawks, several Arabs surround me with the offer of an easier ascent.

Step, step. Ever upward. "Ever closer."

I think of the dental assistant's comment, as she prepares to poke, prod, and check my gums for deterioration, and examine my teeth for cavities. Not exactly the sublime image I expected I'd be having on my way up Sinai. A spiritual examination?

Buzzing brush. Burning bush. Foggy, distracted mind.

With each step, the summit is "ever closer."

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Why doesn't anyone stop and smell the non-existent flowers? Why such a goal-oriented focus? My breathing is labored now. I wonder if I'm beginning to get dizzy.

There is a bit more light, and I can see the top.

Someone shouts back, "3500 steps now."

Thirty-five hundred steps. I have two thoughts. One, that's a lot of steps. Why does it get harder the higher you are and the closer you are to your goal? My second thought: "Did God carve these steps to help Moses near the top?" If God was truly trying to make it easier, why not just appear in a dream during sleep, or place the tablets by Moses' bed while he slept?

** * **

More switchbacks at a relatively steep angle--at least for me. Groggily, I continue to place one foot before the other. Step by step. My airplane dream of last night returns to my mind. The basic feeling from the dream is one of joy and happiness, but occurring after and on the other side of a lot of panic and fear. Who's the pilot? Male? Female? Does the pilot symbolize faith in

humans--whom I don't trust? Faith in God Whom I should trust?

The undiscovered me that I don't yet know?

And who are the other people? My family, my society, the kibbutzniks? The passive side of myself that I distrust? The wise calm part? Trust? God? That is what I seek on the top of Sinai.

And the dancing feet? Miriam asking all the Israelites to dance after crossing the Reed Sea. At the least those feet show there's still joy in me, even if buried deep down.

More steps. The only force I am aware of is gravity, holding each foot down like leaden weights. The opposite of dancing. I should have been counting so I'd know how far I have to go.

Others seem to be picking up the pace, as if some unseen current or force is drawing them toward the summit.

I feel the beginning of a dizzying nausea. I knew it was just a matter of time. I debate whether to sit and try to let it pass, or continue pushing. Is it really fair that while some are being pulled to the top, I am being thwarted?

I decide to sit, placing my forehead in my hands. I feel my father's hand once again on my forehead, during the Kansas City flood, placing a warm cloth to comfort me. I see the picture in my mind of my mother holding me as a young baby, staring with love into my eyes.

I push both images away. False idols. A posed picture. There is no father, or mother to comfort me any more. And no more little baby.

Breathe. You are choosing to make this climb. Remember an image of strength. Self-chosen nausea:

The summer before my senior year of high school, running

sand dunes at camp in Wisconsin. I was pushing so hard--to build my endurance--that I wouldn't stop until I literally threw up. There was a certain macho badge of courage in that nausea. Trying to be the best conditioned, most powerful person I could be.

The image is reassuring. I start to get up, but feel like I'm hit by a wave of dizziness, a return of Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death". The dream image: We are all going to die. I fear I am never going to feel differently. I am completely at a loss about how to change or control these feelings.

A Job-like emptiness, a Roquestin nausea, like after Mery left.

Was that self-chosen? Groggy thoughts. Am I trying to think to clear my mind? Or do they thoughts just make it worse?

After she left, the horrible pain certainly didn't seem self-chosen. I don't believe it completely was. But I wonder how much that suffering was me trying to be the best--at suffering. If Mery has seen the nothingness, I'm going to show her that I can feel despair, pain, and existential nothingness even better than she does. I will out-existential the existentialists.

Is that the side of me that made me leave the comfort of Eilat? Push on to be the best? Then why do I stop and quit as I near the top of Sinai? I push my thumb into my index finger, hard, to....Why? Feel pain and punish myself? Stop my thoughts and clear my head? Make me feel like I'm giving myself pain--which is better than uncontrollable pain and groggy confusion that comes unbidden.

I think back to the sand dunes and the strength I had, in spite of pain.

I stand and once more begin taking a step at a time.

* * *

A thousand steps to go?

It seems interminable.

But that means I've done twenty-five hundred.

One more step. Ever closer.

* * *

The sky is light now.

Though I don't miss the weight of my camera, or having it hang around my neck, I wish it could magically appear in my hands. This is a scene I'd like to commemorate and immortalize.

If I had my camera with me, and took a picture, the snapshot of the sky would be ambiguous. It could be just after sunset, like when I was riding with Mery along the ocean. It could be just before sunrise, like at the top of the Crown Room. The same with a snapshot of the full moon. Either rising or setting.

Heights and Depths.

* * *

I hear the group talking, and know that the top is just around one more bend. At first the murmurs are unintelligible. I'm surprised they're even talking at all. I'd have expected hushed tones. Silence. Solemnity. Instead there is chatter, and as I get closer, I can hear a few words: "Hungry." "I wonder what's for breakfast." This is not opening yourself to receive the sacred. How petty they are.

I think I even overhear someone talking about the tall lazy American who fell so far behind, I wonder if he'll even make it for the sunrise." Petty and judgmental.

* * *

*I arrive at a plateau on the top, joining the other members,
Just as the sun begins to emerge, a shout goes up from the
group, welcoming the light. Then we are still, and around us is
an eerie and awesome quiet.*

** * **

*I look from this lofty height over the pink morning sunrise,
the cool blue light. The first sun rays reach us, illumi-
nating--like little dust motes-- all the millions and millions of
particles in the world that were previously invisible.*

*The bush was aflame but not consumed. Like the Hanukkah
shamash candle-- sharing with others. New light is formed, but the
old light loses nothing.*

Stark, elegant, naked, fearful, majestic. Crystalline air.

I'm on a lofty pinnacle from which to view the world.

*I think of the little fountain in Kansas City, from which I
gave a Tarzan call, while sprinkles of water splashed over me.
Some of the same exuberant, joyful feelings well up in me. Multi-
plied by hundreds. Thousands. I feel surrounded, at the top of a
mountain rising out of desert, by an oceanic feeling of bliss.
Sprinkles of water become waves become ocean. Water on a mountain
in a desert. It makes no sense. I am not just splashed by water
but feel surrounded as if in a sea of infinity. Swimming? Float-
ing? Swelling with pride?*

*I feel like I am a distinct wave, yet if I were to break or
fall or crash, all I would do is merge with the watery substance
of which I am made. God as container and content.*

*Is this what it is like to experience God? To be a part of
God? To be held by God? To feel like God? To be God?*

Too many questions. I remain with the experience.

Moments pass.

I realize the nausea is gone, completely gone. When I felt so dizzy and sick, it was impossible to imagine I could ever feel otherwise. As I climbed higher, the dizziness and loss of balance should have gotten worse. But it has magically disappeared, vanished. From these heights, with the joy I am feeling, I wonder if it was really as bad as I experienced it. I even question whether I ever really felt it. If so, where did it go? Absorbed back into me? Taken from me?

By whom?

"Trust...that you are loved."

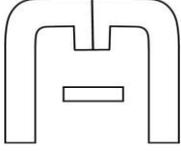
By Whom?

I feel the heat of the suns' first rays on my forehead, my face, as if I'm being bathed with a warm cloth of comforting light. My heavenly Father healing me? I slowly turn and look out over the vistas. A 360 degree panorama unfolds before me. With each degree of my turn, I feel the same light, surrounding and caressing me. My heavenly Mother holding and protecting me?

I make a complete revolution. Back to the beginning. Only different. I feel once again like a little child, only now in a man's body. This time, my nausea is cured by my heavenly Father and by my heavenly Mother.

Both Father and Mother are One. One indistinguishable, radiant light, circling, enfolding, and loving me.

"



nything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you." As I finish writing about my ascent of Sinai now back in Jerusalem, I realize I'm humming a little song my brother and I used sing endlessly to each other. It was our anthem, and fit perfectly given Grandpa's competitive admonition to "Be the best."

As I hum it, I'm thinking of the Rebbe. After the Parashah session today, he said he had some things he wanted to talk to me about, but that "they weren't Shabbos conversations." Could I stop by for a few minutes on Monday, before Dr. Lisbet's tai chi class. I agreed. Reluctantly. Maybe I'll go, and maybe I won't. We'll see.

I bet he realizes he's losing me as a therapy patient, and that bothers him. His loss. Both of me, and of my money. I don't need him, and I'll save money. I can be my own therapist. Like the camel carrying his own food in its hump. The Rebbe made lists of topics to comment on when we were in therapy sessions. I've have done the same with the Sinai ascent. The advantage is I don't cost myself anything.

"Anything you can do, I can do better..."

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Writing about Sinai, it was hard restraining myself not to editorialize. I know the future, at least better than I did in Sinai. I also am a bit wiser. Perhaps at least some of that can be attributed to the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. Certainly, I'm better at understanding dreams.

What else do I need to explore? I consult my list.

**Golden calf: money, and possessions. I'm not quite as good here as I thought. I felt I was beyond money issues. Clearly, that's not the truth, given how much time I spend worrying about it. Same with possessions. I still have both flutes, and when I went back to Eilat after Sinai, Jean Claude again offered me my camera, and this time I took it. So, Mr. Cannon, though renamed more non-violently Mr. Reflection, is back in my possession.*

**Black/white thinking. When I saw the Bedouin's smile at Sinai, at first it seemed genuine, then mocking. I assumed it was only mocking. Not very nuanced. Same with the my view of faith versus doubt. Both the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet cautioned me about that type of either/or thinking. Dr. Lisbet said to read the theologian Paul Tillich on the relationship of doubt and faith--that faith can and will include doubt. I haven't yet, but maybe I will.*

**The dream and death. Grandma is dead. We all will die. The plane inevitably crashes. I was much too willing to focus on a brief moment of dancing joy. That does not resolve death. Is that either/or thinking? I don't think so.*

**"Trust...that you are loved." This may be the biggest wrestle for me since the ascent up Sinai.*

I knew then, and know now who and what I can't trust. My earthly father and mother; law school; Elizabeth Mery. I even have strong doubts about Dr. Lisbet and the Rebbe, supposedly God's representatives and ambassadors.

I do know what I experienced on the top of Sinai--a feeling of pure trust in God.

But now, in Jerusalem, two months later, the intensity and

joy has definitely dissipated.

I still want to believe in and trust that memory. But with time, it grows hazier. Reabsorbed into me? Taken from me? Did it really exist?

What does it mean to experience God? Moses was able to see only the back of God, for to see God directly was to have been too blinding. Elija heard a still small voice. Jesus said "the Father and I are One. (John 10:30)"

What really was my experience?

Is it logically possible --experientially possible-- for me to feel like I was a part of God, cradled and taken care of by God, and at the same time feel I was God? What does it mean to be God? How do I know whether those feeling were a complete experience of God, like Jesus', or only partial, like Moses'. Or whether the experience itself was an egocentric prideful return to Johannes, a primitive Tarzan-like euphoria from accomplishing a goal and climbing to the top of a mountain?

Who can I turn to for guidance and answers?

Only myself. To remind myself that I once felt my "self" part of the larger "Self." During the dark times, I need to remember the trust and love I felt at the heights. It is that memory that allows me to believe that love is possible. Divine love gives me the strength to keep going forward, and, to plunge once again into my past, where Johannes is at the pinnacle of his relationship with Mery. I remember in my writing class where the teacher said "in every good story there is a turning point. That toward which things have been building and after which things change." Johannes at the Fairmont. Moses at Sinai. Although Johannes doesn't yet know it,

there is only one way for him to go. Just like after you reach the top of Sinai--the ascent--there is only one way to go.

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I can't believe how many pathetic, angry, terrible drivers there are on the road. The drive south from Mery's on Sunday was a nerve-wracking nightmare. Through luck, skill, and Mr. Red's reliable performance and speed, I made it home safely.

Parting was difficult. When I got home, I added some notes to my file about our visit to feed the homeless, which should be helpful for my political science class on the elderly and social security.

I realize that "home" is a temporary word. I only have eight more weeks left at the Farm, and then all structure here completely disappears. It's hard to hold that thought in my mind at the same time return and commit to a dissolving framework.

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It's been hard for me to get back to the order and structure of my classes these past couple of weeks, but I am thankful for the framework, even if only temporary.

Like summers, or vacations, lack of structure is hard for me without a plan. I wonder if that's why I would try to fill the start of my summers when I was younger with counting numbers, and writing them down. A meaningless ritual in which each summer I would try to beat my past record, and count higher and higher.

Somehow I have been able these last two weeks to return to semblance of normaly--flute playing, my classes, my tennis at the Farm--even while knowing each day brings me closer to the Farm's demise--or rather the demise of my time at the Farm.

It's interesting that what Johannes is saying about graduation,

from a larger perspective, is true of life. Certainly on the physical plane, it will end, yet we try to connect to a dissolving framework. That's not easy.

It's hard to maintain intensity and focus. Especially when nearly all my thoughts are on Mery, and wanting to return to see her. We've talked daily, often for hours. Some nights, in fact, when I was having trouble sleeping, because I missed her so much, I'd lie in bed and she'd read me a story over the phone until I fell asleep. Winnie the Pooh. She loves Tigger, though she sometimes says she feels more like Eyore. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

The talk is often about daily events--she tells me how mean her boss is to her; or how some customer is really nice. I try to help her solve the problems, though sometimes there are silences and it feels awkward on the phone. And I also catch myself becoming a little jealous when I hear of nice customers, especially if it's a male, a potential rival. She just laughs at me "Silly boy. You have nothing to worry about." I want to trust her. But I know I do have something to worry about---when Grandpa \$ gets these phone bills.

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How do you create a day?

Johannes structure is provided for him: classes leading to a degree leading to the next rung on the career ladder. Even as he realizes his framework is ebbing, he still acts. I admire his focus and energy. I know they will later waver and he will end up like me!

By choosing to leave the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet's counseling,

I once again face empty days, and the realization that I have no external framework at all. I can't--don't seem to be able--to stay on the raw edge of existence, creating every moment.

I make a list of hobbies and activities I can do by myself. I'm slightly embarrassed at doing this, like I'm just a big baby, though with a modicum of consciousness, trig to figure how to play and amuse myself.

1) Take small excursions to different sites I'm reading about in the Old and New Testaments. That will get me out of this room.

2) Self improvement. I love to play with words. So, take I'll take a half hour each day for a cross word puzzle. That will keep my vocabulary sharp.

3) Keep carving the chess set, to get me out of my mind.

4) Keep playing music.

a) Practice some etudes. Work on tone, fingering speed, rhythm. b) Play free form, just feeling the music.

There, now life seems more structured.

See, baby John, there are lots of ways to create order, meaning and purpose. Some may be received. Some are self-created.

I wonder what the non-shabbos issues are that the Rebbe wants to talk to me about. I feel like I'm being called into Dad's room to be grounded, or spanked.

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My main task is still to continue my forward and back time travel and reflection. Me as Johannes, continuing his dance with Mery, literally and symbolically, including some more heated "discussions"

about human law and God.

Me as Moses on the top of Sinai, asking God for guidance in
The next step of my life.

And me in Jerusalem, trying to see if all these different
selves can come together and make sense. I feel like I'm working
at both ends of time. Jumping from past to present and present to
past.

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I hope, like Shakespeare when he was writing his historical
plays, Richard 11, Henry IV and V, that somehow I will be able to
order history--the past-- , and give it meaning. Is it ironic that I
read the tragedies Henry 1V and V first--in America--, the class
assignments. Then I take Richard 11 with me to the kibbutz. It's
as if I read the future before I read the past. Sinai before
Carmel. Story of my life?

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Maybe like the building of the Union Pacific Railroad--one
group building tracks west to east; another east to west, even-
tually there will come a point when the last stake is nailed in,
and the tracks will seamlessly join. That union, in turn will
hopefully create a smooth transition and become the railroad tracks of
my future. Working backward and forward, I will come together somehow
with that last stake.

* * *

I'm dawdling. I don't want to leave the top of Sinai and
the magnificent, Moses-like, even Jesus-like experience of en-
countering God. I don't want to face the descent, either there,
or with Johannes and Mery.

With both descents, at least I know what is coming. My only task is to figure out how or if I could have lived those days better or wiser; and what I can learn from my mistakes and foibles. Recycling their lives, I can see into and know the future--for I am it. And in my present life, I'm seeking to gain wisdom from the past, to create a more meaningful future.

Enough procrastinating. To the task. Again, I realize there is not much I can control in my life, but one thing I can control is when I stop reading and writing about my past selves. And which one I choose to read about. Do I want to read about Johannes, or write about coming down Sinai? Ah, control. Right?

Control? Self-created? or the illusion thereof?

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I received a present today from Mery in the mail. A book by Martin Buber "I-Thou." In it she inscribed,

"To J, my 'thou,' who helps me to see the dash (-) --God-- in my Life through a loving relationship. Thank you. Love, E.M."

When I call to thank her, there's no answer. Assuming she's at work, I call David's, but they say she's not working today. Where could she be? Perhaps she's painting and doesn't want to be disturbed.

Maybe I should drive up and surprise her.

I think about how cute she was at the Fairmont. "What are you going to do with the pictures you took of me 'down there?'" Down there! What a naive little girl.

I haven't yet developed them, but as I image her, what comes to mind is her face. How expressive her face is, and how fluidly she shifts through a range of emotions, each flowing into the other. Beautiful eyes. Amazingly trusting. "I feel so

comfortable with you."

I decide it will take too much time to make the drive to see her, and I have a lot of work to do. I can wait a couple more days until our "date" when she is going to cook for me and says she has a surprise for me. When I asked for a hint, she only said "JJ".

In the meantime, I'll develop the pictures. That way she'll be here with me even during her absence.

* * *

Later that evening, after several more calls, she finally picks up.

"Hi, I've been trying to get ahold of you. Your book arrived today. Thank you so much."

"Oh, I'm glad you like it. Did you read my inscription?"

"Of course. It's beautiful. What is with the dash and God?"

"Buber sees connection between people as evidence of God. He's spiritual, mystical, and Jewish."

"Sounds like the Trinity. I'll read it for sure." Trying to sound as if it's an offhanded comment, even though it's an implied question (Where were you?), I state, "I've been calling since early afternoon, but couldn't reach you. I even tried David's."

"Are you checking up on me?" She responds more defensively than I'd expected.

"What? Of course not. I just wanted to thank you."

"Oh."

Silence. I try again. "But you didn't say where you were."

More silence. Then, her defensiveness disappears, and she says, "Remember when we were in the Shakespeare Garden the first

time, I told you I volunteered with autistic kids doing art therapy."

"Yes."

"Well, that's where I was. Working with a group of them."

I want to ask "All afternoon and evening?!" But I know that sounds like some distrustful jealousy slipping through and she'd be annoyed with me and pull back. Instead I go with safety, and compliment:

"You really are amazing. The homeless, the retarded. What a good-hearted person."

"Thanks. It's good to hear your voice. Actually, I'm feeling discouraged. It's nice to hear some words of encouragement."

"What's wrong?"

"Aren't you tired? It's late. Are you sure you want to hear this?"

"Of course. I love the sound of your voice. In fact, I almost drove up this afternoon to surprise you."

I await some affirmative response like "That would have been great," Or "Wow, pretty spontaneous!" She says nothing. There is just silence.

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I sit and look at a picture of her jumping on the Fairmont bed. By doing so, I restrain myself from becoming annoyed at her non-responsiveness, and from probing. Instead, I ask her to tell me about her work with the kids.

"What motivated you to begin that, to work with them in particular?"

"I've been doing it for years. I told you when I was younger, I was dyslexic, didn't I?"

Did she. I don't remember. "Dyslexic? What exactly does

that mean."

"Just that I turn things around sometimes, words, letters.

Do you have a piece of paper and a pen near you."

"Yes."

"Make a small r."

"Done."



"Do you see that the top of the vertical meets the left hand part of the line at the top?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'd draw the vertical line starting on the right side of the top line. Try drawing that."



"Done. It looks like an inverted J."

"I did that too. I'd write the J of my last name as if it

were . That was me. I literally saw the world, or parts of it, differently than anyone else. I quickly learned that people are often caught up in their own perspective. No one ever really made the attempt to understand how I was seeing things. So I made it one of my goals to really see through the eyes of others."

What a refreshing idealism, though very close to naivete.

"You would be a good lawyer. One of the fundamental principles of the British Constitution is just that: *audi alteram partem*."

"Exactly."

"Do you know Latin?" I say with some surprise. I was expecting she'd ask for a translation.

"No, but that's pretty simple: *audi:* from *audio;*
*alter....*the other, like *alter ego; partem*. Duh. Not everyone who
doesn't go to Stanford is a dunce!"

Is she being playful, in a sarcastic style, like my family?
Is she feeling hurt? Was I being patronizing? Sarcasm is some-
times hard to read, and everything gets so complicated. Fine, I
can dish it back.

"I thought you were this spiritual, kind-hearted, innocent
girl. Where is this sarcasm coming from?"

"You. You're my role model." She laughs somewhat awkwardly.
"Just kidding. You're right. My therapist told me I need to take
things less seriously and be less sensitive when I get into one
of my 'down' moods. You seem to make light of everything--oops, I
did it again!--sorry. But maybe that's something I'm learning
from you. You said you like that quality in others. Maybe I'm
trying to please you. Maybe it's from being around the other
waitresses. It seems a way to toughen up, keep the world at a
distance, say something without having to take responsibility for
really saying it. I'm not exactly sure yet how to be less seri-
ous, more playful. I'm still learning."

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She seemed pretty playful and spontaneous at the Fairmnt, jumping
around on the bed. But I don't say anything. I don't really like where
this conversation is going--I make light of everything; I use sarcasm
to avoid responsibility; I'm the evil force teaching her sarcasm. Poor
little lamb. I feel to continue in this vein would to enter a briar
patch. I want to change the subject and return to the topic of her
kids. "Tell me more about what you do with these retarded children."

"I don't really like the word 'retarded' it's become so

pejorative, a taunt kids use on the playground." She's right about that. I used to make fun of several "less athletically gifted" kids like that. Do I hear another criticism? It's so hard not being with her in person. I don't say anything.

"Because people didn't try to understand me I decided I'd work with children with disabilities, kids who seemed isolated and couldn't be reached. I want to get into their world, to see if I could understand things as they did, rather than making them conform to my world."

"How do you try to do that?"

"One of my former professors, an art therapist, said he thought I could use my art gifts as a non-verbal way of communicating with them. A way to bypass words and get to feelings. So, I assist in a weekly class he teaches the autistic kids. We use art, talk, touch if they allow it. Anything I can find that might work."

During her monologue, I take out a couple of pictures from the first time I photographed her--at the Shakespeare garden, wearing that bright yellow dress, and blue shawl. I compare them to the ones at the Fairmont.

"Art. Touch. Lovely. That's really lovely," I say, as I stroke myself. "So, why the discouragement?" Good for me. Reinforcing, solicitous. I vaguely wonder if I should ask her more about this former art Professor she's assisting. But I'm drawn to another one of her pictures.

Arousal trumps the desire to query.

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She continues to chatter as I notice the way the blue shawl innocently falls off her shoulder. Could she have had any idea at

that moment in Golden Gate Park that less than a month later she would be letting me photograph her at the Fairmont nude? I look at her facing the camera as she dips a banana into the chocolate fondue. What does she mean she doesn't know how to play. I begin stroking myself.

"I've been seeing some of them for several years. I've tried with every ounce of my strength to communicate with them, but there are still many that I haven't even begun to reach." Her voice has a tone of weary resignation.

"That must be really painful." And now, she's holding the banana above her head, as the chocolate drips into her mouth.

Why does she voluntarily put herself in a situation-like with those kids-- that is so difficult and frustrating? What a painful waste of time and energy. I know that's not the right thing to say. "I'm really sorry. I'm sure you must have helped a some." That's good. A kindly empathetic response.

This is embarrassing to read. What a hypocrite. Johannes, are you really such a sexual-obsessed, emotionless robot? She's in pain, and you are basically ignoring her and seeking to gratify yourself. And if you hadn't been so involved in ignoring her pain for your pleasure, you might have wondered how she was able to so completely let go of restraint at the Fairmont. That might have been a warning sign, which you completely missed.

I look at a voluptuous picture of her, taking the chocolate covered banana, and looking straight into the camera, starting to suck on it, hollowing her cheeks. My lingam continues to be re-born.

"I can't even imagine how frustrating that is. I really

admire you for trying. I know I don't have kind of patience.
Would you like me to drive up and be with you?" I ask, trying to
keep my voice filled with compassion, and not with excitement.

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"That's so sweet of you." Watching her suck the chocolate-
covered banana, I want to say, "You are the one who is sweet."
But I just keep listening.

"I'm sorry I'm like this. I get so frustrated with myself
that I can't do more. I would feel horrible even if there were
only one child I couldn't reach. But there are so many. How did
Jesus deal with the frustration --there are so many to heal, so
many hurting and suffering, so many who stand by and seem imper-
vious to the suffering of others?"

Those who stand by impervious? Ouch. That's too close to the
bone. My lingham starts to shrink. I put her pictures down.
Though I'm feeling tense, it's clear to me this conversation is
not setting the right mood for achieving an orgasm. I'm feeling
annoyed. Also impressed.

The latter seems more strategic to share, so I say "You
really are a sensitive soul, aren't you?" while I think to my-
self, with more than a trace of sarcasm, what should we call you,
Saint Elizabeth? Saint Mery?

"If you knew what else I was thinking you wouldn't say that.
It's embarrassing to tell you this, but sometimes I get frustrat-
ed, even angry at God. I don't understand how a loving God can
let children be born who can't be reached, who can't show or seem
to feel or receive love.

"My therapist tells me we're all wounded, but some wounds
just seem too deep. How can children be born that way? I've

tried to study it--is it something human caused? Pollutants in the environment? Parents drinking? I won't allow myself to believe a loving God can allow this to happen to those beautiful, innocent children."

I can't tell whether she's angry or crying. "And I can do nothing, absolute nothing, to help them."

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I'm not exactly sure what to say. What I want to say is "Well, either God isn't all that compassionate, or has a crazy sense of humor, or doesn't exist." Probably not the best response.

I'm also feeling irritated. This is definitely not the most conducive conversation for having an orgasm.

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"Are you sure you don't want me to come up?"

"No, thank you. I wouldn't be that much fun to be with tonight. Also my therapist said I have to learn to find ways to cope with these feelings myself. Somehow I have to keep myself open, and not shut down. Sometimes I can do that. Other times it just hurts too much. Then I close down to the kids, to the world."

"What does your therapist suggest you do when that happens?" I look down at the pictures and my limp shaft of light.

"Sometimes it helps if play the piano, or paint, or run until I'm completely drained. Then I just sit down and cry."

I like the image of seeing her run. My lingam starts to revive. I give it a stroke, but know that sharing with her my

ideas for letting off energy and staying open to the world would probably not be such a good move. "Well, just know I'm here if you want to talk, and of course I'd come up if that would help. You know, give you a cuddle." And....

"Thank you so much. It does help talking to you. I feel like we really are having an I-Thou encounter. Just talking to you helps me feel more open. I feel you not only as the Thou, but also as part of the dash of God."

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As I sit looking at her pictures and stroking myself, I feel a bit awkward being called the dash of God. "That's very kind of you. I'm not sure I deserve that."

"Ah, modest, too." I hear her laugh. It's a bit forced, but it seems she's trying to be more cheerful.

"How do you cope with all the pain and suffering you see around you?" she asks.

"I'm afraid in this area I'm pretty far behind you. To be truthful, mainly I try to avoid it. I'm only slowly coming to the realization-- with your help-- just how much suffering there is in the world. Thanks a lot for showing me the world's pain. I really feel much happier, now."

"Do I detect a bit of that Kansas City family sarcasm you've told me about coming through?"

"Just a tad. Actually, you do make me think about what it means to be sensitive to the world and others beyond where and how it affects me directly. That is new for me, and I'm not really very good at it. Remember the story I told you about the doctor and my double chin?"

"How could I forget?"

"Well, he was trying to encourage me to get more involved with the world, and be less self-absorbed. I think you're helping show me how to do that in a caring, giving way. So, really, thank you for opening me to a larger world."

"That is so kind of you to say. By the way, remember you said you had a couple other experiences like that you were going to tell me."

"That's it, rub it in. Does it make you feel better to hear what a pathetic non-giving person I am? Thanks a lot. What happened to my being part of the dash of God?"

"Please. I promise. No judgment, and only a few giggles. Especially if it's as weighty as the last one."

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"Spring of freshman year, a group from our dorm went hiking in Yosemite with our resident assistant."

"That sounds fun. I can't wait to hear how you screwed up."

"Thanks, Ms. Understanding. Speaking of 'weighty' I'd just finished a diet Dr. Pepper, and threw the can into the woods, off the trail."

"No, you didn't."

"Thanks again for your understanding. Look, you can see how far I've come. Remember how I helped pick up after us at the Shakespeare garden?"

"Right, after I reminded you."

"Well, no one's perfect. I told you, I'm still a work in progress when it comes to helping be of service and clean up the litter of the world."

"Litter? Are you referring only to things, or to people,

too--like my little kids, or the men on Sixth Street?"

"Come on. This is hard enough. Bad choice of words. No, of course not. Of course not."

"Sorry, I'm being too sensitive. My therapist says I overreact sometimes. Go on."

"I thought nothing of tossing the can. The RA, who was walking behind me, angrily yelled for the group to stop. I had no idea why. He said something about how pristine and lovely nature is, and that I have no right to use it as my personal trash can. That each of us has a responsibility to pick up after ourselves, and we weren't going to continue hiking until I retrieved the soda can. I was confused. This was not a lesson or value that my family had ever practiced. Wasn't nature big enough to absorb all our waste? He sounded preachy. I also thought of my Latin teacher yelling at me, calling me a primadonna when I was putting my clutter in the trash can. I felt like the world was so unfair, and I just couldn't win."

"Your family seems so nice. I'm really surprised that they wouldn't teach you not to litter."

"Yea, it's their fault, right?" If you only knew.

"You sound like such a poor misunderstood little boy. Everybody seems so mean to you. I wish I were there to cuddle you."

"Better. This is the girl I know and love."

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"It may sound somewhat humorous now, but at the time, I was angry. I didn't like being singled out like that in front of my dorm mates. If it had just been the two of us, I'd have told him not to be ridiculous, since I'd thrown the can far

enough off the trail so that no one could see it. I didn't understand why he was making such a big deal about it. But I didn't like the peer pressure and holding everybody up, so I grudgingly found it, and was forced to carry it with me the whole trip. I felt like an idiot."

"You were an idiot. I'm glad I didn't know you then."

"That's not non-judgmental! Are you feeling better now--at my expense?"

"Sorry, but we do have to take care of nature."

"Am I receiving another sermon?"

"Sorry, you're right, I'm not keeping my promise. Please go on."

"That was the easy story. The next one is even worse."

"I can't imagine."

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"When I was 18, I was drafted. I dutifully went. After being stripped, prodded, and probed, I was given a classification of 1Y, ready for service. I felt enormous fear, and I wondered, Could I say I'm a conscientious objector to get out of it. I had heard of people who didn't believe in taking another life under any circumstances and that this belief kept them out of combat. I liked the idea of avoiding combat, but wasn't sure I believed what they did. It wasn't something I'd given any thought to. I would just be making it up as an excuse. So, I said nothing.

"About 20 minutes later, as I was getting dressed, an officer came to me, and said, 'Son, I've got some bad news for you.' I now really felt scared. Were they going to send me immediately to Vietnam? I looked up at him, expectantly, and he said:

"'Unfortunately, because of the deafness in your left ear,

we feel you would be a liability to us on the front line. You might not hear orders that would put your life, and the life of your fellow soldiers at risk. I know you're going to be sorry to hear that we've reclassified you as 4F, unfit for service. You won't be able to serve your country in combat.'

"I looked appropriately deferential and saddened, but inside there was the biggest whoop of joy you could imagine."

"I'm glad you didn't go," Mery replies. "Taking another life is wrong. I like that story better than the first one, even though it sounds like you hadn't really formulated a philosophy about war and killing. What do you believe now?"

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I feel like I'm in a confessional booth, with lovely voluptuous pictures lying all around me, and a stern super-egoic task master is making me psychologically and spiritually probe and inspect myself. How did I get from the arousal of those pictures to here? I turn the pictures over. Is there any way to just say good night, and end this conversation? I feel like a cartoon snake who's eaten something that you can see is half way down it's body. Somehow I have to dislodge it to get it out of me.

"Before we jump to my current beliefs, let me finish the story."

"I thought you were done."

"No, that was only the prelude. Flash forward seven months. I'm now in the spring of my freshman year at Stanford, and have been elected president of my freshman dorm."

"Wait, are you doing it again, telling a story that's supposed to put you in a bad light, but really using it as a pretext for bragging." Her voice sounds like it's trying to be playful,

but do I hear a bit of an edge? It's really hard to tell when you can't see the person.

"Just you wait. Then there was a council of presidents of all eight freshman dorms. I was elected president of the president's council. I know, this sounds like it's becoming increasingly self-serving, but bear with me.

"One of my tasks was to introduce distinguished speakers who visited the campus. In the spring, William Sloan Coffin came to visit. I had no idea who he was, so I perfunctorily read his bio blurb: 'Yale Chaplain, etc etc'. His topic was the Vietnam War. Since I was now classified 4f and couldn't be drafted, I wasn't particularly interested in what he was going to say. If it wouldn't have seemed too rude, I would have left after performing my presidential ceremonial duties."

"See, you've had a sensitive soul in you right from the beginning."

"Thank you. I will take that how I am sure it was meant. To continue, there were perhaps two dozen people in the room. He began by saying, 'There is a war going on in Vietnam. Our reasons for being there are not clear. Yet more and more of our sons are over there fighting and dying. Do any of you have any thoughts or feelings about this?'

"Later I found out he was a very dedicated antiwar protester, and was helping young men explore their own views on war, peace, conscientious objector status.

"I looked inside, and I saw that now that this war was not a part of my future. I actually had not thought about it again, and had no feelings whatsoever, one way or the other. My

job was to get good grades, do well in school, and get into law school. What compelled me to share that so honestly and baldly, I still don't know, but I did:

"I really don't think about it at all. It has no relevance in any way to me."

"There was a stunned silence. I thought perhaps people were impressed with my candid declaration. Reverend Coffin also was speechless for a long minute. He then went on, 'I believe that one day you will see it may have more direct relevance to you than you think. And that one day you may learn to give something to a cause larger than your own limited self-interest. Now, does anyone else have some thoughts or questions?'"

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I wait for Mery to say something, but the phone is silent. I wish I could see her face. Maybe.

"Silence was what I received then, and what I'm receiving now."

"Don't you realize that this war is causing people to search at the deepest level of their morality for answers about how to respond to the draft and the war?"

"Yes. now I get that. I told you I'm not proud of these stories. I realize I sound spoiled, picked on, misunderstood. But that's who I was. Until I met you. Seeing the way you give to others helps me to begin to realize my own naivete and even callousness. In retrospect, it's actually amazing how composed Reverend Coffin was, not angry and pissy like my Latin teacher. I guess he could have deservedly verbally pummeled me. I suppose you can too if you want."

More silence.

"Are you trying not to be judgmental?" I say somewhat defensively."

"No, well, yes. Honestly, I think it's very brave of you to share that with me. It shows you trust me a lot.

I'm not exactly sure what she means, but at this point the last thing I want is to prolong the conversation. I'm feeling tense, tired, drained. Not from giving service, but from talking about how I didn't. I hope she's feeling better, because I'm certainly not. I'm tired of this masochist self-crucifying conversation.

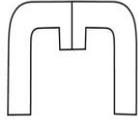
I turn over her pictures and look at her smiley chocolate covered face, tongue out, leering at a banana. That's the face I want to see. The Mery of the pictures is speaking to me a lot louder than this whimpery, guilty, religious-spouting, judgmental girl on the phone. There's only so much of that I can take.

"I do. I trust you. Now, it's late. We both need some sleep. I'll see you in two days. Sweet dreams."

I hang up the phone, pick up a picture and begin stroking my lingam. Sweet dreams, indeed.

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"



ery, I want you to know that I'm anxious and vulnerable.

Please be gentle with me because it is my first time."

She looks at me askance, as I hand her some flowers, lilies
from which a single sunflower emerges.

"Thank you, kind gentleman, they're beautiful. Now what is
this about your first time? What are you talking about?"

"If you don't like it that much, just tell me. But I hope
you do."

I hand her a piece of paper:

THE DANCE

sweat streaming off smiling faces
She, reddish hair, swinging over brown eyes,
coyishly returning to greet
I, boyishly laughing, throwing my arms
high, spinning faster;
I, dashing out, skipping, casting
daring glances at
She, alluring, following,
breathless
and once more smiling

WE

My first poem.

She smiles as she reads it.

"You're so cute...and what a trickster. You and your playful
sexual double entendres." She re-reads it. "Yes, I do like it.
Is this a version of our bedroom dance at the Fairmont?" She
looks directly at me Too intense. I lower my eyes.

"An artist, and a gentleman, never tells."

I am relieved that there seems an easy lightness between
us. Whatever tension from the phone calls is gone, a distant
memory, probably the result of the technology: impersonal, disem-
bodied voices. No flesh. Seeing her in person, like the poem,

gives form to the voice.

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"This poem--'We'--is dedicated to you, your loving, playful, trusting good nature. I feel a little shy and awkward saying this--and this is the first time I've ever shared such feelings--but I feel ready to deepen our commitment. This is pioneering territory for me. I've shared more with you about my life than I have with anyone. I feel as though with you I've seen what the "promised land" might be like. I want to enter it. This is a strange thought for me: I could see us being life-long partners together."

I'm feeling a sense of joy. I've left my entrapment of Kansas City Egypt, escaped the Pharaohs that ruled me. The plagues are behind me. A new life awaits.

She puts the flowers down and throws her arms around me. "That's the sweetest thing anybody has ever said to me." She gives me a big kiss. "Are you proposing?"

Am I? No. Not really. Well, kind of. Sort of maybe if things continue to go well. Perhaps next year. But what about law school?

"Whoa, Nellie. Or rather, whoa, Marry Mery. Merrying Mery would be Mery," and I give her a kiss back. "But I've still got to graduate and figure out what I'm going to be doing next year. What we're going to be doing."

Mery continues to hug me, but it seems a little less tight.

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After a moment, she lets go and returns to the chopping table, to start preparing the ingredients for dinner.

"Do you like halibut."

"Great." I hate fish. And I still am thinking about the poem.

"The professor gave me a C+ on the poem. Do you want to hear his comments."

She says yes while starting to chop some carrots. I smell the fragrance from the lilies.

I pick up the paper again, and began reading. "The modernistic unrhymed blank verse is well done. Also good is the alternation in the length of the lines. This creates a sexual tension, when added to the impressionistic, kinesthetic energy embodied in the words."

"That sounds positive."

"I thought so, too, but he only gave me an 78."

"That's good."

"Not really."

"Did he have any other comments saying why?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to read those?"

"No."

"Ok." She continues chopping.

* * *

"You know how sometimes you tease me about being too analytical?"

"Why, whatever do you mean, Oh White Knight? You?"

"Cute. Sometimes you seem to like it--my dividers in the car; sometimes not. So, I've been working on being less analytical. I guess, analyzing when to analyze, and when not!"

"Now, that is cute. And waaay too analytical!"

"See, exactly. So, anyway, the professor had asked us to

write an analysis of our poem, applying literary constructs to our creative effort to explain its structure, cadence, feet, meters, syllable accentuation, etc. I felt that the joy and happiness in the poem would be diminished by that--too much reflection. So I didn't do it.

"You rebel, you."

"Well, partly, But also, I may have told you, in second grade, I was put in a group called the Indians--there were two of us; we were the 'retards' because we couldn't figure out how many syllables a word had, and where the pronunciation and accents lay."

"Sounds like an incredibly racist school."

"What are you talking about?"

"The 'retarded' group is called 'Indians?'"

"Well, so is my current school, which isn't exactly full of retards. Anyway, aren't we getting off the point?" This doesn't seem the time to tell her that Dad and I used to go across the street from our house into an empty lot--before it was built over-- and shoot Coke bottles with a BB gun. Dad called it "shooting the Indians."

I have a moment of embarrassment. Am I responsible for his teachings, and going along with it? How was I to know better at 10 years old. Then I think of the decal I wanted to put on Mr. Red, of several Stanford Indians, the first one thumbing his nose at the second, who is thumbing his nose at the third, and down the line, until the last one thumbs his nose at everyone driving behind. At least that seems a small evolution away from dad, willing to identify myself as a Stanford Indian; and thumbing my nose at the rest of the world. A work in Progress? Again, I decide not to share this story with her.

"You're right. Sorry. You're telling me about why you didn't complete the assignment. Trying to be less analytical. Very courageous of you. But maybe not so wise, when the professor is the one grading you. Sometimes it's important to follow rules. 78 is actually pretty good considering you didn't complete the assignment."

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She finishes chopping the carrots, and reaches for a couple of onions. The knife she's using looks sharp, a ten inch blade, serrated.

"I've spent all my life following rules. How do you think I got into Stanford, and then Harvard? Great, the first time I try to draw outside the lines, to evolve into a more spontaneous, creative person--the very thing you're encouraging me to do--I get my hand slapped. By everybody."

Johannes likes rules and structures that he creates. He'll also follow imposed rules when he feels they are fun--golf, tennis. Or he'll follow rules if he feels they serve some other self-chosen goal, like taking certain classes that will be helpful for law school. But if he can find a way to break the rules, or push the envelope, and get away with it, he'll do that without qualms.

It's complicated. I guess I'd say he likes, even needs, some structure, to then see how he can rebel against it, and push the limits of tolerance. And me? I've taken that impulse and found that even as I long for structure, I won't accept a framework that I can't admire and respect, even if that means living on the raw edge of emptiness and aloneness.

Mery walks over to me, the knife in her hand. I

take a step back. When she realizes she's still holding it, she puts it down. "Oh, my big brave Knight is feeling sensitive. Let the little milkmaid comfort him." She gives me a big hug, and then rests my head on her breast.

"Better. That's what I need." I snuggle in. "How about if we go upstairs?"

She puts her hand on the back of my head, and runs it through my hair. "Not now, little boy. You have to be patient. We are on a schedule. First dinner, then, as I told you, I got us tickets to a surprise special event tonight." She continues rubbing and patting me. "Then, if you're good, you'll get to go upstairs later."

I know I should be happy at her flirtations and her surprise. But I hate surprises. And I hate fish. And I hate eating in.

* * *

Mom never cooked me a meal.

She'd sometimes ask me what I wanted, and then would have the cook make it. When I was younger, I resented this, and felt she wasn't properly taking care of me. But as I've grown older, I realize that having someone else cook --like going out to a restaurant--allows conversation to occur without the hassles and divided attention of preparing a meal. I probably should share that with mom.

A first sign of healing and forgiveness?

And maybe I can get her to help Mery learn that lesson.

Johannes, you turn to how you can use this insight to your advantage with Mery, rather than realizing it's time for a healing and asking forgiveness talk with mom. You still have such a long way to go.

* * *

After a few minutes Mery returns to the chopping block. She

takes and handful of greenish carrot tops and throws them toward the waste basket about five feet away. All of them go in.

"Wow, great shot. Where did you learn to shoot like that?"

"There was a waste basket in dad's study, where I'd go when he'd help me with my homework, particularly writing. My work was never good enough, and he'd grab the paper with my scribbles on it, crumple it up, and say 'Throw it away--in the basket over there.' Most of the time I'd miss. One day he said, 'To shoot well, throw it in the direction you want it to go, without worrying about making a basket.'

"It was the best advice he ever gave me...about life. In a funny way, he taught me to distrust myself in writing, but to trust myself in shooting baskets. So, I just throw it in the general direction I want it to go, and trust myself. My therapist says I need to try to forgive him for all the distrust he poisoned me with, and remember the kernel of help he gave me." She pauses. I try to paint the same way, too!"

I give her a hug. "What a cute, goofy, playful girl you are. Wisdom in a wastebasket. My dad taught me to shoot, too."

"Don't give me that girl stuff; I'll challenge you anytime to a game on the courts."

"Oh, adventurous and competitive, too. Bring it on."

She picks up the knife.

"Hey, don't be too competitive."

"My therapist says I both like competition and fear it." She smiles as she picks up the onion, and places it under the faucet and turns on the water. "I was always told running cold water an onion makes you cry less. But I still cry, anyway. As long as I'm going to cry, why don't you read me your professor's con-

structive criticisms?"

"Fine, let me entertain you with my tale of woe." I pick up the paper and continue reading. "John Updike once said that a fine line exists 'between writing a character with a strong ego and one who is narcissistic, and that fine line makes all the difference.' The 'boyishly laughing' phrase gets awfully close to that line.

'Small points: Coyishly is not a word. Use your dictionary. Is your use of the word 'smiling' in the first and last lines planned? Did you attempt a metered rhythm? Where, why, why not? I'd asked you to comment.

'Finally, why was the male 'I' laughing in the middle, but not the 'she?' Be careful of sex-typing --active male, passive female-- with the male 'I' laughing and dashing out, she following.'"

"Wow, he sounds pretty deep and perceptive. He obviously spent time thinking about your poem. He should get an A for commentary."

What's wrong with this picture? Somehow this started off about my poem--about the two of us merging and dancing in love--and ends up about how smart my professor is.

* * *

"I went up to him after class to ask him what I could do to improve the grade."

"Why? You've already made Phi Beta Kappa, and are accepted by your first choice law school. Aren't you taking this class just for fun, anyway? Pass/no credit?"

"Like you, he seemed puzzled, and a little annoyed that I was concerned about getting the grade changed. He asked me if I

was concerned about the grade, or if I was sincerely interested in learning.

"I know a softball pitch when I see one, so I told him, learning, of course. I even used your line, reminding him that I'm taking the course pass/no credit, don't you remember?"

"That wasn't a line. But were you being truthful? Was it about learning?"

"Well, kind of, but not exactly. It's interesting that even when grades don't matter, I still am not happy when I don't receive a good grade. I remember getting my first 'D.' I was in 5th grade. I broke into tears and ran out of the room crying."

"Oh, my poor baby. What trials my white knight has had to endure. I had no idea. I always pictured your life as a fairy tale." Ouch. If she only knew. Well, a little bit at a time.

"He said that 78 was a good grade for this early in the course (and certainly an improvement on my first grade!). It showed that though I'm improving, there's still room for growth, and I shouldn't worry about passing the course.

"I know that annoyed look on the faces of professors and fellow students. In high school, I had the nickname 'grub' as in grade grubber. I didn't like it. Mom told me (and Dad agreed) the other kids were jealous of my good grades so I should ignore them. My Grandpa JC said, 'You should always be the best. Don't let anyone stand in your way. If you're not the best, you need to find out why and learn. Always be in their face. Patient, attentive, respectful, but like a bull dog.'"

At first Mery doesn't say anything, but turns to trim the flowers. Then she goes over to the stove and turns it on. She takes down a skillet.

Did I say too much? I think back to the swimming pool, and realize this assertive side of me is not that she finds all that attractive. I need to be careful what I share with her this candidly.

Finally, she responds, "It's nice how your family comes to your defense." I guess my family is another side of my life that I haven't been totally honest about--the whole truth-- with her either.

"Did the professor give you any helpful advice?"

"I explained to him that 'coyishly' was a Joycean-like made-up word I'd used intentionally to create the same iambic meter in the third line as the first, framing the Shakespearian iambic pentameter of the second line; and also to rhyme with the word 'boyishly' in the next line.

"The professor replied, 'Fine, then you should have written about the meter in more detail, as I assigned. In any event, coyishly seems more anapest than iamb. And then you should have pointed out the headless iamb, tailless trochee, spondee, other anapests, amphibrach, and dactyl."

"What's anapest?"

"I didn't know either. I think he was just trying to one up me with technical jargon. I didn't know how to respond. Talk about going from stressed to stressed, and skipping unstressed.

"What did you say? I hate it when someone gets technical about my painting, too. It seems the feeling gets lost." Better. That's the sympathy I want from a future wife.

"Simple, I tried to one-up him. I asked him if he noticed the overall reverse triangle holistic form, as 'self' and 'other,' the two points at the base, merge into 'we,' a single

point, at the inverted base."

"Let me see."

I show her the poem, and point at how the odd lines:
1-3-5-7-9-11 form a V. As do the even lines 2-4-6-8-10.

"That sounds pretty technical."

"That's what he said--something like be careful that you
don't put more effort into the structure than into the feeling.
How hypocritical, when he'd berated me with all those stupid
structural terms. He was just feeling challenged by me because I have
structure, just not his."

"Hmmm" she responds vaguely, continuing to chop.

Johannes sees an inverted V as two people
converging in relationship. Later, after Sinai, I saw the V as
the first half of the hourglass, or, as an inverted Sinai moun-
tain itself. It's interesting how the same object is interpreted
and understood differently, depending upon the eyes through which
I look. Even the same event--counting numbers--.Johannes sees
it as a meaningless ritual to fill time and create structure
during the summers. At Sinai, I saw it as a spiritual longing to
reach infinity. It's as if who I am at the time is as important
in creating a reality and determining the meaning of what hap-
pened, as the "reality" itself. This feels a profound insight. I
notice part of me wishes I were still in therapy so I could tell
the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet, and get their approbation.

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I see tears in her eyes. "The onions?"

"Kind of. I'm having a hard time at work, too. My boss keeps
complaining about the way I do everything wrong. I'm afraid I
might lose my job. It's just too hard for me trying to keep it

all organized."

I find her description of her bland boss criticizing her rather prosaic and boring. If I were writing as a vignette for my creative writing class, I would punch it up a bit.

His face reddened, fierce, like a gargoyle, and he began yelling at me. I thought he was going to strike me. I recoiled in terror, wondering what I could do to salvage my mistakes. Is he looking at me salaciously? Oh, no, not again."

I put my arm on her shoulder. "You've come to the right person, the White Knight of Structure. Truthfully, for me, making the job into a routine would be easy. The only thing hard about doing your job for me would be it'd be too easy. I'd get bored with the monotony, doing the same thing day after day. Serving people and listening to them complain. It would become mind numbing, and annoying.

"For me there is no routine. It's never the same. Every person is different. Each person comes with a story, a reason they are there. Celebration, nurturance, just to get out of their lonely lives. My job is to serve them however I can. I don't believe anything is trivial. I try to make it a good experience for each of them. If they want to talk, I want to hear their stories. But then sometimes I get scared having to face new people. And upset when they don't seem satisfied with the food; or hurt when they seem sad and I don't seem to be able to help them."

"You really are sensitive. That's what I love about you. That's what you teach me."

"But I know I shouldn't get nervous each time I go to a new table. How can I best serve them? What will they order? Even while I'm taking their order, I'm often wondering who they are, why they are here. I look at their faces, the lines, shadows,

wonder what their life has been like. It's hard to keep my mind on their orders. I need this job so badly."

More tears. I rub her back. "Now who's the baby? It's just a Restaurant, little one. You're just a waitress. You're made for better things. Can't you build some sort of pattern into the job? A system. Make a diagram on your order sheet, like a clock, and give each person a number based on where they are sitting, and write their order under their number. Fit them into your system. Matzah ball with chicken and noodles at 2; brisket with extra sauce at 3. Simple. And if they complain, would you be bothered by criticism if it was coming not from a person, but from a number on a clock."

"I know I'm too sensitive. That was one of the reasons I took the job. Everyone told me I had to get more organized, work myself into a better routine in life, keep myself from spacing out."

"Everyone? You mean besides me?"

"Yes, my therapist. Even my former art professor, Pierre. He told me my sensitivity is great with art, but that I'm too sensitive with people. Like the autistic kids we work with. I take everything too personally.

"But how do you try to pretend the customers aren't really people? Doesn't making them into numbers cause me to relate to them as 'I-It.' That seems to go against everything I believe. Yet, because it's nearly impossible for me to shrug off their criticisms, I get flustered and tense, and do even worse. I want everybody to be satisfied and happy. Even if it's not my fault, but I can see they're sad, that makes me sad, especially when I don't know what to do to help them."

She continues to cut and cry. I take the knife out of her hand, turn her around, place her head against my chest, and give her a hug, holding her tightly. I even go in for a little feel of

her breasts. She calls her former art professor Pierre?

"Sorry, this is stupid. I want to prepare you dinner. I want to serve them well. I don't seem to be able to do anything right at all."

"Mery Mery. It's just food, a meal. Theirs, mine. My dad always said, at times like these, take a breath. Thata girl. I promise you, we won't starve."

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She pulls back from me, wipes her eyes. "Sorry. Enough about me. You WILL starve unless I get something cooked for you. Tell me, what else have you written in your class?" She returns to cutting.

I think of the Kansas City play, which I'm still working on but which I don't really want to share with her, yet.

"Well, one of my first assignments in the class was a disaster, at least according to the professor. We were supposed to write a short piece, a brief sketch of 'A Body in Motion.' I'd been learning this new tennis drill, which is supposed to help footwork, and improve coordination between the feet, arms, head, and eyes, so I thought it would be perfect to write about.

"Because the drill is complicated, I used my usual style of breaking it down into smaller bits of information that are more manageable. When I visualized all the different parts working together, I saw a very graceful body in motion. So, I turned in my description, and called it "A Graceful Body in Motion."

"Do you have a copy of it?"

"It's in my car. Do you want me to get it?"

"Sure. You can regale me with your prose while I chop."

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I retrieve the "Creative Writing Class" folder from Mr. Red, tuck it under my arm, and jog back. For some reason, I pause before entering at look at the outside of her home. Wide eaves and brackets, tall, arched, curved windows, separated by columns, a cone like roof. I wonder why I never questioned how someone who claims she is so poor can afford to live in a place this nice.

I open the door to the smell of onions frying, a smell I love. I have a creative idea. I don't really want to read this to her while she's cooking. I want her undivided attention.

"Mery, rather than just read this to you, why don't we go to the park and let you experience it? There's still enough light outside."

"But I've just begun cooking. And, as you know" she winks at me, "I bought us some special tickets for an event tonight. I don't want us to be late."

"Come on, it'll be fun, Saturday afternoon in Shakespeare's garden. We'll be back in an hour. And I'll help chop when we return. It'll all be fine. I promise."

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As we drive over, I say to Mery, "I also have something I want your help with. I've been putting it off."

"Which is..."

"Law school. Grandpa keeps writing to ask if I've notified them of my acceptance. It's due this week."

"And what do you want my help with?"

"Well, is that my vision, or is it just what grandfather and really society expect of me. As my creative writer teacher observed, I've been trained to be analytical, rational, intellectual. And I'm good at it. Does that mean that's what I should

do? Is this my choice, what I want? That's confusing to me. I need time to think through more who I am. And maybe more importantly, who I could be, what I want to be."

"We've already discussed this. Why not take a year off to decide? Work on perfecting your creative writing!"

"Well, that's where I'm leaning, but if I do that, I don't think Grandpa will be very happy with me. I have to be ready for him to take Mr. Red back."

"Not a problem for me."

"You're the best. So unmaterialistic. You're loving, good nature is always there for me. The 'We' of the poem!" She smiles, and places her head on my shoulder.

"I guess I could see losing Mr. Red as part of the letting go of my materialistic entrapments. In that way, I'd be becoming more like you." I look over at her, and she's looking out of the corner of her eyes at me, smiling. "If I'm careful, I have enough to live on for a year, assuming no more help from them if I don't go to law school this fall."

She says nothing. I look again, and her eyes are now closed. She starts to hum a tune, "Amazing grace."

"Ok, that's what I'll do. I'll spend next year here with you, getting to know myself better, exploring and developing different sides of me, like the creative writing, maybe even take an art class with you, work some more on my flute."

"Great. A decision. See how simple that was." She continues to hum.

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I notice some fear arising in me. It's actually a scary thought to be without Grandpa's financial revenue. Maybe I don't

need to burn my financial bridges there yet.

"Ok, I'll request a year's deferral from Harvard. But what should I write Grandpa?"

"Tell him you're taking a year's deferral. It's not that complicated."

"But I still may go to law school. It's unclear. Do I need to let him know the depths of my uncertainty? Do I need to actually tell him I've requested a year's deferral

'I'm deeply appreciative for your guidance, Grandpa, and am taking it very seriously.' That's not bad. And true. Or, if I write him before I request a deferral, then I can honestly say I haven't yet sent in a deferral. That would also be true, technically, at the time the letter is written and sent.

"I certainly haven't said no to law school. I could tell him how much I admire him as a lawyer. That's even better."

Mery has removed her head from my shoulder, but is still humming.

"What if I put something in about the 'fall' and leave it ambiguous as to which fall, or is that too much of a stretch? Maybe like 'I have let them know I am interested in pursuing law studies 'in the fall.' There's no need to say anything more definite to him just yet. I'm still being truthful, although it's just a version of the truth, as he himself taught me. At a very deep level, I'm sure he'd be proud of me."

"Why all these machinations? He'll find out this fall. Are you just trying to buy a few more months of income?" Her voice is pleasant, sing-song like, but the words sound harsh. Am I showing her too much of my calculating side?

"You're right. Case adjourned. Monday morning I will write

Grandpa, and Monday afternoon I will write the law school."

It seems like money is a consistently difficult issue. For Johannes, at first, it's wanting lots of it and the material possessions--goods and services-- it can purchase. John does not want more, but spends a lot of time worrying about it, and is afraid of losing it, spending it unwisely, or being taken advantage of. Both, for different reasons, are quite controlled by money's energy.

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We arrive at the park. She takes my hand and holds it up to her lips, kisses it, then places it on her cheek. "Sorry if I wasn't helpful--and was too dismissive-- about your letter to your grandfather. I know how scary and confusing this must be to you. It's going to all work out. We'll both be fine."

It's such a tender gesture. I really do feel taken care of. As I start to say this to her, she drops my hand and runs off playfully toward the Shakespeare Garden.

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We find our spot, and again, there are a few children running around.

"Now, this tennis drill is really pretty complicated, like a triple version of patting your stomach, rubbing your head, and standing on one foot! It involves feet, arms, and head coordination."

"And how did the professor feel about your body in motion?"

"He hated it. he gave me a D--a "65"-- and wrote on the paper, 'Horrible, the most ungraceful body in motion piece I've ever read. There is absolutely no kinesthetic movement in it.'"

"Did you take his comments like a man?"

"Well, if you're asking did I run out of the room crying, no. Though it was only the 2nd D in my life. I was more composed, but I must admit that reading those comments felt like a punch in the stomach. I took it like a man in that I fought back. This professor was going to have to explain himself. I reread my piece, and completely disagreed with him. Why couldn't he appreciate how creatively and thoughtfully I'd described this complex exercise?

"He defended his grade, rather passionately I might add. He told me that 'writing about a body in motion is about grace, heart, passion, beauty. This is more like an instructional manual, written by a technician. Or maybe a lawyer's brief, or an accountant's end of year report, or an engineer's analysis. It's dry, uninteresting, fragmented, disjointed, and frankly just plain boring. Great writing can make any topic seem interesting. This isn't great writing.'

"I was not to be put off. I remembered my grandfather's advice: 'Be patient, respectful, and yet a bulldog.'

"'You're a distinguished professor. You've taught creative writing for many years and won teaching awards and published several books of fiction, and one on the craft of writing.' He nodded, unsure where I was going, and probably a little surprised at how well I'd researched him (I do that for all my professors). 'To you, this piece doesn't feel fluid.' Again, he nodded. 'But isn't that just your point of view? What if an accountant or lawyer or engineer read it, might not they be able to understand and visualize it perfectly? How can you say your point of view is the only truth? Is creative writing only for English majors?'

"He looked at me astonished and appalled. 'That's a creative, albeit contrived, argument. However, that piece is not, by any stretch of the imagination, creative writing.'

"'But you do agree that I have a point, and that SOMEONE might be able to visualize it as a graceful body in motion, don't you?'

"'I'll grant you there may be someone out there who would be able to read, or see it that way.'

"'So, don't I get some credit for helping you see a different point of view.'"

"I think he was just so frustrated that he wanted me to go away, so he said 'Fine, I'll give you a C- (71). Now, I have to go. But you're going to have to learn to help the reader visualize the movement, feel the kinesthetic energy. This piece is much too analytical.'

"I gave him my most respectful smile. 'Of course. Thank you.'"

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"Oh, you sly one, you. Now, after all that build up, either read me the piece of show me the drill, oh graceful legal accounting mind." I love the way she laughs, and the way she is opening up more and more with me, letting that playful, slightly gently sarcastic witty side out.

I show her the drill, my feet and arms and head gliding as I skip along the grass.

She claps. "Do it again."

I do, and if I say so myself, quite elegantly and fluidly.

"Look, the children are trying to emulate you. You're like the Pied Piper!" Mery merrily shouts at me as I practice the drill, showing off and imagining myself spinning and dancing

powerfully and gracefully. It actually reminded me of a whirling Sufi dervish performance that Alice had made me go see in Berkeley a few months back.

I look and see that a group of children is indeed copying the side step. A few are able to do a close approximation. Several of the kids are getting confused, and are in a state of disarray. Others seem ok with not being able to "get" the drill, and giggle as they fall to the ground. Some are disenchanted. One actually seems upset.

I motion to him to come over. "Don't try to do it all at once. Keep your head facing straight ahead, and arms extended at your side." I put my hands on his shoulder, and position his arms. "Perfect. Now, watch my feet. Pretend there's a long line going off to our left toward that big tree there. First put the right foot in front of the left foot along that line, then bring the left back around. That's it. Now put the right foot behind the left. Perfect, now, repeat, get the rhythm, go!" He tries, succeeds, and laughingly sways several more yards down the line toward the tree.

Mery comes over and puts her arms around me. "You are so good with children. They just naturally gravitate to you. And what a good teacher you were with that one little fellow." She pulls my head down and gives me a quick kiss.

What could be better, being with someone who loves and admires me, frolicking in the reddish golden sun of Golden Gate Park, in the Shakespeare garden? Little children playing all around us.

Still our Garden of Eden.

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I'm amazed how quickly children pick up new things. For me, learning that exercise had taken quite a while. What I'm having to learn is how I learn. It seems my process is the same no matter what the topic--Dr. Lisbet's Tai chi class, golf, that tennis drill, flute playing, even how I approach understanding the nature of the universe.

When I first saw the tennis drill--or confront any task--it seems overwhelming and complicated. Learning does not come easily for me. So, what I do is break the task down into component parts, before I try to reconstitute it. What's interesting is that with enough practice, a complicated process, like the tennis drill, can become fluid and graceful.

Further, because of the way I learn, I can then take the whole and show how each part works, in a more simplified, step by step manner to someone else. The parts in relation to the whole. The whole in relation to the parts. Perhaps that's what would make me a good teacher, as Mery said.

That strategy might work for some. But will it necessarily work for ALL people? Be careful of one size fits all, trying to impose your worldview and style on others. Maybe it's important as you learned in your psychology class, to match the "technique to the person." There are many ways of learning and teaching. You'll soon learn the Chinese saying, there are many fingers that point to the moon, and Rumi's "There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

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I go over by a tree and sit down. Mery joins me.

There are some ants crawling around us. I want to crush them, but decide that might break the jovial mood. I see she is also looking at them and I say, "It's hard to imagine in such an

idyllic place that we really live in a dog eat dog world."

"What brought that up. To mix metaphors, do you see a snake in the grass?"

"The ants. I once had an ant farm, and did a lot of reading about ants. Did you know that there are Amazonian ants. There are certain trees that they dwell in. So, it turns out they inject a toxic acid into the leaves of all plants surrounding their host trees. In other words, they kill off all other species of vegetation in the area of the forest to give their host trees living space to expand, and create space for new plantings."

"Ugh."

"Exactly. Eat or be eaten. Do you know what the human inhabitants of the region call these ants' housing tracts?"

She shakes her head.

"The devil's gardens."

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There is a pause, and Mery looks somber. Then she smiles again. "You sure know how to whet my appetite. Speaking of which, we need to get back. Enough demonstration. Let's hear the fabulous instructional paper you wrote. "

I pull out the page and read the assignment out loud to her.

"A Graceful Body In Motion

The head begins by facing straight ahead, and the arms are extended perpendicular to the sides of your body. You pretend there's a long line going off your left foot, and you first put the right foot in front of the left foot along that line. As the right foot goes in front of the left foot, sway your left hand toward your right, and turn your head left, and your eyes further left.

Then bring the left foot back around to its original position, and as you do so, your arms (now on your right side) come back to the center, and your head, now facing left, comes back to the center, eyes forward.

Now, as your right foot goes behind your left, both hands sway to your left in front of your body, your head turns right.

Then, as you bring the left foot back around once again to its original position, the arms which are on your left side go right and come back to the center, and your head, facing right, goes left toward the center.

Repeat and keep practicing until you feel yourself starting to flow gracefully."

She giggles. "I can't believe that professor. How ignorant.

I know true poetry when I hear it."

"Really?" Then I look at her face and see she's mocking me.

"Fine, let's see you try it."

"Not in a million years."

"No, come on," I tickle her a little.

"I wasn't watching closely. Do it again."

"Here, let me explain it to you." I start in on a simplified explanation, but she covers her ears. "Way too analytical. Just show me."

"It's too complicated to get all the parts to work without breaking it down incrementally," I chide.

"Show me."

I do it for a few yards, then turn and say, "Ok, do your magic.

And magician she was. The first steps were tentative, but it was almost as if she were closing her eyes and seeing something inside, or feeling something. She developed an instant rhythm. It was extraordinary, and beyond my comprehension. It's simply not the way my mind and body learn.

"Wow, that is like magic. It took me forever to do that."

"Too much analysis," she kids me, tickling me back. Then she starts running "You're it."

I give her a head start, then start chasing her. I love the way she's running, her hair swishing like a horse's mane, right and left, over her shoulders. Naturally, rhythmically, effortlessly. Without analysis. The light of the sun alternately

reflects off and makes her hair golden; then as she turns, the light is cut off, and her hair darkens. She has a cute girlish run, elbows too far out from her body, sashaying hips, and of course I also love the unselfconscious jiggling of her breasts, even in her turtleneck. Like the counterpoint in Bach's Brandenburg concerto, as her foot reaches down toward the earth in her forward stride, her breasts rise. Then they are suspended, as if defying gravity, before they begin to fall as she pushes off with her back foot rising for the next stride.

As I come closer, I call out, "You'd better pick up the pace, I'm going to get you." She laughs and runs harder still. My hand is just an inch behind her, above and between her scapulas.

I give her a tag.

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My tag may have been too hard, or maybe she is running too fast to keep her balance, but some combination causes her to lose her stride, and stumble. I see it in slow motion. Her face turns awkward, contorted, shocked, helpless, vulnerable. Her hands and arms swing forward as if the strings of a puppeteer are pulling them ahead jerkily and spasmodically, as she reaches out for self-protection. I run faster to try to break the fall, but she is out of reach. Her head lurches backward, arching her back, then like a sling shot catapults forward, thrusting her body onto the ground.

She is bleeding, breathing raggedly, trying to control her sobbing.

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X-rays at the Emergency Room show no broken bones, or even

sprains. There are a few bruises, and four stitches are required under her chin.

"I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault. We were just playing. It happens."

The tone is restrained, stoic.

She insists that we not change our plans. "I'm going to cook a dinner for you tonight, even if it kills me."

I am appreciative of her seeming forgiveness.

But it was my fault. I'm the one who suggested we go to the Park over her objection. What I'm feeling inside is maybe mom was right. Maybe I'm not a trustworthy person to be around. Is there an unconscious part of me that wants to hurt Mery? Was I angry because she kept calling me too analytical? Because she was able to do the drill so easily and I wasn't? Is some of my father's anger and rage in me? Am I angry at my mother and so at other women? Do I fear commitment with her and so am pushing her away..literally? My mind is spinning crazily with thoughts.

I know consciously I didn't and don't want to hurt Mery.

But Mom's words-- "You think you know yourself, but you have no idea..."-- keep reverberating. Maybe I didn't leave the plague in Kansas City, but carry it with me--inside me-- no matter where I am. Whatever comes near me gets hurt.

Yes, maybe I am the plague.

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